

Review

We pick up our study in the book of Ezekiel with chapter 35...

35:1-15 Edom Will Be Destroyed

Mount Seir was the territory in which the Edomites lived, ever since it was settled by their ancestor, Esau (Gen. 32:3). And so as God tells Ezekiel to set his face against Mount Seir, He is about to speak against the Edomites.

You may remember that when God was pronouncing judgment against the nations, He condemned the Edomites in chapter 25 (Ezek. 25:12-14). They were mentioned again in chapter 32 (Ezek. 32:29) as those destined to be in hell, where Pharaoh would see them.

Now, all of chapter 35 is spent in prophecy against Edom. Is God repeating Himself? Some commentators explain the apparent repetition by pointing out that here Edom seems to be representative of all the nations that desired the lands of Israel and Judah. However, I have not been able to discern why they make this assertion. I believe Ezekiel 36:5 clarifies that they are not the same. And frankly, even if God is repeating Himself, He is certainly entitled to! Edom would be history because they gloated over the calamity and destruction that had befallen Judah, struck down the Jews that fled Nebuchadnezzar's army, and looted Jerusalem (Obadiah 1:8-14). They presumed to take the land of Israel for themselves (Ezek. 36:2).

36:1-7 The Nations Will Be Judged

In Babylon, Ezekiel would have been facing southwest towards Mount Seir as he spoke of Edom's doom. Now, He is instructed to look west to the mountains of Israel, and speak another prophecy.

Israel was to be reminded that the nations who came against them were allowed by God to do so. It was "for good reason" - they had to be judged for their sin.

But they are also told that God is jealous for His people and His land. Those nations who were used to judge the Jews and who sought to take over the land are going to be judged by God for what they have

done.

The idea of "enduring insults" is placed in juxtaposition in verses six and seven. The Hebrew "naw-SAW kel-im-MAW" literally means "to carry disgrace." The King James translation translates it as "bear the shame." I think that's probably more all-encompassing than the NAS's "enduring the insults" because there was more disgrace that the Jews endured than just being insulted. The very act of being removed from their land and being brought captive into another nation was a shame.

But God says that they had endured that shame and disgrace from the nations, but soon the roles would be reversed, and the nations would be the ones enduring shame and disgrace.

36:8-11 The Mountains Will Bear Fruit

The prophesy towards the mountains of Israel continues with God promising that the land would become fruitful, in preparation for the return of the Jews from Babylon. When the people of Israel come back, the mountains will once again be inhabited, increasing in population and fruitfulness.

36:12-15 Bereaving Them Of Children

God has made promises of fruitfulness and habitation regarding the mountains of Israel, but it is interesting to read what else God has to say about these mountains: they had bereaved the Jews of children and were devourers of men. They had caused the nations to stumble. What do these things that mean?

Some commentators say that the "devourers of men" refers to the fact that no matter who lived in this land, they were consumed. The Canaanites were driven out by the Jews, and then the Jews were driven out by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

However, I think that in context the key is the children. "Shaw-KOLE" in Hebrew means "to make childless." You see, the law spoke of people being childless when they violated the commands of God (Lev. 20:20-21). If they obeyed the law, then God would bless the fruit of their wombs (Deut. 7:13).

What did this have to do with the mountains? God said through Hosea the prophet,

Hos. 4:12-13 My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner's wand informs them; For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, and they have played the harlot, departing from their God. They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains and burn incense on the hills...

There was also a more insidious way that the mountains were making people childless. Often, the Jews who fell into idolatry would make their children into sacrifices for their false gods. This was the very thing to which God attributed the Assyrian Captivity:

2Kings 17:17-18 Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him. So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah.

We were reminded of this in chapter 20, when the Lord said,

Ezek. 20:28-31 "When I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering. There also they made their soothing aroma and there they poured out their drink offerings. Then I said to them, 'What is the high place to which you go?' So its name is called Bamah to this day." Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things? When you offer your gifts, when you cause your sons to pass through the fire, you are defiling yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will not be inquired of by you."

So, in that sense, the mountains of Israel devoured men, made people childless, and caused the nation to stumble (This idea is also confirmed in verses 17 and 18). It would seem that God's promise is that the mountains of Israel would no longer be used for this sort of idolatry. And indeed, we have not seen idolatry of this kind in Israel since the Jews returned from the Babylonian Captivity.

36:16-19 Like The Uncleanness Of A Woman

The word picture God uses is quite disgusting. You may recall that a woman was considered to be unclean during menstruation (Lev. 12:1-8; 15:25-30) and not to have relations with her husband (Lev. 20:18). God equates the blood shed on the land of Israel from their idolatrous human sacrifices to the blood of a woman in that state. He says that the Jews' sinful ways were like a woman's uncleanness, and they were judged for it.

36:20-23 God's Concern For His Name

The Jews were carried off into captivity, which made the other nations say, "What's the deal? Aren't these 'God's people'? If their God is so great, then why were we able to remove 'God's people' from 'God's land' that He supposedly gave to them?"

God's response is that He would not tolerate this profaning of His name. He tells Israel that He is about to act - not for their sake, but for the sake of His name. He is going to "vindicate the holiness" of His name. In Hebrew, that is just the one word (Kaw-DASH), meaning "make holy, consecrate, sanctify." God is going to insure that His name is set apart from all the other so-called gods of the nations. He is going to prove Himself strong by bringing the Jews back into the land in plain sight of the nations.

36:24-38 Israel Regathered

God's promise to the Jews is that they will be brought back from being scattered among the nations, and into the land of Israel again.

There is some disagreement as to whether the Lord is speaking

about the return from the Babylonian Captivity, about the return to the land in the 1940's, or about the return to the land after the Great Tribulation is over. I believe that the clues before us show that He is referring to the regathering yet future, after the Great Tribulation. Notice:

- Cleansed from all filthiness and their iniquities
- A new heart and new spirit
- Walking in God's statutes, careful to observe His ordinances
- Saved from all uncleanness
- The land like the garden of Eden
- The nations left round about them will know that God has done this.

We have not seen all of these things happen - neither after the return from Babylon, nor when Israel became a nation again. But we do see these things prophesied about Israel's future during the thousand-year reign of Christ.

When Christ returns at the end of the Great Tribulation, the Jews are going to confess their sin of rejection, walk in righteousness, and be saved.

Rom. 11:26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."

They will dwell securely in the land, and all of the nations who remain will acknowledge that they were God's people.

Zech. 8:23 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."'"

The population of the Jews will explode - far beyond the meager 4.8 million Jews who live in Israel now, or the 13 million who are in the whole world. And so it is quite certain to me that we haven't see these prophecies fulfilled just yet.

37:1-10 The Valley Of Dry Bones

The Lord took Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones and asked him

if they could live. Ezekiel's no dummy - he responds, "Lord, you know." That seems to always be the safest answer to fall back on, doesn't it?

Then God does the impossible: Dry skeletons begin to grow flesh, and breath enters them. They stand up, completely alive. Of course, this is something that only God can do.

37:11-14 The Bones Are Israel

When the Jews heard that Jerusalem was destroyed, and that the last of the people were killed or removed from the land of Israel, they thought, "This is it. We have no more hope. We've been removed from the land, never to return." But God reassures them that He is able to do the impossible.

37:15-23 Two Sticks

Ezekiel is instructed to take two sticks and join them together into one. When the people ask what this means, he is to explain the meaning to them. No longer are Israel and Judah going to be divided into two nations. When God brings them back to the land, they will be one.

Yet again, we must wonder if the Lord is talking about the return from Babylon, or a later time? I believe the answer is clear: in that day, they will have one king.

The Jews have not had a king over them since Zedekiah, who was blinded, bound with chains of bronze, and taken to Babylon (2Kings 25:7-8) where he died (Jer. 52:11). Even today, there is no king of Israel, but only a Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.

37:24-28 A King Will Reign Over Israel

One day, Israel will have a king over them. He is called "my servant David." As we saw in our previous study, this shepherd-king is a descendant of David, called "The Branch." He is Jesus Christ.

God's sanctuary will be placed in the midst of Israel, and He will dwell with them there. And there will be no doubt among the nations that God is for His people Israel.