

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Yehezkel: The Book of Ezekiel**  
**By Dr. Tova Ganzel**

\*\*\*\*\*  
In Honor of Ovadia Sutton for his love of Sefer Yehezkel  
\*\*\*\*\*

**Shiur#23: God's Eternal Preference for Israel over Edom (35 – 36:15)**

**Mount Se'ir and the Mountains of Israel**

The appeal to mountains is a feature that we encounter throughout Sefer Yehezkel.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the mountains are referred to in a general way, without reference to any specific area, while other instances refer to a particular place. "Mountains of Israel" is a phrase unique to Yehezkel, appearing sixteen times in the Sefer.

We might guess at the reason for the prophet choosing to address the nation in this way. In chapter 6 (vv. 2-3) he speaks to the mountains of Israel, describing how the coming destruction will include the mountains, the hills, the riverbeds and the valleys. The appeal to the mountains seems to arise from the fact that these were the main sites of the '*bamot*' (altars on high places) and the practice of idolatry: idolatry is the sin these verses focus on.

In contrast, in Chapter 36 (vv. 1-4) the prophet addresses himself to the mountains of Israel, and also speaks to the desolate ruins and empty cities. This difference arises from the chronological gap: the prophecy in Chapter 6 preceded the Destruction, while the prophecy in Chapter 36 comes afterwards, and therefore includes a description of the state of the land in its wake. The prophecy mentions the reaction of the nations to the Destruction, with specific mention of the sites of idolatrous worship: "Aha, even the high places (*bamot*) are ours in possession..." (36:2), and the punishment that they deserve as a result (36:5-7). This suggests that the nations will suffer a special punishment because of their arrogance and their scorn for what goes on in the high places on the mountains of Israel. The mountains continue to be a central focus even after the Destruction. (Below we suggest another reason for the prophet choosing, in God's Name, to address the mountains.)

---

<sup>1</sup> Yechezkel utters his prophecies in Babylonia, which geographically is a flat country. i It may be that his frequent invocation of mountains is an expression of his longing for the landscapes of Eretz Yisrael. For elaboration see Y. Felix, *Teva va-Aretz be-Tanakh: Perakim be-Ekologia Mikra'it*, Jerusalem 5752, pp. 233-235.

## **The placement of the prophecy to Mount Se'ir in Sefer Yehezkel**

The prophecy in Chapter 35 is addressed to Mount Se'ir – home to Edom. The placement of this prophecy among the chapters of Sefer Yehezkel about the revival deviates from the general structure in this part of the Sefer (chapters 25-32) which concentrates the prophecies to the other nations.

Furthermore, the unit of prophecies to the nations already has a message directed specifically to Edom (25:12-14; we discussed these verses in shiur #18). This seeming deviation and repetition is not coincidental. The aim of the prophecy in our chapter is different from Yehezkel's prophecies to the other nations. Surprisingly enough, this prophecy is actually addressed to Israel. The shared historical background of the Israel and Edom, on one hand, and the habitation of the Edomites to the south of Yehuda, on the other, presented a religious challenge that overshadow Yehezkel's prophecies of revival.

The religious challenge receives a prophetic response in Chapters 35 and 36:1-15, which together comprise a single prophetic unit. It seems that the chapter division (executed by a Christian theologian in the Middle Ages) in this instance is an obstacle to a proper understanding of the message. The two chapters should not be viewed as two separate prophecies, one to Mount Se'ir and the other to the mountains of Israel. Rather, they are part of the same prophecy, whose main message is that the mountains of Israel will be rebuilt on the ruins of Mount Se'ir. The first part opens with a call to Mount Se'ir:

“Son of man, set your face against Mount Se'ir and prophesy against it... Behold, O Mount Se'ir, I am against you, and I will stretch out My hand against you and will make you a total blight. I will lay your cities waste, and you shall be desolate, and you shall know that I am the Lord” (35:2-4).

Then the second part starts with a call to the mountains of Israel:

“... Prophecy to the mountains of Israel and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord.” (36:1).

### **A perpetual hatred**

There are two reasons that Yehezkel mentions in his prophecy for why this attitude and message to Edom are necessary for the prophecies of revival in the following chapters to be accepted by Am Yisrael. The first reason relates to the long history that the two nations share; the second concerns the Edomites' territorial demands. After addressing each of these reasons separately, Yehezkel connects them and sums up the struggle between the two nations. This prophetic message also arises from the structure of the chapter (see appendix below).

The origins of the relationship between Edom and Israel are found in parashat Toldot, in the story of the birth of Yaakov and Esav (Sefer Bereishit 25:19-34; 27 – 28:9). The story of Yitzchak awarding the blessings, in these chapters, in no way points to any wrongdoing on Esav's part. In fact, the reader cannot help but identify with Esav's cry:

“And Esav said to his father, Have you then only one blessing, my father? Bless me, too, my father! And Esav raised his voice and he wept.” (Bereishit 27:28)

Hence, to fill in the picture, Chazal chose as the haftarah for this parasha a prophecy from Sefer Malakhi. The selected passage represents the “final word” of the Tanakh concerning the relations between Yaakov and Esav, following their long history, placing these relations in their historical perspective:

“I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say, In what [way] have You loved us? Was not Esav Yaakov's brother, says the Lord; nevertheless, I loved Yaakov, and I hated Esav, and laid his mountains waste, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness. For Edom says, We are made destitute, but we will return and rebuild the desolate places. Thus says the Lord of hosts: They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall be called ‘the border of wickedness’, and ‘the people against whom the Lord has indignation forever’. And your eyes shall see, and you shall say, The Lord is great beyond the border of Israel.” (Malakhi 1:2-5)

From these verses it appears that the nation's fear that God preferred Esav prevailed until the beginning of the return to the land. Even after the Second Temple was built by the returnees, the status of the Edomites – the descendants of Esav – caused Am Yisrael to doubt their own status in God's eyes. This seems to be an echo of the fear that the Divine choice of Yaakov over Esav is not an eternal choice but that God might change His mind. Indeed, Yehezkel's need to mention God's eternal hatred is an expression of the nation's fear that God preferred Edom.<sup>2</sup> The impression arising from Yehezkel's response is that the nation feels that perhaps now, following the destruction of the Temple, after it has been made clear that Am Yisrael did not uphold the covenant with God, God will continue His covenant with Avraham via the sons of Esav, rather than through the descendants of Yaakov.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See: E. Assis, “Why Edom? On the Hostility Towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources”, *VT* 55, 2005, pp. 1-20.

<sup>3</sup> This tension between Esav and Yaakov may be discerned throughout the First Temple Period, starting from the time of David's kingdom. At times the kings of Yehuda managed to push the Edomites southward, while at other times the Edomites pushed the kingdom of Yehuda northward. See: Shemuel II 8:13-14 (David subjugates Edom); Melakhim I 11; 15:14-22 (revenge on Edom following the death of David); Melakhim II 8:20-21 (the rule of Yehoram ben Yehoshafat); Melakhim II 14:7; Divrei ha-Yamim II 25:11-13 (the days of Amatzia); Divrei ha-Yamim II 26:7, 10; Melakhim II 14:22 (the days of Azaria); Melakhim II 16:6 (the exile of the kingdom of Israel).

The hostility between Israel and Edom throughout the generations grew even stronger during the years of Yehezkel's prophecies, owing to the active participation of some Edomites in shedding the blood of Am Yisrael during the Destruction:

“Because you have had a perpetual hatred and hurled Bnei Yisrael to the power of the sword in their time of calamity” (35:5).

The Edomites put themselves at the service of the conquerors and took part in hunting down the survivors of Yehuda and handing them over to the Babylonians for slavery or for exile. By virtue of this service the Babylonians permitted them to settle in Yehuda, in the place of the Jews who had been killed or taken captive and exiled. The Edomites established their own autonomy in the area of the northern Negev and the Judean hills.<sup>4</sup> An echo of this development arises from the prophecies of Yoel (4:19) and Ovadia (1:10). This strengthening of Edom continued for many years, and when the Second Temple was built they grew even stronger and invaded cities in the center of the country. It is therefore not surprising that the nation to whom Malakhi addresses himself doubts God's love for them.

An important archaeological finding offers its own evidence of Edom's harsh treatment of Yehuda, and suggests that at a certain stage the city of Arad was in danger of being conquered by Edom. The finding is an ostrakon from Tel Arad, with an inscription that reads:

“From Arad 50 [...] and you shall send them to Ramat Negev by the hand of Malkiyahu, son of Kerav'ur, and he shall hand them over to Elisha, son of Yirmiya, in Ramat Negev, lest anything happen to the city. And the word of the king is with you, for your very life. Behold, I have sent to warn you this day: Let the men be with Elisha, lest Edom come there.”

The instruction is that fifty soldiers must be dispatched urgently from the base in Arad, as well as soldiers from Kinah, to Ramat Negev, lest something happen to the city, because Arad is in danger of being conquered by Edom.<sup>5</sup>

In Sefer Yehezkel, as in other biblical sources, the reason for the destruction and desolation of Edom is their abuse of the remnant of Yehuda (v. 5). Yehezkel's prophecy states that Edom is punished measure for measure for its actions: just as in the past it bound its destiny with that of Israel, so too will be its future, but this time with Israel having the upper hand.

Indeed, the prophecies in Chapters 35 and 36 are inversely connected: to the degree that the mountains of Edom are now desolate, so will the mountains of Israel flourish. But for now, with the destruction of Edom, the prophetic

---

<sup>4</sup> M. Kogan, *Ovadia, Mikra le-Yisrael*, Tel Aviv-Jerusalem 5752, pp. 8-10

<sup>5</sup> See S. Achituv, *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Mikhtav*, Jerusalem 5765, pp. 118-120.

message is emphasized through the expression, “and you shall know that I am the Lord”, a phrase repeated five times throughout the Edom prophecy.

The continuation of this prophecy, in Chapter 36, is likewise the inverse of the prophecy concerning Mount Se’ir, as well as of the prophecy concerning the mountains of Israel in Chapter 6 (vv. 1-4). Thus, the contrast between the content of Yehezkel’s prophecies prior to the Destruction (Chapter 6) and the content of his prophecies in its wake (Chapter 36) is clearly manifest.

Finally, this prophetic unit concludes with the revival of the land in the future (36:7-15). This prophecy fits well with the preceding message. Beginning with the insult of the nations surrounding Am Yisrael – “I have lifted up My hand, saying, Surely the nations that are about you – they shall bear their own insult” (36:7), and continues with a description of the mountains of Israel in their abundance - “But you, mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to My people of Israel, for they will soon be coming” (36:8). God’s Divine Presence inspires this reality - “For behold, I am for you, and will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown” (36:8), and this finds expression in the fact that the mountains of Yehuda will once again be teeming with inhabitants:

“And I will multiply men upon you – all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited, and the waste places rebuilt. And I will multiply upon you man and beast, and they shall increase and bring fruit, and I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and I will do better to you than at your beginnings, and you shall know that I am the Lord. And I will cause men to walk upon you, My people Israel, and they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance, and you shall no longer bereave them of children.” (36:10-12)

These elements combine to provide a precise Divine response to the fears of the nation. This prophecy says nothing about the ingathering from among the nations, nor about the ramifications of the desecration of God’s Name represented by the Jewish presence in exile; and not a word about the unification of Israel and Yehuda. The prophecy makes no mention of any future leader, of a future Temple, etc. Each of these issues will be addressed in the prophecies that follow, starting with Chapter 36:16, which is a distinct prophetic unit.<sup>6</sup> Why all these omissions? Because the purpose of this prophecy is to prepare the people’s hearts to accept messages about the future revival. So long as they are fearful, uncertain as to their status as God’s nation, the prophecies concerning the future will be met with skepticism. First Yehezkel must deal with the crisis of faith, concluding with the promise that only the mountains of Israel will be yielding fruit and be inhabited by Am Yisrael. Only then does he launch a series of prophecies regarding the nation’s future. These prophecies, from 36:16 up until

---

<sup>6</sup> This proposed division is based on the fact that the haftarah for Parashat Para starts at 36:16.

Chapter 39, are a concise formulation of Yehezkel's message to the nation. The following chapters will be devoted to these units.

**Appendix: Edom vs. Israel – the structure of the prophetic unit**

<b>The future of Edom (Chapter 35)</b>		<b>The future of Israel (Ch. 36)</b>	
Edom's actions towards Israel since the beginning	The Edomites' desire to succeed and inherit Israel's place and their God	Their glee at Israel's downfall and their desire to inherit Israel	Edom's actions towards Israel since the beginning
Because you have had a perpetual hatred and have hurled the children of Israel to the power of the sword in their time of calamity (v. 5)	Because you have said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it, though the Lord was there (v. 10)	Because the enemy has said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession (v. 2)	Because they say to you, You are a land that devours men, and have bereaved your nations (v. 13)
<b>God's response</b>			
Therefore, as I live, says the Lord God, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; surely you have hated your own blood, therefore blood shall pursue you. Thus I will make Mount Se'ir most desolate, and cut off from it all who come and go. And I will fill its mountains with its slain men, in your hills, and in your valleys, and in all your riverbeds	Therefore, as I live, says the Lord God, I will do according to your anger and according to your envy which you have used out of your hatred against them and I will make Myself known among them, when I shall judge you. And you shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have heard all your blasphemies which you have spoken against the	Therefore... Because they have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that you might be a possession to the rest of the nations, and you are taken up in the lips of talkers, and have become the gossip of the people: therefore... thus says the Lord God to the mountains and to the hills, to the riverbeds and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken, which have become a prey and a	Therefore you shall devour men no longer, nor any more bereave your nations, says the Lord God. Neither will I allow the insult of the nations to be heard any more against you, nor shall you bear the reproach of peoples, any longer, nor shall you

<p>there shall fall those who are slain with the sword. I will make you perpetual desolations, and your cities shall not have a restoration, and you shall know that I am the Lord. (vv. 6-9)</p>	<p>mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate; they are given us to consume. Thus with your mouth you have blasted against Me, and have multiplied your words against Me; I have heard them. So says the Lord God: When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate. As you have rejoiced at the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you; you shall be desolate, Mount Se'ir, and all Edom – all of it, and they shall know that I am the Lord. (vv. 11-15)</p>	<p>derision to the residue of the nations that are round about. Therefore... Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the residue of the nations, and against all Edom, who have appointed My land to themselves for a possession with the joy of all their heart, with disdainful minds, to cast it out for a prey. Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains, to the hills, to the riverbeds and to the valleys, saying... Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My fury, because you have suffered the insult of the nations. (vv. 3-6)</p>	<p>cause your nations to stumble any more, says the Lord God. (vv. 14-15)<sup>7</sup></p>
---	---	--	---

Translated by Kaeren Fish

---

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the language of this prophecy see Y. Grossman, "Kefel Keri'a Mivni" bi-Yechezkel 33-48", Beit Mikra 49b, 5764, pp. 194-224.