EZEKIEL

Chapter 35

*A Prophecy Against Edom*

**The word of the LORD came to me:  2 “Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir; prophesy against it  3 and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you and make you a desolate waste.  4 I will turn your towns into ruins and you will be desolate. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 5 ”‘Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax,  6 therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you.  7 I will make Mount Seir a desolate waste and cut off from it all who come and go.  8 I will fill your mountains with the slain; those killed by the sword will fall on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines.  9 I will make you desolate forever; your towns will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 10 ”‘Because you have said, “These two nations and countries will be ours and we will take possession of them,” even though I the LORD was there,  11 therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will treat you in accordance with the anger and jealousy you showed in your hatred of them and I will make myself known among them when I judge you.  12 Then you will know that I the LORD have heard all the contemptible things you have said against the mountains of Israel. You said, “They have been laid waste and have been given over to us to devour.”  13 You boasted against me and spoke against me without restraint, and I heard it.  14 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: While the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate.  15 Because you rejoiced when the inheritance of the house of Israel became desolate, that is how I will treat you. You will be desolate, O Mount Seir, you and all of Edom. Then they will know that I am the LORD.’”**

The brevity of this chapter might give the careful reader his first clue that there is something different about it. If he reads further, he soon discovers that chapter 35 should be counted as only half a chapter and should really be paired with 36:1–15, where the next chapter should begin. It must rate as one of the most egregiously misleading chapter divisions in the OT. (CC)

The unity of 35:1–15 and 36:1–15 is evident formally in the fact that the word-event formula, “the Word of Yahweh came to me,” which usually begins an oracle, is present in 35:1 but is not repeated in 36:1. There is a transition at 36:1, but it opens with language virtually identical with that in 35:1: “son of man, prophesy … and say …” When the text continues in those two places, it uses two virtually identical expressions with opposite meanings: the hostile orientation formula “I am against you” in 35:3 versus “I am for you” in 36:9. (CC)

**35:2-4** Beginning with the hostile orientation formulae, “set your face against” and “I am against you,” the initial oracle uses typical Ezekelian doom language in the second person of direct address. No reason is given at this point for Yahweh’s fundamental opposition. (CSB)

One literary flourish serving the message may be noted. The noun שְׁמָמָה, “desolation,” is used twice in succeeding verses (35:3, 4) for Mount Seir. Moreover, the asyndetic expression in 35:3, שְׁמָמָ֥ה וּמְשַׁמָּֽה, “an utter desolation,” will recur in 35:7, both times portending judgment for the mountains of Edom. This recalls the use of “an utter desolation” in 6:14, before the fall of Jerusalem, in a prophecy of judgment upon Israel’s mountains, and also its use in 33:28–29, which, after Jerusalem’s fall, proclaimed judgment for the remaining inhabitants of Judah. (CC)

**35:2** *set your face against.* See note on 20:46. (CSB)

*Mount Seir.* Edom (v. 15), Israel’s relative (Jacob and Esau being twins, Ge 25:21–30) and constant enemy, from whom brotherhood was sought but seldom found (cf. Am 1:11). Edom had to be dealt with before Israel could find peace (cf. Ge 32–33). See 25:12 and note; Isa 63:1–6. (CSB)

**35:3** *I am against you.* See note on 5:8. (CSB)

**35:5-6** Yahweh’s first statement of his case against Edom describes the country as an ancient blood enemy of Israel, evidenced especially in its treatment of Israel at the time of the Babylonian invasions. Already after the universal flood, God had established the principle “he who sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen 9:6). Apparently using the ancient premonarchical language of asylum, Edom is described as one who shed blood vindictively and with full culpability. Hence, the blood he shed would seek its own justice, and he would find no city of refuge (see the textual notes on 35:6). The language about blood vengeance and the asylum metaphor are alien to us, but the theological point is powerful.

We must remember “Edom” as a major example of what the Gentile oracles were all about. God’s judgment on the heathen enemies of his people is part of the Law-Gospel dialectic that extends throughout the Scriptures and that characterizes how God works in history to accomplish salvation. These verses almost classically exemplify what still characterizes the fallen “world” in which we live. Ancient enmities, often leading to bloodshed and war, still characterize much of life, whether individual or international. Anyone who knows the modern Near East will feel that often he need only substitute biblical names for the modern ones to understand its unending conflicts. Especially since the rise of modern nationalism, Europe has nourished grudges that the “European Union” and Common Market hope finally to extinguish. But there are no permanent political or social solutions to conflicts between peoples. Lasting peace begins to come only when God’s Word of Law and Gospel does its work, putting to death the sinful human nature in individuals, who then, by the power of the Spirit, can begin to lead the new life of faith in Christ (e.g., Romans 6). Ultimately, God’s left-hand kingdom, with all the governments and nations of this world, must pass away at the return of Jesus Christ before his eternal kingdom will come in full. And for this we pray, “*Thy* kingdom come” (Mt 6:10). (CC)

**35:5** *ancient hostility.* Beginning with Jacob’s deception of Isaac for Esau’s blessing (Ge 27; see especially v. 41) and continuing later (Nu 20:14–21; 2Sa 8:13–14; 1Ki 9:26–28). (CSB)

*time of their calamity.* Edom looted Jerusalem in 586 b.c. (see Ob 11–14). (CSB)

**35:6** *as surely as I live.* See note on 18:3. (CSB)

*bloodshed will pursue you.* Retributive justice based on Ge 9:6. (CSB)

**35:7-9** Yahweh now speaks about Seir (not to it, as in 35:3–6). This serves as a reminder that his audience includes not just the Edomites (most of whom will not listen), but also the Israelite exiles, many of whom may repent, believe, and be comforted by God’s promises. The theme of utter desolation, heard before, is now picked up in different language in 35:7 and continued in 35:8–9. Instead of living people, Edom’s rugged terrain will be filled with their corpses (35:8), and 35:9 applies the idea to the terrain itself (cf. 29:12 and 30:7). The repetition of the recognition formula, “then you will know that I am Yahweh” (35:9; see also 35:4, 12, 15), especially in a context like this, is a reminder that Yahweh’s ultimate desire is not the destruction of Edom or anyone else, but for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4; see also Ezek 18:32). (CC)

**35:9** *desolate forever.* To experience no restoration like Egypt’s (see 29:13–16). (CSB)

**35:10** *These two nations.* Israel and Judah. (CSB)

A new accusation and appropriate penalty are launched with this verse: Edom’s unjustifiable desire to annex and occupy the now depopulated land of Judah, even though, in God’s eyes, Edom had no legitimate claim to it. Yahweh speaks of “these two nations and these two lands” at the same time that he uses the singular object “it” in his direct quotation of the Edomite ambition: “we will possess it.” This is no inconsistency, but an anticipation of a thought he will shortly develop in detail (37:15–28), and which he expressed through all the prophets, namely, that the kingdom that was divided after Solomon’s death really remained one kingdom. So it had been before, and so it would be again under “my servant David,” the “one Shepherd” (Ezek 34:23; 37:24) who would gather by faith even Gentiles into his “one flock” (Jn 10:16). (CC)

Since northern Israel had fallen well over a century earlier in 722 b.c., the Edomites probably thought of occupying only the one former kingdom of Judah, recently capitulated in 586 b.c., but from a prophetic perspective their intrusion into the promised land necessarily constituted an invasion against the Northern Kingdom as well. Archaeological evidence amply confirms Edomite penetration into southern Judah (even before the fall of Jerusalem, according to a letter found at Arad), but there is no evidence that they ever ventured as far north as Jerusalem, or even had hopes to do so. In any case, even calling them “two lands” heightens Edom’s greed. Imperialistic ambitions being what they are in every age, it is not implausible that Edom actually did entertain such grandiose dreams, however unrealistic. (CC)

The circumstantial clause at the end of the verse, “even though Yahweh was there,” magnifies the offense from mere opportunistic seizure of a neighbor’s territory into an affront against Yahweh himself. In typical pagan thought, land, temple, and deity were all but inseparable. The chief god was often virtually a personification of the “spirit” of the nation. Any god who allowed his “house” to be destroyed and his people deported must have abandoned that land and people, leaving it ripe for the picking. And in the syncretistic thought of that world, the god himself would have simply been absorbed into the pantheon of the conquering nation and assigned some subsidiary role serving the chief god of the victorious people. Thus the Edomites would have interpreted even a partial conquest of Judah as proof that their gods were superior to Israel’s God. (CC)

We must ask how Yahweh’s assertion here accords with the earlier vision of Yahweh’s כָּבוֹד (“Glory”) abandoning the land (Ezekiel 9–11). In the other direction, the clause prematurely anticipates the climactic renaming of the new Jerusalem at the end of the book, “Yahweh is there” (48:35). Among other things, this type of question probably imports more of the Western sense of tense and time than is applicable. Given the position of the Hebrew verb הָיָה in the clause in 35:10, one would ordinarily translate it as “Yahweh *was* there,” but this does not carry the corollary that Yahweh was no longer there in any sense. (The LXX translates, κύριος ἐκεῖ ἐστιν, “Yahweh *is* there,” better bringing out the continuity.) For although Yahweh had allowed his temple, city, and land to be laid waste because of his people’s abandonment of him, that did not mean that he had renounced his right to the land and had abandoned it forever. It was his grant to Jacob/Israel (28:25; 37:25), and in 36:5 he will call it “my land.” Edom had received its own allotment (Deut 2:1–7) and should have been content with that. If false territorial claims from within Israel should be denounced (Ezek 11:15; 33:24), how much more so when they come from a foreigner! (CC)

After the exile, God’s people, humbled and penitent, would return to the land and rebuild the temple, and Yahweh would once again reside there. Then in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4), God would become incarnate in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He will be the new sanctuary (σκηνόω, “to tabernacle,” in Jn 1:14) and temple (Jn 2:14–22), and henceforth God gathers true worshipers in Spirit and truth, not to Jerusalem nor confined to any geographic land, but around the One in whom his fullness dwells. Eschatologically, he will again reside in the midst of his people even more concretely than in the earthly temple (Rev 21:3, 22). (CC)

**35:11** *as surely as I live.* See note on 18:3. (CSB)

Again God expresses the motif that his justice matches the offense. אַף, “anger,” and קִנְאָה, “zeal, jealousy,” are often attributed to God, who administers them in his righteousness. When God is jealous, this relates to his covenant with his people as a kind of marriage in which he tolerates no adultery. When “jealousy” is attributed to people, however, it is more likely a matter of sinful, petty grudges or self-serving desires. Simple “jealousy” is common enough among people, of course, but in this case, although Edom was a competitor and an enemy of Israel, it is not clear why it should have been “jealous.” I have translated, “fanaticism,” in the hope that it will convey some of the irrationality the use here implies. (CC)

In Yahweh’s promise “I will make myself known among them,” the antecedent of “them” (בָ֖ם), in a second-person address, is debatable. Parallel thoughts that will be expressed in 38:23 and 39:21–23 after Yahweh’s destruction of Gog do not clarify the issue here. Those parallels, if relevant, would indicate that the reference is dual, both to Edom and to Israel. The next verse seems to suggest that Edom is the primary referent and will learn that Yahweh is not another god who dies or is defeated when his land and temple are desolated. The LXX specifically makes this application, translating, γνωσθήσομαί σοι ἡνίκα ἂν κρίνω σε, “I shall be known to/by you when I judge you.” Chapters 38–39 make possible the additional interpretation that Yahweh is faithful to his ancient promises and has not completely abandoned his people in spite of their infidelities. (CC)

**35:12** The rest of the chapter is a commentary on the last clause of 35:10, “even though Yahweh was there.” It is somewhat divided into two parts by the use of the citation formula, “thus says the Lord Yahweh,” at the beginning of 35:14. It somewhat makes explicit what could be assumed all along. A depopulated land of Judah left a vacant territory that the Edomites believed they would be foolish not to add to their own domain, and the few poor peasants left after the deportation of most Israelites would be no real hindrance. The use of the passive verb in “given [נִתְּנ֖וּ] to us for food” may even imply their assumption that heaven—Yahweh or their own god(s) or both—had given them permission to proceed. The language is similar to 29:5, where Pharaoh was given to the animals for food, or 34:5, 8, 10, where Israel as scattered sheep are vulnerable to predators. (CC)

Yahweh hears such thoughts as blasphemy because to taunt and take advantage of his people was tantamount to doing it to him personally. Jesus affirms this in his description of the final assize in Mt 25:31–46. The verb “I have heard” (שָׁמַ֣עְתִּי) will be repeated at the end of Ezek 35:13, thus framing the two verses. In 8:18 Yahweh had asserted that he would “act in wrath” because of his people’s offensive idolatry, and then he would “not hear/listen,” no matter how loudly his apostate people cried for help. Here he does hear the insults of the enemy who does not know Yahweh and mocks him as a deposed ruler who has lost his claim to the land and people of Israel. (CC)

**35:13** *You boasted against me.* Cf. Ob 12; Zep 2:8, 10; also Ps 35:26; Jer 48:26, 42. (CSB)

What Yahweh hears are the arrogant words of “Mr. Big Mouth,” words that, however, will prove to be only “hot air” in confrontation with him who “upholds all things by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3). It is a familiar theme in Scripture that “pride goeth … before a fall” (Prov 16:18 KJV Even general revelation and human experience can attest to that. (CC)

**35:14-15** The unexpected citation formula alerts us to the conclusion of this half (35:1–15) of the oracle (35:1–36:15). Its basic theme is the eschatological one of the great reversal, when all of God’s competition will be eliminated. As we confess in the Creeds, this goal has, in principle, already been accomplished on Easter with the triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, having vanquished death and the devil, along with all of our sins by his atonement on the cross. (CC)

This pericope is too focused on the immediate postexilic situation to be developed in eschatological terms, although there are hints of that in “when the whole world rejoices” (35:14; cf. Rom 8:18–23) and in the singling out of Edom as representative of the whole power of Satan. No Gentile oracles will be understood correctly if they are not read eschatologically. (CC)

Noteworthy here too is “the possession [נַחֲלָה, usually ‘inheritance’] of the house of Israel” (35:15). The word is very prominent in the later chapters of Numbers, in Deuteronomy, and subsequently in Joshua 13–24, when the Israelites took possession of the land under Joshua. Its theological import continues in the frequent use of “inherit” (κληρονομέω and κληρόω), “inheritance” (κληρονομία), and “heir(s)” (κληρονόμος) in the NT. Having been adopted into God’s family through Baptism into Christ, who is himself the “heir” of all things (Heb 1:2; see also Mt 21:38), we receive an “inheritance” and are “heirs” of all God’s promises, from those issued to Abraham through those uttered by Christ himself. Ultimately, our inheritance will comprise the entirety of the new heavens and the new earth (Mt 5:5; 25:34; Revelation 21–22). (CC)

God remains the ultimate owner of the land. Yahweh’s vested interest in it is shown by his use of נַחֲלָה, “possession, inheritance,” in 35:15 and 36:12 and thirteen times in chapters 44–48. It functions as a sort of key to the meaning of the entire pericope (35:1–36:15). The true Israel of God (Gal 6:16)—the one church that spans both Testaments—retains its inheritance, while unbelieving Edom’s claims are thrown out by the heavenly Judge. (CC)