



Ezekiel 36:22-32

A New Heart and a New Spirit

The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel was a captive in the land of Babylon during the seventy years of exile. Nebuchadnezzar had carried him away when the nation of Judah was taken captive. Ezekiel is the first prophet of the exile in Babylon. Daniel, somewhat younger than Ezekiel, lived during the second part of the exile.

Ezekiel saw the terrible sin of Judah and the punishment caused by forsaking the LORD God. "The soul that sins will surely die" (18:4) is equivalent to the Apostle Paul's summary, "The wages of sin is death."

The New Testament book of Revelation is full of Ezekiel. The apostle John saw four living creatures, the throne of God and a man on the throne. The LORD God reigns upon His throne. Ezekiel and John both see the power and majesty of the sovereign Lord. Even though Ezekiel may not have understood all the significance of his mission, he did see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God reveals Himself through Jesus Christ and Ezekiel saw the revelation of God in Jesus. The Old Testament prophets often spoke more than they knew. Because of the progressive revelation of God in the New Testament we have the privilege of seeing much more in Ezekiel than Ezekiel was privileged to see. He saw the promise; we see the fulfillment realized in Jesus Christ.

EXILE IN REVERSE (36:22-24)

God promises to return His people to their own land. The return of Judah to their land in 535 B.C. after the Babylonian exile is promised by the LORD. "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land" (36:24). However the passage before us, and the next chapter of Ezekiel reaches far beyond the return from the Babylonian exile.

Many Bible scholars understand the prophet saw a gathering of Israel from all nations that looked beyond the first return after the Babylonian captivity. He sees the regathering from all nations of the world (Ezekiel 11:16-17; Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 15:15).

Moreover, this restoration is more than a physical restoration to the land of Israel. We will say more about this later. God promised spiritual restoration as well.

A CLEANSED PEOPLE (36:25)

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols" (v. 25). The sprinkling of clean water symbolized cleansing from sin. It has nothing to do with baptism. In the Old Testament sprinkling and washing with water pictured cleansing from ceremonial defilement. God will purify Israel from her sins and God will impart new life.

The Hebrew scholars Keil and Delitzsch write, "Cleansing from sins, which corresponds to justification, and is not to be confounded with sanctification, is followed by renewal with the Holy Spirit, which takes away the old heart of stone and puts within a new heart of flesh, so that the man can fulfill the commandments of God, and walk in newness of life (vv. 26-28)."

The writer of Hebrews saw the fulfillment of this cleaning in the blood of Jesus Christ. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11-2). Then he adds, "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God . . . all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (v. 14).

Because of the finished work of Christ "we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh . . . having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-20, 22). We have been saved "according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7).

However, that is not all God does for His rebellious people.

A NEW HEART FOR NEW PEOPLE (36:26-27)

A "new heart" and "new spirit" is the promise of spiritual regeneration. "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (vv. 26-27).

Jeremiah also spoke of this spiritual change in the heart of sinful man (31:31). The change is in the heart that will cause the people to turn to the Good Shepherd. The people receive a new heart that desires to please the LORD. The "new spirit" (v. 26) is "My Spirit" in v. 27. He is referring to the Spirit of Yahweh (Ezekiel 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29). Only the Holy Spirit can empower man to fulfill the word of God. There are twenty-five references to the Holy Spirit in the book of Ezekiel. A new heart and a new spirit are themes Ezekiel reflects on several times.

Jesus may have had this passage in mind when He spoke to Nicodemus one night in Jerusalem. To this upright, moral, spiritually sensitive man Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nic asked, "How can a man be born again when he is old?" Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. . . Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (3:5, 7).

Reflecting on that work of God in the human heart, the apostle Paul wrote: "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Holy Spirit changes the heart to cause the individual to "follow" the Lord (v. 27). The Spirit enables and creates the desire in the heart of the person to do what is humanly impossible. The only way to live a life pleasing to the Lord is by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26).

The Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart of the believer will "cause you to walk in My statutes and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (v. 27). What Moses law could not do God does through His "Spirit within you." His dwelling within enables the "new heart." The heart of stone has been removed and replaced with a "new heart" and "a new spirit."

Only the sovereign grace of God can do that. As the believer yields to the Holy Spirit He enables us to "walk" in the statutes of God and carefully observe His "ordinances." The holy life is an exchanged life.

One of the most intriguing ideas is the people will return to the land and live in it permanently. The meaning is to "live" or dwell as permanent residents and is the opposite of the non-immigrant or alien. "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God" (v. 28).

How strange that this promise becomes a stumbling block to some students of God's word when the greater miracle is the radical change in the heart of believing sinners. If we take verse 28 for what it says God will take care of the logistics. He will bring the people back to "the land" "from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you back into your land" (v. 24). The problem is not God's doing it, but is our accepting the impossibility of man doing it. God will do it in His own way in His own time. The people "will live in the land" as permanent residents. This will be a God sized accomplishment; not something brought about by politicians.

Not only will He bring his people cleansed, forgiven with a new heart and new spirit to their land, but also He promises fruitful agricultural production. Observe who instructs the increase in the fruit trees, grain, crops, etc. There will be no more famine for the people in the land. God's fruitfulness will cause the people to see His glory and repent (vv. 29-30). God instructs the grain to produce and the crops to yield abundantly. "I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, that you may not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations." The LORD God will also restore the land to better than the original. It will be like the Garden of Eden before sin invaded it.

How will you know that it is for real? The result will be a radical change in the heart. "Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations" (v. 31). True repentance will have taken place in the core of their being. The people will "remember" their evil ways and will "loathe" their iniquities. They will not secretly want the opportunity to be tempted to sin again. They will no longer be ready to sin when the temptation comes. They will see their former life style and feel the revulsion. That is what every true believer should experience when they pause and silently reflect upon their sins of the past in the sight of God. God is holy,

experience when they pause and silently reflect upon their sins of the past in the sight of God. God is holy, and His holiness should cause us to loathe our past sins. His holiness should produce a desire in our hearts to be holy.

Modern man needs the message of this passage in its context. God will not do it because He loves us or for our sake. He does it out of "concern for My holy name" (vv. 21, 32). His name is holy and He does it for His glory alone. "It is not for your sake . . . that I am about to act, but for My holy name . . ." (v. 22). "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name . . . the nations will know that I am the LORD . . . when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight" (v. 23). This reveals God's purpose. He "will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land" (v. 24). The purpose is so His holy name will be redeemed.

This restoration will vindicate the name of the LORD. His reputation is at stake! He will demonstrate to the nations that He is the sovereign Lord over the nations by bringing Israel back to the land He gave her (36:21-23).

What God does for Israel as well as non-Jews is an act of sovereign grace. No one deserved these restoration promises (v. 32). A sovereign holy God reached down to Israel in His amazing grace to save and restore. God chose to save for Himself a holy people. He did this out of grace and mercy. We have been redeemed by the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

Have you personally experienced this "new heart" and "a new spirit"? Jesus Christ came to give you eternal life. Here is [A Free Gift for You](#). All you have to do is *receive* it.

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