

"A TALE OF TWO MOUNTAINS"

I. Introduction

- A. As you can see, this text contains an oracle in which the Lord instructs Ezekiel to address two sets of mountains.
1. Mount Seir is not one mountain peak but the main mountain range in Edom, the nation that bordered Judah to the southeast, located just below Moab.
 2. In this oracle, Mount Seir is a synonym for Edom.
 3. The Edomites were descended from Isaac's firstborn son Esau, and the conflict between Esau and Jacob continued down through the history of the two nations that traced their roots back to them.
 4. The message of judgment against Edom in Ezekiel 35 may seem a bit out of place, since chapters 25-32 contained oracles of judgment against Israel's neighboring nations, including Edom.
 5. The reason why this prophecy of Edom's destruction is placed here, near the beginning of the section of Ezekiel that deals with Israel's restoration, is because it provides an important backdrop to the message that is addressed to Israel in the first part of chapter 36.
- B. The basic question that is being addressed in this passage is this: who will possess the land of Palestine?
1. The Edomites thought that they could take advantage of Judah's fall to Babylon and claim the Promised Land for themselves.
 2. Here we are given a vivid picture of the Lord's commitment to establishing Zion as his glorious city, along with his fierce opposition toward all who set themselves against the city of God.

II. Mount Seir Laid Waste

- A. Our text begins with the Lord announcing his disposition toward Edom, symbolized by Mount Seir.
1. God says that he is against Mount Seir, and that he will make her "a desolation and a waste."
 2. The thing that makes this statement especially noteworthy is the context in which it was spoken.
 3. When Ezekiel first uttered this prophecy, it was the land of Judah that was a desolation and a waste.
 4. The temple had been destroyed, the land had been ravaged, and a significant portion of the population had been carried off into exile.
 5. While Chapter 36 makes it clear that this situation will not last forever for God's people, it serves as a picture of the dreadful future that lies in store for Edom.
- B. The Lord continues this message by stating the reasons why he is against Edom.
1. To begin with, they cherished perpetual enmity against the people of Israel.
 2. As we have already noted, the enmity between Israel and Edom went all the way back to the time when Jacob and Esau struggled against each other in Rebekah's womb.
 3. While Esau himself eventually let go of his personal grudge against Jacob, his descendants were constantly renewing it and seizing opportunities to do Israel harm.
 4. Our text says that when the Babylonians came against Israel, Edom gave them over to the power of the sword.

5. This may indicate that there were Edomite soldiers who participated in Nebuchadnezzar's campaign.
 6. It may also mean that some of the Edomites hunted down and slaughtered Israelites who fled from the Babylonian invaders.
 7. The Lord says that because they did not hate bloodshed, blood will pursue them.
 8. Their mountains will be filled with their slain, and their cities will be left uninhabited.
- C. Another reason why the Lord is against Edom is because they sought to take possession of the Promised Land after Babylon's conquest of Judah.
1. The Edomites took advantage of Judah's fall by moving into the land and claiming it as their own.
 2. Perhaps they still considered it to be the birthright of Esau, regarding it as stolen by Jacob.
 3. What they did not realize was that in trying to seize the Promised Land, they were committing an affront against God himself.
 4. Even though the Jews had been evicted from the land, God was still its rightful owner.
 5. Edom's encroachment on the land was a direct challenge to the Lord.
 6. This made clear in verse 10, where these words are addressed to Edom: "you said, 'These two nations and these two countries [meaning the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel] shall be mine, and we will take possession of them' — although the LORD was there".
- D. The Lord also confronts Edom for looking at the mountains of Israel and reviling them because of the desolation that had come upon them.

1. It was as if they stood by clapping their hands as they watched Jerusalem fall.
 2. We see the same thing described in Psalm 137, where it says, "Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, 'Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!'"
 3. Here in Ezekiel 35, God makes it clear that he did remember.
 4. He heard everything that the Edomites said against Israel, and he will deal justly with them.
 5. He will repay them in kind for what they have done.
 6. Because they rejoiced over Jerusalem's desolation, he will make them desolate.
- E. In light of the things that are said about Edom in this chapter, it is clear that Edom is a symbol for all who oppose God's plan.
1. The Lord is enraged against those who set themselves against his church.
 2. The same truth is expressed in a very similar prophecy in Isaiah 34, where it says this: "the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion. And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulphur; her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up forever."
 3. You may recognize the last phrases in that quote because of how they are used in the book of Revelation to describe the final state of the wicked.
 4. This tells us that the judgment that befell Edom is a picture of the eternal torment that awaits those who set themselves against Christ and his church.

III. The Mountains of Israel Made Fruitful

- A. As we turn now to the first fifteen verses of chapter 36, we see a dramatic shift, a shift that is evident in two ways.
1. First of all, there is a shift when we compare God's disposition toward the mountains of Israel with his disposition toward Mount Seir.
 2. While God was against Seir, he is for Israel.
 3. Second, we see a shift when we compare what is said about the mountains of Israel here with what the Lord said about the mountains of Israel earlier in the book.
 4. Back in chapter 6, the Lord instructed his prophet to declare that he was about to bring a sword against the mountains and hills of Israel and destroy all of their high places.
 5. But now that the Babylonians have carried out that judgment, the Lord's disposition toward his people is one of mercy.
 6. Here we find a message of restoration, a message in which the Lord tells his people how he is going to resolve the problems of the past.
 7. The nations that have assaulted and insulted the land of Israel will themselves suffer reproach, and the disgrace that came upon the Promised Land will be removed.
- B. As the Lord continues with this message of comfort to his people, he does so in a manner that addresses the concern that lay heaviest on their hearts: the utter devastation of their land by the Babylonians.
1. We have to remember that Israelite piety was bound up with the Promised Land.
 2. This was entirely appropriate under the old covenant.

3. This was the period when the covenant of grace was administered under the types and symbols associated with the temple.
 4. The land itself was a type of God's heavenly rest.
 5. Ezekiel and the other Jews who lived through the Babylonian conquest and exile would have been traumatized by what had happened to their land.
 6. As they looked at the Promised Land, the land into which the Lord had led them, the land in which he dwelt with them, and saw how it had been laid waste, they would have been paralyzed with grief.
 7. Here in Ezekiel 36, the Lord deals with this by addressing his words to the land itself.
 8. He speaks to Israel's mountains and hills and ravines and valleys, its desolate wastes and deserted cities.
 9. He does this because he wants his people to know that he has not forsaken them.
- C. The Lord's message of restoration begins with an assurance that he has directed his jealous wrath toward the nations who laid waste to the Promised Land.
1. Justice will be done.
 2. Then he tells the mountains of Israel that they will once again bear fruit, and that he will soon restore his people to the land so that they can enjoy its fruit.
 3. Then, in a striking reversal, God says to the mountains of Israel, "behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown".
 4. The land will be repopulated and the cities will be rebuilt.

5. God even says that he will do more good to the land than he ever did before.
- D. This picture of the renewed agricultural fertility of the Promised Land is symbolic of the blessings that flow to the people who have God in their midst.
1. What a comfort this would have been to Ezekiel and his contemporaries!
 2. The most devastating thing about the Babylonian conquest was the fact that it was preceded by the Lord causing his glory to depart from the temple.
 3. Because of Israel's sin, the Lord handed them over to their enemies.
 4. They brought that judgment upon themselves by breaking the covenant that God established with them at Sinai.
 5. But that covenant did not annul the former covenant, the one that God had set up with Abraham, the father of all who believe.
 6. In his sovereign grace, God makes a way for his people to possess the inheritance that they forfeited by their disobedience.
 7. In Christ, God qualifies us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light, the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for those who believe.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Edom's opposition toward the church in Ezekiel's day is a picture of the world's opposition to the church today.
1. The world continues to hold Christ's church in derision.
 2. The world continues to try to take control of the church so that it can use it for its own purposes.

3. God sees all of this, and he will hold the world accountable for its actions.
 4. A day of vengeance is coming for all who abuse and deride Zion.
- B. The presence of God is a terror to those who stubbornly persist in their rebellion against him, but it is an immeasurable blessing to those who place their trust in him.
1. The holy God makes his presence dwell in the midst of his redeemed people.
 2. He is simultaneously the God of perfect justice and the God of unfathomable mercy.
 3. In Christ, God is not only with us, he is with us in order that he might be for us.
 4. The cause of Zion is his cause.
 5. And if such a God is for us, who or what can possibly be against us?