

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 35

Content & Intent

Broader Unit — Component of a Larger Section: Ezekiel 35 belongs to the oracles of restoration that dominate chapters 33–48, yet it functions as an interlude in that hopeful sequence — a judgment oracle directed against Mount Seir (Edom) embedded within chapters that otherwise address Israel’s future hope. It must be read alongside Ezekiel 36:1–15, which forms its direct counterpart: the curse on Edom and the blessing on Israel’s mountains are structurally paired, so that the desolation of Edom’s mountains (ch. 35) is the precondition and mirror image of the restoration of Israel’s mountains (36:1–15). However, Ezekiel 35 makes its own complete claim within this pairing and does not require the full restoration oracles to sustain that claim. It is analyzed here as the self-contained oracle it is, with the 36:1–15 counterpart noted where load-bearing.

This Text — Content: The LORD addresses Ezekiel against “Mount Seir” — the geographic and symbolic heart of Edom — through a series of oracles that build in intensity. He indicts Edom for a sustained, ancient hostility (*’êbat ’ôlam*, v. 5) toward Israel, for taking advantage of the moment of Israel’s national collapse (“the time of their calamity,” v. 5), for speaking blasphemous claims of ownership over both Israel and Judah (“These two nations and these two countries shall be mine,” v. 10), and for speaking arrogantly against the LORD Himself (vv. 12–13). The judgment is a precise talion: as Edom celebrated Israel’s desolation, so Edom will become desolation; as Edom thought the mountains of Israel were delivered into its hand, so Edom’s own mountain will be given over to waste. The oracle ends at the universal horizon — “the whole earth shall rejoice” when Edom is made desolate (v. 14) — and the repeated refrain “you shall know that I am the LORD” (vv. 4, 9, 12, 15) anchors every judgment in divine self-revelation.

This Text — Intent: God is seeking to accomplish three things simultaneously through this oracle. First, He is vindicating His own name and character against Edom’s blasphemous claim that the LORD either could not or would not protect His people. Second, He is addressing His devastated covenant people in exile: the nations that exulted over Israel’s ruin will not have the last word. The God who brought Israel under discipline has not vacated the field or abandoned His people to their enemies’ contempt. Third, He is pressing upon every reader the solemn reality that contempt for God’s people is contempt for God Himself — and that the LORD’s patience with such contempt has limits that, when reached, produce precise, proportionate, and total judgment.

Subject Sentence: The LORD judges Edom’s ancient, God-contemning hatred of Israel with measured, total desolation.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating that no nation's contempt for His covenant people goes unaccounted — those who exult in Israel's ruin exult against the LORD Himself, and He will answer that contempt with a desolation as complete as the malice that invited it.

Interpretive Evaluation

The identity of “Mount Seir” and the scope of fulfillment: A significant hermeneutical divide exists over whether this oracle against Edom is to be read as *historically* fulfilled (in the progressive displacement and disappearance of the Edomite nation in the post-exilic period, culminating by the second century BC) or *eschatologically* fulfilled (with Edom functioning typologically as representative of all nations hostile to God's people, fulfilled at the eschaton). The historical-fulfillment reading is the more precise grammatical-historical reading: the oracle names Mount Seir and the specific sins of a specific nation at a specific historical moment. The Edomite nation did, in fact, disappear from history as an identifiable ethnic and political entity. However, the text's own universalizing gesture — “the whole earth shall rejoice” (v. 14) and the use of Edom as an enduring biblical symbol for anti-covenant hostility (cf. Isaiah 34, 63; Obadiah; Malachi 1:2–4; Romans 9:13) — warrants *acknowledging* a typological dimension without abandoning the historical particularity. The Reformed reading holds both: Edom receives a historically real judgment (to be acknowledged), and that judgment is paradigmatic — it displays a principle that extends to all nations that adopt Edom's posture toward God's people (to be retained canonically). This is not an either-or.

The basis of the judgment — election or ethics? Wesleyan/Arminian readings of this passage sometimes emphasize Edom's moral failures as the independent basis of judgment, reading the talion structure as pure ethical reciprocity: Edom receives what it gave. This is partially right and should be *acknowledged* — the text is explicit that Edom's guilt is real, particular, and enumerated (vv. 5, 10, 12–13). However, this reading underweights the covenantal logic embedded in the oracle. Edom is not judged merely as a nation that behaved badly toward another nation — it is judged for treating the LORD's covenant people as though the LORD's covenant did not exist. “You have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, ‘They are laid desolate; they are given us to devour’” (v. 12) — the offense is not merely territorial ambition but the theological presumption that God's purposes for Israel were finished. The Reformed reading holds that God's defense of Israel here is covenantal, not merely moral: He is vindicating His own name and His own purposes, not merely rewarding ethical reciprocity.

Perpetual desolation — hyperbole or literal eschatological judgment? The promise that Edom will be “perpetually desolate” (*šimamôt ’ôlam*, v. 9) raises the question of scope. Dispensational readings that maintain a sharp Israel/nations distinction may read the “perpetual desolation” as eschatological and absolute. The grammatical-historical reading sees *’ôlam* here functioning in its covenantal sense — not necessarily “endless

time” but “of the age” or “of the covenant epoch” — consistent with its use throughout Ezekiel. The historical disappearance of Edom from the stage of history serves as sufficient fulfillment of this language within its canonical frame. The typological dimension (Edom as the enduring type of covenant hostility) need not require a literal end-times Edomite nation for the oracle to retain its theological force.

No significant Roman Catholic or Pentecostal/Charismatic divergence exists on this passage; it has not been a locus of sacramental or pneumatological controversy. Its judgment content places it outside the range of Spirit-gifts debates.

Key Canonical Support

- **Obadiah 1–21** — The most direct canonical parallel: an entire prophetic book devoted to Edom’s judgment for precisely the sins enumerated in Ezekiel 35 (standing aloof in Israel’s day of distress, v. 11; gloating, v. 12; cutting off the fugitives, v. 14). Obadiah grounds the same claim: the LORD will not permit covenant contempt to stand unreckoned.
 - **Isaiah 34:1–17** — A sweeping cosmic judgment oracle in which Edom becomes the representative of all nations standing under God’s wrath, with the same imagery of total and lasting desolation. Confirms that Edom’s judgment is paradigmatic, not merely national.
 - **Isaiah 63:1–6** — The LORD as Divine Warrior coming “from Edom” in blood-stained garments, trampling the nations in His wrath. Functions as the eschatological escalation of the Ezekiel 35 claim: what began as a historical oracle against a specific nation is revealed at the canonical horizon as a type of final divine judgment on all covenant hostility.
 - **Malachi 1:2–5** — The LORD distinguishes His love for Jacob from His setting aside of Esau/Edom, and points to Edom’s ongoing ruin as perpetual evidence that “the LORD is great beyond the border of Israel.” The talion principle of Ezekiel 35 is still legible in Malachi: Edom called its territory “the border of wickedness” by its own conduct, and the LORD named it accordingly.
 - **Romans 9:13** (quoting Malachi 1:2–3) — Paul’s use of Jacob/Esau as the paradigm case for God’s sovereign electing purpose places the Edom/Israel distinction within the deepest Reformed theological frame: not ethnic identity but divine covenant purpose governs the nations’ standing before God. Edom’s judgment is finally intelligible not merely as divine payback but as the outworking of covenant purposes that no human malice can annul.
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Aim

This analysis sets out to establish that God’s judgment of Edom is not an episode of ancient Near Eastern geopolitics but a permanent, paradigmatic disclosure of how the LORD guards His covenant purposes — and to drive home the double-edged consequence: there is no safety in contempt for God’s people, and there is no final jeopardy for those who are God’s people, no matter how completely their enemies exult over them.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	The LORD directs Ezekiel to set his face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it	Mount Seir = the highlands of Edom; the formula matches Israel-directed oracles, indicating Edom is treated as a genuine subject of divine address
3–4	First oracle: “I am against you, Mount Seir” — I will make you desolate; you shall know that I am the LORD	The <i>recognition formula</i> (“you shall know that I am the LORD”) appears first here and anchors every judgment section; judgment is simultaneously revelation
5	Indictment #1: Edom harbored “perpetual hatred” (<i>’êbat ’ôlam</i>) and gave over the Israelites to the sword in the time of their calamity	“Time of final punishment” (<i>’êt ’ăwôn qēš</i>) — the moment of Babylonian conquest; Edom exploited Israel’s hour of discipline
6	“I will prepare you for blood” — since you have not hated bloodshed, bloodshed shall pursue you	Talion in the most direct form; as Edom gave Israel to the sword, the sword will pursue Edom
7	Mount Seir will be made utterly desolate — the coming and going will be cut off	Total desolation: no travel, no commerce, no life
8	The slain will fill the mountains, valleys, and ravines	Geographic comprehensiveness of the judgment
9	“I will make you a perpetual desolation” — your cities	<i>Šimamôt ’ôlam</i> — the desolation matches the

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	will not be inhabited	“perpetual hatred” of v. 5 in the Hebrew; the punishment mirrors the sin
9b	“You shall know that I am the LORD”	Second occurrence of the recognition formula
10	Indictment #2: Edom claimed ownership of both Israel and Judah — “these two nations and these two countries shall be mine” — even though the LORD was there	The theological heart of the indictment: Edom’s territorial ambition was a theological claim — it implicitly denied the LORD’s continued presence with and purpose for His people
11	“I will deal with you according to your anger and envy which you showed” — so “I will make myself known among them when I judge you”	God’s self-revelation happens <i>through</i> the proportionate judgment; it is not incidental
12	Indictment #3: Edom spoke against the mountains of Israel — “they are laid desolate; they are given us to devour”	The land itself is personified; the LORD has heard this speech against His own terrain
12b	“You have boasted against me”	The offense escalates: speaking against Israel’s mountains = speaking against the LORD
13	Edom multiplied words against the LORD and He heard	God as witness to Edom’s speech; the LORD’s patience does not equal inattention
14–15	As the whole earth rejoices, Edom will be made desolate; as Edom rejoiced over Israel’s inheritance, so Edom will become desolate	The cosmic scope of judgment (whole earth) and the perfect talion (Edom’s joy becomes Edom’s desolation)
15b	“You shall know that I am the LORD”	Fourth and final occurrence of the recognition formula; the passage closes where it opened — divine self-

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		disclosure

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–4	The Address: Judgment Announced Against Mount Seir
2	5–9	The First Indictment: Perpetual Hatred and the Punishment of Blood
3	10–13	The Second and Third Indictments: Theological Arrogance and God-Contemning Speech
4	14–15	The Verdict: Cosmic Desolation as Perfect Talion

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The LORD judges Edom’s ancient, God-contemning hatred of Israel with measured, total desolation.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating that no nation’s contempt for His covenant people goes unaccounted — those who exult in Israel’s ruin exult against the LORD Himself, and He will answer that contempt with a desolation as complete as the malice that invited it.

Applications (Five)

1. The contempt you direct at God’s people is contempt you direct at God. (*Mind/Belief*)
Edom thought its quarrel was with Israel — territorial, political, ancestral. The LORD corrects that perception: “You have boasted against me” (v. 13). This reframes every act of contempt, mockery, or hostility toward God’s covenant community. The person who dismisses the church, scorns the believer, or exults over the suffering of God’s people is not merely dealing with human institutions or flawed individuals — they are speaking against the mountains of Israel, and the LORD hears it. Repent of the easy contempt that treats the church as merely human and therefore fair game.

2. God’s patience with those who target His people is not God’s absence. (*Mind/Belief*)
Edom had harbored its perpetual hatred through the long centuries of Israel’s history. The

LORD had not answered it yet. But verse 13 is precise: “You have boasted against me, and have multiplied your words against me; I have heard.” The silence of God is not the inattention of God. For the believer enduring seasons in which enemies seem to flourish and accusations go unanswered, this passage is a stabilizing reality: the LORD is keeping the ledger, and He knows what has been said. The absence of immediate response is not the absence of a response.

3. Repent of the instinct to exult in another’s ruin. (*Affections/Worship*) Edom’s sin was not merely territorial ambition but the particular quality of its joy: it rejoiced at Israel’s calamity (v. 15), exulted at the desolation. This is a deeply human temptation — to feel satisfaction at the suffering of someone we have grieved against, to experience a righteous-feeling vindication when an enemy falls. The passage names that satisfaction as the very thing that draws down divine judgment. Where do you feel that satisfaction? Over the struggling marriage of someone who wronged you? Over the professional failure of a rival? The LORD heard Edom say “they are given us to devour” — and He hears the heart that says the same.

4. No human verdict on your life is the final verdict. (*Affections/Worship*) The exilic Israelites heard their enemies announce with confidence: “These two nations and these two countries shall be mine — they are laid desolate” (v. 10). It would have felt irrefutable. The temple was gone. The king was gone. The land was gone. Edom’s reading of the evidence was entirely plausible. And the LORD says: “Even though I was there.” The people of God are never in the condition their enemies most confidently diagnose them to be in. What enemy verdict about your life — your marriage, your ministry, your future — are you treating as definitive? The LORD was there then. He is here now.

5. Align yourself with what the LORD is doing, not with the nations watching from the sidelines. (*Will/Behavior*) Edom’s catastrophic error was strategic: it stood with those it perceived as the winning side — the Babylonians — and acted accordingly, treating Israel’s covenant status as null and void. It miscalculated catastrophically. Every generation faces the same pressure to read the room, identify the prevailing cultural and institutional powers, and position itself advantageously relative to them — even at the cost of contempt for or distance from God’s people. Ezekiel 35 is a standing warning: to align against God’s covenant purposes is to align for desolation, no matter how solid the ground looks beneath your feet.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 35 is a disclosure of God as the active covenant guardian who does not merely permit the suffering of His people but tracks, names, and answers every act of contempt directed at them. The oracle reveals that the LORD’s patience with Edom was not tolerance — it was the accumulation of a case that would be answered at the time and in the manner He determined. The fourfold repetition of “you shall know that I am the LORD” anchors the entire passage: judgment is not merely punitive; it is revelatory.

God is making Himself known through the undoing of Edom. This discloses a divine character in which sovereignty, covenant faithfulness, and justice are not competing attributes but a single coherent purpose: the LORD will be known as LORD, and those who have acted as though He were not will be confronted with that reality in the most concrete possible way.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ezekiel 35 functions within Reformed theology as a sustained display of the principle that God's covenant purposes cannot be annulled by human malice, strategic miscalculation, or the apparent triumph of His enemies. Edom's error — "these two nations shall be mine" — was not merely military overreach but theological presumption: it supposed that the covenant between the LORD and Israel was revocable by circumstance. The Reformed understanding of election and covenant insists precisely the opposite: what God has bound in covenant cannot be unbound by nations, demons, or disaster. The oracle also demonstrates the covenantal nature of solidarity: to attack God's people is to attack God — a principle that reaches its fullest form in the New Testament, where the risen Christ asks Saul of Tarsus, "Why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4), and instructs his disciples that whatever is done to the least of his brothers is done to him (Matthew 25:40). The judgment of Edom is thus not a relic of Old Testament ethnic politics but a paradigm case of the Reformed conviction that divine sovereignty is not passive — it is covenantally active, jealously guarding its purposes against every Edomite presumption that the covenant is finished.

Main Takeaway

No nation, no adversary, and no season of ruin gets to declare God's covenant purposes over. Edom announced Israel's desolation as permanent, treated God's absence as established fact, and exulted in the ruin — and the LORD says: I was there, I heard every word, and the desolation you announced for others is the desolation coming for you. If you belong to God's covenant people, your enemies do not determine your final condition. And if you have taken Edom's posture — exulting in the downfall of those you have grieved against, speaking against the mountains of Israel with the easy confidence that God has moved on — repent now, before the LORD, who heard every word, answers.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls:

- **Treating Ezekiel 35 as a curiosity or historical footnote with no present claim.** The most common pitfall with this oracle is handling it as a piece of ancient Near Eastern political history with minimal applicability — “Edom was punished for what it did to Israel.” This fails the passage at the level of intent. The recognition formula (“you shall know that I am the LORD”) occurs four times — God is making a *claim* through this judgment, not merely enforcing a policy. The passage is doing something in the reader, not just reporting something about Edom. Preach what the LORD is doing, not merely what happened to Edom.
- **Moralizing the talion into a general principle of karma.** The talion structure of the oracle (“as you did, so it will be done to you”) can easily slide into a generic “what goes around comes around” message that requires no specifically biblical theology. This empties the passage of its covenantal content. The judgment is not cosmic karma — it is the LORD acting as covenant guardian, specifically in defense of His covenant purposes and His covenant people. The specificity must be preserved or the passage’s own argument is lost.
- **Skipping the blasphemy of verse 10 as merely territorial.** Verse 10 — “these two nations and these two countries shall be mine, even though the LORD was there” — is the theological climax of the indictment, and it is frequently underread. Edom’s claim was not merely a land grab; it was an implicit theological statement that the LORD’s covenant with Israel was cancelled. The phrase “even though the LORD was there” is the LORD’s own rebuttal. This is where the passage’s deepest claim lives and where the most important application for contemporary readers is located. Do not let the territorial frame obscure the theological offense.
- **Missing the intended comfort for God’s suffering people.** This oracle was delivered to Ezekiel in exile — to a people who had watched the temple burn, heard their enemies exult, and could have concluded that the LORD had abandoned them. Ezekiel 35 is not merely a warning to Edom; it is a message of covenantal assurance to Israel. The comfort dimension — “your enemies’ verdict is not the final verdict; the LORD was there; He heard what they said; He will answer” — must be drawn out. Preaching Ezekiel 35 only as warning, without preaching its assurance to the church in seasons of affliction, leaves the congregation with half the oracle.
- **Applying the passage in ways that encourage nationalistic or tribal triumphalism.** The temptation in a passage like this is to identify contemporary enemies of the church or nation with Edom and preach assured divine retribution against them. This misuses the passage in two ways: it identifies the contemporary church too directly with ancient ethnic Israel in a way that bypasses the New Covenant reframing, and it moves from divine prerogative to human confidence — “God will destroy our enemies” as a political slogan rather than a covenantal reality. The passage calls God’s people to trust, not to triumphalism; to alignment with God’s purposes, not to the presumption that our assessments of who counts as Edom are reliable.

- **Neglecting the Christological endpoint of the Edom typology.** Isaiah 63:1–6 and Romans 9:13 stand at the canonical far end of the Edom theme, and they reveal that the talion principle of Ezekiel 35 reaches its fullest resolution in Christ: the Divine Warrior who comes from Edom trampling the winepress alone (Isaiah 63) is the same LORD who demonstrates His sovereign covenant purposes through the Jacob/Esau distinction (Romans 9). To preach Ezekiel 35 without at least gesturing toward this canonical completion leaves the passage orphaned from the gospel in which it finds its deepest meaning.