

# Ezekiel 36: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 17 June 2021

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Ezekiel chapter 36 Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God.
- Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted cities, which have become a prey and derision to the rest of the nations all around.
- Therefore thus says the Lord God, Surely I have spoken in my heart jealousy against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and utter contempt.
- That they might make its pasture lands a prey. Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I have spoken in my jealous wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations.
- Therefore thus says the Lord God, I swear that the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer reproach. But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home.
- [ 1 : 3 1 ]     For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. And I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it. The cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places rebuilt.
- And I will multiply on you man and beast, and they shall multiply and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited, as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before.
- Then you will know that I am the Lord. I will let people walk on you, even my people Israel. And they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance. And you shall no longer bereave them of children.
- Thus says the Lord God, Because they say to you, You devour people, and you bereave your nation of children. Therefore you shall no longer devour people, and no longer bereave your nation of children, declares the Lord God.
- And I will not let you hear any more the reproach of the nations. And you shall no longer bear the disgrace of the peoples, and no longer cause your nation to stumble, declares the Lord God.
- [ 2 : 3 3 ]     The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity.
- So I poured out my wrath upon them, for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries.
- In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.

But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

[ 3 : 45 ] I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules.

You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your guard. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain, and make it abundant, and lay no famine upon you.

I will make the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities, and your abominations.

It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God. Let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. Thus says the Lord God, On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt, and the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by.

[ 5 : 11 ] And they will say, This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited. Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the Lord.

I have rebuilt the ruined places, and replanted that which was desolate. I am the Lord. I have spoken, and I will do it. Thus says the Lord God, This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them, to increase their people like a flock, like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts.

So shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel chapter 36 continues from the prophecy against Mount Seir in chapter 35, with verses 1 to 15 of this chapter likely functioning, as Daniel Block maintains, as a second panel in parallel with the panel of chapter 35.

Various elements of the language of that chapter reappear in this one, such as the list of mountains, hills, valleys, and ravines, which is used in chapter 35 verse 8, and appears again in verse 6 of this chapter.

From judgment upon Mount Seir, the prophecy moves to address the mountains of Israel. Edom is still in view in verse 5 of this chapter, in which Edom is singled out as an example of the opposing nations.

[ 6 : 33 ] This prophecy, addressed as it is to the mountains of Israel, should also recall the prophecy Ezekiel delivered against the mountains of Israel back in chapter 6. He picks up much of the same language in this chapter, in which he prophesies the reversal of the desolation he formally pronounced.

Chapter 6 verses 1 to 6 reads, The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God.

Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys. Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places.

Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols, and I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars.

Wherever you dwell, the cities shall be waste, and the high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed, your incense altars cut down, and your works wiped out.

[ 7 : 43 ] Whereas that earlier prophecy foretold the devastation of the mountains of Israel, this chapter speaks of the restoration. It speaks primarily of the renewal of the land of Israel, not merely of its people.

In the preceding chapter, Edom had turned its envious gaze toward the territory of its brother Israel, fancying that now the house of Israel was largely removed from it, they could take possession of the land.

Among other things, this chapter answers that threat from the south, assuring the hearers that the land would be restored, and the people within it. After Judah's fall to Babylon, its land became prey for the hungry remaining nations in the region, who acted like scavengers seeking to devour its carcass.

The Lord declares his word to the land in this lamentable condition, reassuring it by speaking in his jealousy and anger to those who believe that they can seize the Lord's land with impunity.

The Lord may have given his people into the hands of Babylon and allowed their land to be devastated, but he has not utterly abandoned it. His jealous anger is excited against those around it who reproach it.

[ 8 : 48 ] They would suffer the same reproach themselves. Yet the land, here addressed as the mountains of Israel, would be restored, bursting forth in a new fruitfulness of blessing for the returning captives of the house of Israel.

The land, now empty and desolate, would be re-sown with men and animals, inhabited, worked, and made fruitful once again. Its former settlements would be rebuilt and its waste places repopulated.

The recognition formula, then you will know that I am the Lord, is frequently used in these prophecies. The Lord proves who he is by demonstrating his character and his sovereign faithfulness.

He keeps his promises and he achieves his purposes. The land, currently divorced from its proper inhabitants, will once again be possessed by them. The Lord's land will be possessed and occupied by the Lord's people.

While the land had formerly functioned as an agent of the Lord's wrath against an unfaithful nation, cutting them off through famine and pestilence and wild beasts, being ill-spoken of by other peoples, as a harsh and inhospitable land, it would once more be a place of life and blessing and fruitfulness.

[ 9 : 58 ] A new oracle begins in verse 16. This oracle looks back to the defiling sins of Israel prior to their exile. In places like the book of Leviticus, the land was described as a realm that could be polluted with bloodshed and abomination, spitting out defiling inhabitants.

Rituals were prescribed, for instance, for dealing with defiling bloodshed in the land. These rituals ensured that Israel would not suffer the fate of the previous wicked inhabitants. Israel's defiling of the land, however, chiefly occurred through the idolatry that it performed, something that was pervasive in all of the land.

They established shrines in all of the high places, next to notable trees, and in many other such places in the land. Although scripture often speaks of the relationship between the Lord and his people as akin to the relationship between a man and his bride, we should not forget the land as a party in the relationship between the Lord and Israel.

In some places of scripture, this passage in Ezekiel being an important example, the land-people relationship really comes into the foreground. Here the relationship between the land and the people is seen to be akin to that between a man and a woman.

In the ceremonial law, it was forbidden to have relations with a menstruating woman, which was seen as a violation of a blood taboo. The menstruating woman was not culpable for her state, but the man who had relations with her during it committed a serious abomination.

[ 11 : 24 ] Here the land is defiled in a like manner by bloodshed and idolatry, likely a reference to the offering of child sacrifice, among other things. The analogy is not exact, but the people's idolatry and bloodshed is seen to be akin to the defiling action of relations with the menstruating woman.

As a consequence of it, they had to be expelled from the land by the Lord. The third commandment forbids bearing the name of the Lord in vain. Many people read the third commandment in a narrow sense, thinking of it as not swearing, using the name of the Lord in a way that would dishonor the Lord by blasphemy.

However, that commandment has a broader reference. The Lord had placed his name upon Israel. They were his people. They were marked out by his presence. They were living in his land.

He had bound himself to them in covenant and made great promises to them, connecting their positive destiny with his purposes. Like a child bears a surname or a family name and a Christian name given to it by its parents, so Israel was named by the Lord and its actions and behavior reflected upon the Lord's character.

Just as the child can bring dishonor to his family by his behavior, so the people of the Lord brought dishonor to the Lord by the way that they disobeyed him. In the scattering of this unfaithful people among the nations, the Lord was dishonored in the way that a parent might be dishonored by a son that was wayward and wicked.

[ 12 : 47 ] The Lord declares his determination to deal with this intolerable situation. However, he wants the house of Israel to be in no doubt that it is not for their sake that he is acting.

Rather, he's acting because they bear his name. They are bringing his name into disrepute. The nations are blaspheming the Lord on account of Israel and so he needs to vindicate his name by restoring his people and restoring his honor thereby.

He will do this as he takes the people from the various nations where they have been scattered, gathering them and placing them into the land once more. Back in Deuteronomy chapter 30, the Lord had promised that he would circumcise the hearts of his people, that he would restore his unfaithful people once the curse of exile had come upon them.

Here he speaks of sprinkling clean water upon them. This is a purification rite, but it's referring to a more radical change of the heart that he will achieve. This looks back to Ezekiel chapter 11 verses 19 to 20.

The problem of the former covenant situation was not the covenant itself. It was certainly not the Lord. It was rather the hard and rebellious hearts of the people, set against obedience to the Lord.

[ 14 : 12 ] The Lord would deal with this root problem and as this root problem was dealt with by his spirit and they were led to walk in his statutes to obey his rules, then and only then could they enjoy life in the land in security and safety and blessing.

