

EZEKIEL

Segment 5

Ezekiel 6 & 7: Judgment on Judah's Mountains

The High Places

Ezekiel 6:1-7 Yahweh plans to destroy the high places in Judah.

Before the Israelites came to the Promised Land, the inhabitants worshipped figured stones and molten images on the high places (Numbers 33:52). Perhaps the grandeur and beauty of these lofty locations overwhelmed the Israelites' aesthetic senses resulting in a worshipful mindset, or maybe they thought heaven could hear them better when they were nearer. Whatever the case, high places served as the location for sacrifice and worship. In the time of Solomon before he finished the Temple, he offered sacrifices to Yahweh atop Gibeon, the great high place.

1 Kings 3:2-5

2 The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the LORD until those days. 3 Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. 4 The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 In Gibeon, the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you."

God responded to Solomon favorably here, but after he finished the Temple, God wanted His people to offer sacrifices solely there. Consequently, the high places fell out of use for worshipping Yahweh (though people still used them to worship other gods). Sadly, by the end of his life, Solomon himself built a high place for Chemosh and Molech.

1 Kings 11:7-8

7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. 8 Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

If Solomon cracked the door of royal endorsement for high place idolatry, then it was Jeroboam who threw open the floodgates and eagerly encouraged everyone in his realm to step through them. He had succeeded with the northern ten tribes and did not want his countrymen pilgrimaging to the Temple down in Jerusalem—the capital of the southern kingdom.

1 Kings 12:27-32

27 "If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of

Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” 28 So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.” 29 He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. 31 And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. 32 Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.

Sadly, Rehoboam, the king of the remaining tribes that did not succeed with Jeroboam, likewise allowed rampant idolatry on the high places.

1 Kings 14:22-24

22 Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked Him to jealousy more than all that their fathers had done, with the sins which they committed. 23 For they also built for themselves high places and sacred pillars and Asherim on every high hill and beneath every luxuriant tree. 24 There were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel.

What’s interesting is that when the book of Kings summarizes and evaluates a good king, it mentions whether or not he removed the high places. Here are a few examples.

1 Kings 22:42-43

42 Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 43 He walked in all the way of Asa his father; he did not turn aside from it, doing right in the sight of the LORD. However, the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense on the high places.

2 Kings 12:2-3

2 Jehoash did right in the sight of the LORD all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. 3 Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

2 Kings 14:3-4

3 He [Amaziah] did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father; he did according to all that Joash his father had done. 4 Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

Although a couple of the kings broke down and eliminated pagan worship on the high places,¹ for most of the nation's history, people continually burned incense and offered sacrifice to other gods. Due to the idolatry of thousands of Israelites over centuries, God is finally fed up. He decides to deal with the defiled mountains. When He does so, they will "know that He is Yahweh." He is not Bel, Marduk, or Ashtoreth; He is Yahweh—the living God acting in history. Think about how destroying the high places would underscore this great truth.

Ezekiel 6:8-10 God desires that some who survive will come to grips with what they have done to Him

The NET renders 6:9 as "...They will realize how I was crushed by their unfaithful heart which turned from me and by their eyes which lusted after their idols." God is not an emotionless robot. His beloved people have wounded Him. His rage is real, and He wants His people to "get it"—to realize what they have put Him through so that they feel the burning shame of their actions and repent. The exiles will know that He is Yahweh when He follows through on His threats of catastrophe.

6:11-14 Corpses are strewn around demolished high places and broken idols.

God describes how He will fully vent His rage against His people. On every high hill, all the mountaintops, and under every leafy green tree—the very places they used to offer incense to their idols—He will make the scene of death and destruction. Sword, famine, and pestilence will slaughter these idolaters. Then, once the competing gods and those who worship them lie lifeless on the ground, they will know that He is Yahweh.

God Judges Based on Behavior

7:1-4 They will suffer because of their abominable behavior.

God is not capricious or erratic; He punishes in proportion and as a response to what people actually do. In Christianity, we commonly think that God doesn't care about what we do as much as He cares about our heart—our intentions, emotions, and motivations. Perhaps we get this idea from the story of Samuel anointing David as king. Jesse did not even call his son David into the house to meet the illustrious prophet, figuring that the runt of the litter would be better off managing his chores with the sheep. In this context, God said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks as the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). This is perfectly true, but it does not mean that God does not judge people based on their actions. The whole reason God sent Samuel to anoint the next king of Israel was because Saul had disobeyed him in the matter of the Amalekites. Consider these statements from the ascended Christ:

Revelation 2:1-2

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance

¹ Asa (2 Chronicles 14:3-5), Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4), and Josiah (2 Kings 23:5-10) removed the high places, though their successors usually rebuilt them.

Revelation 2:8-9

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: 9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (Revelation 2:8-9 NAU)

Revelation 2:12-13

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 13 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith

Revelation 2:18-19

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: 19 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance

Revelation 3:1

To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Revelation 3:7-8

7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 8 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door....

Revelation 3:14-15

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot....

Over and over Jesus says, "I know your deeds." Although we typically like to divide what we believe from what we do, maybe this way of thinking is flawed. God and His Son take what we do very seriously. If Ezekiel's doomsday prophecies teach us anything, they make it clear that God is watching what His people do and that we deeply wound Him when we choose idols and alternative lifestyles over the way He graciously gave us to live.

7:5-27 Lists all of the calamities God will bring about on the people

EZEKIEL

Segment 6

Ezekiel 36: Restoration on Judah's Mountains

I Am For You

Ezekiel 36:1-7 The aftermath of God's judgment on Judah's mountains

After the Babylonians conquered and captured Judah, they deported the surviving captives. As a result, the surrounding peoples had every opportunity to seize the lands and mountains for their own use. The nation specifically called out for this is Edom. We know from Obadiah and elsewhere that the Edomites were particularly cold-hearted towards the Judeans following the Babylonian invasion. As people fled into the surrounding region, the Edomites would cut off the fugitives and hand over the survivors to the Babylonians (Obadiah 14). Furthermore, rather than fearing for themselves or having compassion on their neighbors, they gloated while the Babylonians carried out their brutal siege and captured Jerusalem (Obadiah 11-12). But now that God's wrath is spent, now that the fire of His zeal is quenched, He has new plans for His chosen people and the land He long ago promised to their ancestor, Abraham. Even so, the surrounding nations who insulted and mocked Judah will now endure their own calamity.

Ezekiel 36:8-15

Whereas Ezekiel's early prophecies predicted doom and gloom, now that God has poured out His wrath (through the Babylonians), He wants to provide the exiles with hope in captivity. All is not lost forever; they will once again go home and rebuild. Time after time, God had said, "I am against you"²

Ezekiel 5:8-9

8 therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations. 9 'And because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.

Ezekiel 13:8

8 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you," declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 21:3

3 and say to the land of Israel, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am against you; and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off from you the righteous and the wicked.

² In Ezekiel we see that God is also against Tyre (26:3), Sidon (28:22), Egypt (29:3, 10; 30:22), Edom (35:3), and Gog (38:3; 39:1).

Ezekiel 34:10

10 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.'"

Now, after all of this, He says, "I am for you, and I will turn to you." God speaks to the same mountains He had threatened in chapters 6-7 and promises that He will bring back the people to till and plant the land as well as rebuild the cities and waste places. He goes on to promise that He "will do more good to you than ever before." No longer will the mountains bereave the Jews of their children.³

The Landlord's Reputation

Ezekiel 36:16-19

God evicted the former inhabitants of ancient Israel because of their lewd and defiling behavior. After listing off a surprisingly comprehensive number of sexual sins (Leviticus 18:6-23), God warned His people not to be like their predecessors.

Leviticus 18:24-28

24 'Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. 25 'For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. 26 'But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you 27 (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); 28 so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you.

Sadly, Israel did not listen to Moses, and they followed the example of the surrounding nations. God kept His word and caused the land to spew out His own people due to their abominations. Notice how even in the midst of this chapter of hope and restoration, God continues to retell the story of what happened, so that His people will correctly interpret history.

Ezekiel 36:20-23

God has a great concern for His reputation. This is like when Moses prayed for God to relent from wiping out the nascent nation of Israel and starting over with him after the people fashioned a golden calf.

Exodus 32:9-12

9 The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10 Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."

³ This may be a general reference to famine and wild beasts killing of the children, or it might refer to Molech worship during which people burned their children as offerings.

11 Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?' Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people..."

A second time, the people so aggravated Yahweh that He told Moses He would destroy them, and Moses interceded yet again.

Numbers 14:11-16

11 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? 12 I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."

13 But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, 14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, 16 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness....'"

God is very sensitive about His name. It irks Him when people misinterpret or misconstrue His noble actions and pure motives. This concern of His does not derive from some overinflated ego. He actually is the greatest being in the universe, the most high, the almighty. From microscopic organisms to grandiose mountains, there is nothing in all of existence that doesn't find its origin in Him. He is the benevolent creator and consistent sustainer.

Cleansing, Shame, and Rejuvenation

Ezekiel 36:24-30

God will clean His people. He will give them a new heart and a new spirit that will enable them to live how He says they should. Verse 28 nicely summarizes what God has always and continues to want—His dream for humanity. He wants us to live in the land, to be His people, and for us to have Him for our God. Simple. This is what He set up in Eden and what He will finally bring about in the end. When He brings His people back from exile, He promises He will multiply the grain, the fruit, and the produce.

Ezekiel 36:31-32

In the midst of all the blessings and bounty, the people will remember their wickedness and hate themselves for it. God wants them to know that He will not bless them because they deserve it; it is because of His own magnanimous desire.

Ezekiel 36:33-38

People will pass by Judah's land and marvel at how fertile and paradisiacal it has become. God's plan to rejuvenate the desolated land will cause the surrounding nations to recognize that He is Yahweh. Furthermore, He will multiply His people like flocks so that the waste cities will once again have many inhabitants.

Leviticus 26 predicts all of this!