

The Church of the Servant King

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Prophecy Series

(Proph17B_Ezekiel 36)

As we noted in the prior study of this prophetic book, Ezekiel devotes the first 24 chapters to the judgment that was due upon Judah. Ezekiel then spends a few chapters (25-32) focused upon God's judgment upon other nations. Finally, in chapters 33-48, Ezekiel focuses upon the future blessings that will be poured out upon Israel. In this study, we will focus upon chapter 36 of Ezekiel's prophecy.

Outline of Chapter 36

The Establishment of Israel in the Land (vv. 1-15)

The Reason for Israel's Dispersion (vv. 16-21)

God's Vindication, Israel's Restoration and the Results of Her Return (vv. 22-38)

Ezekiel 36 provides further support for the promises of the New Covenant. We see several parallels between the New Covenant provisions found in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. Those New Covenant provisions include the following:

- ❖ Restoration to the Land (Ezek 36.24 cf. Jer 31.27-29)
- ❖ Forgiveness of Sin (Ezek 36.25 cf. Jer 31.34)
- ❖ Indwelling of God the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36.26-27 cf. Jer 31.33)

Most dispensational believers are familiar with the first two of these provisions; however, few have focused much effort upon the last of these provisions – the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Other passages document the fact that believers who will be the beneficiaries of the New Covenant are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (e.g. Ezek 11.19-20; 37.14; 39.29; Joel 2.28-29 cf. Acts 2.17-18; Rom 7.7-8.11; 2 Cor 3.3-18; Heb 8.6-10.39). This is indeed a fascinating phenomenon.

Those who have focused upon this provision of the New Covenant to Israel (i.e. the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) often times attempt to establish a connection between the indwelling Holy Spirit promised therein and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age believer. In some cases, this has led to a theological and hermeneutical system that includes the idea that the Church has replaced Israel. In other cases, this has led to the idea that the Church, while not replacing Israel, is the co-recipient of Israel's New Covenant spiritual blessings (i.e. the "one" Covenant view). In an attempt to protect one of the basic tenets of dispensational thought (i.e. the distinction between Israel and the Church), some dispensationalists have adopted a "two" covenant view, i.e. the "New Covenant" to Israel (Jer 31.31-34) and a separate "New Covenant" to the Church. This issue was examined in greater detail in an earlier study (see "Proph16B_Prophecy in the Prophets_Eschatology in the Book of Jeremiah_The New Covenant").

The Establishment of Israel in the Land (vv. 1-15)

God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the mountains of Israel (vv. 1-3) because it was to the mountains of Israel that Israel's enemies had boasted. Her enemies had rejoiced that those mountains had come into their possession (v. 3 cf. 20.29). Furthermore, it was on Israel's "high places" that Israel and Judah had engaged in idolatrous acts in defiance of God, thus the mountains represented Israel's sinfulness. This was the "good reason" for Israel's having been made desolate according to Ezekiel's prophecy (v. 3). Israel and Judah's enemies rejoiced that they were experiencing the 5th Cycle of Discipline (Lev 26; Deut 28.37; Jer 24.9).

Even though Israel's enemies became the de facto agents of God in His execution of judgment upon His Own, those same enemies would not escape the responsibility of their attitudes and actions (vv. 4-7). Similarly, God may allow each of us individually to suffer injustice or hardship at the hands of others so that we might be humbled or even disciplined, yet God's righteousness is demanded of all and justice will be executed against even those God uses – if they fail to meet His righteous standards.

Verses 8-15 provide encouragement to God's Own people as Ezekiel makes allusions to the blessings that attend the Messianic kingdom period.

- ❖ The Land is referred to as productive instead of desolate and uninhabited.
- ❖ The restored and productive land would support a greater population within Israel as well as animal life in abundance. This is an interesting and significant contrast to the desolation that was earlier promised upon Edom (33.4, 15).
- ❖ The Lord would cause the people of Israel to repossess the mountains as their inheritance so that they would never leave the mountains again. (In their arrogance, the Edomites had purposed to keep the mountains – 35.10).

The nations had accused the mountains and the Land of devouring its inhabitants; however, this was promised to never happen again. The restored Israelites would not have to hear insults from their neighboring enemies. They would once again be His chosen people (Deut 28.13; Zech 8.13, 20-23). In short, Israel would be blessed in the manner in which other nations desired to humiliate Israel.

The Reason for Israel's Dispersion (vv. 16-21)

Israel and Judah had defiled the Land through their violation of the Mosaic Law and turning to idol worship instead. Ezekiel compares this defilement to the menstrual cycle of a woman (vv. 16-17). According to the Mosaic Law, a woman defiled everything she touched during her menstrual cycle (Lev 12.2-5; 15.19-30). In addition, God poured out His wrath on them because of their bloodshed and idolatry (v. 18). They had mixed the true worship of the Lord with involvement in the idolatry of other nations and they had developed syncretistic religious practices.

The result was that God dispersed them under the 5th Cycle of Discipline (Lev 26.27ff); however, their dispersion made God (Yahweh) look impotent in the eyes of the Gentiles. Their dispersion was, in effect, profaning God's name – His integrity (vv. 20-21). Yahweh was the one Who had promised this people the land, yet they were dispersed in discipline. Defeat by one's enemies and dispersion out of one's land were negative reflections upon God in the eyes of the Gentile nations. Why would they want any part in a God Who led His people into defeat?

Principle: In order to objectively understand how God interacts with man, man must be able to transcend individual events and circumstances and interpret the context of those events and circumstances.

Principle: Subjective and self-centered thought patterns develop when man focuses upon individual events and circumstances exclusively.

Principle: Subjective and self-centered thinking is predominant in and among a reversionistic people.

Application: God's people, Israel and Judah, were reversionistic during Ezekiel's day, otherwise they would not have been dispersed under the 5th Cycle of Discipline.

Historical Application: God's people, except for Ezekiel and a few others, arrogantly reasoned that God would not allow His people to suffer dispersion and defeat since they knew it would have brought God's integrity in question. However, what they failed to comprehend was

the fact that God's integrity must be seen and interpreted in panoramic fashion. God's integrity was at stake if He continued to allow violations of His righteousness into perpetuity and with impunity.

Current Application: Sometimes, tragic events occur in life, e.g. the death of a loved one, financial distress, divorce, health, etc. While sorrow is legitimate, distress or depression of soul is not. The soul becomes distressed or depressed when the subjective focus upon the event causes one to lose focus upon the objective reality of Truth as seen from God's panoramic view of human history and events therein. A pattern of subjective interpretation of events in life eventually leads to the development of attitudes and belief systems contrary to God's viewpoint.

Example: A set of Christian parents raise a child in a Christian manner. The child grows up and goes his or her own way. Eventually, the child (now adult) pursues a path contrary to God's desire and gets involved in a lifestyle that is in flagrant violation of God's desire. That lifestyle leads to the death of this child (now adult). The parents can subjectively focus so exclusively on the death of the child as they grieve that they ask God why He allowed such a thing OR they can objectively focus upon God's greater purpose in history to include His essence attributes and the panoramic view provided by an understanding of the Angelic Conflict that they find solace in God during their time of grief. Prolonged questioning of God and extended periods of uncontrolled grief in such a circumstance is evidence that the believer has succumbed to subjective and self-centered thought patterns that are borne out of a lack of trust.

God's Vindication, Israel's Restoration and the Results of Her Return (vv. 22-38)

The importance of understanding these principles is emphasized by Ezekiel in verses 22-23. The Lord declares His intent to preserve the integrity of His Own name. However, Ezekiel's generation would not live to see God do this. God then explains, through Ezekiel, how this will be accomplished – through God's regathering of His people to live in the Land of Promise during a period of unprecedented blessing (vv. 28-31). These blessings include the spiritual blessings of the Holy Spirit Who will indwell believing Jews during this period (vv. 26-27). This period will be accompanied by repentance (v. 31) and a population explosion (vv. 37-38). From Ezekiel's perspective in this passage, all of these blessings occur at relatively the same time. However, we know based upon additional revelation in Scripture that these blessings only occur for those believers who have "endured to the end" (Matt 24.13) of Israel's "last days" (i.e. the Tribulation) and who are delivered into the Messianic Kingdom.

The objective reality – God will not do this for their sake, but for His Own "Name" (v. 32). God's integrity is expressed in His name just as a man's name causes all who know it to think about the character of the man.