

Sunday Sermon – Sunday – June 23, 2024 PM

The New Covenant – Sermon # 5

Ezekiel 36:22-38 **The New Covenant According to Ezekiel**

1. Introduction

Ezekiel and Jeremiah were both post-exilic prophets in Judah, not necessarily contemporaries, but their missions had many similarities. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was from about 626-585 BC; and Ezekiel's was from 593 – 571 BC so they overlapped by about 14 years. While Jeremiah was the son of a priest, Ezekiel was himself a priest and began his ministry at the age of about 30, and was in captivity during the time he wrote.

Ezekiel's prophetic style is quite a bit different from Jeremiah's. Ezekiel depended on visions from God, some of which were spectacular, and he acted out some of the scenarios to envision or demonstrate what God showed him. He also mentions a few lines of NC related texts prior to the main NC passage of 36:24-38, the coming NC blessings, in chapters 11, 16, and 28; 34:23-31; and then following -Ezekiel 36, 39:25-29.

3. Ezekiel 36:16-23 – The Reasons for Israel's Discipline

In the lead-up to our main text this evening, in vv. 16-23, God through Ezekiel explains His actions of having removed Israel (& Judah) from the land He had given them to possess. It is not as if they had not been warned about this. Prophecy after prophecy before any invasion of Israel or Judah had gone out to warn them they were on dangerous ground as they rebelled against God. They were warned to repent and live according to God's law, even as far back as Deuteronomy, they'd been warned of the consequences which had now come to pass. They had refused to repent, and so they suffered the consequences. 1

Since they had been taken into captivity, it was obvious to the captors that their God Jahweh, was impotent, and unable to protect them, which means they held Him in low esteem. So, as a result, God's name (& reputation) was being profaned among these heathen nations. In the eyes of the nations, Israel & Judah's failure was their God's failure. But now, the discipline period over, God would restore His people to their land, and forgive them for their sins. This restoration is for their benefit, but God's primary reason for doing this is found in v. 23.

4. Comparing Ezekiel 36:24-38 to Jeremiah 31:31-34

Although many points made by both prophets are similar in principle, the approach of both is different, as are the points within the prophecies. Ezekiel tends to provide more detail regarding the blessings God will provide Israel

with. He also presents, per above, more preparatory hints of this coming NC; but in general, both prophets give words of encouragement, comfort and peace for both Israel and Judah.

The main thrust of the NC basics is found in 36:22-30, but Ezekiel's descriptions go beyond Jeremiah's. This could be a result of how Ezekiel gets his information from God through visions – in living colour (so-to-speak) while Jeremiah is given God's words and instruction. However, don't forget that the Holy Spirit is the One inspiring both prophets to write Scripture. Ezekiel's prose is in some places incredible. This is not meant to take anything away from Jeremiah because his relaying of God's message both good and bad news, is also absolutely fascinating truth as well. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

We will begin by looking at the text of Ezekiel 36: 24-30 in more detail.

5. Ezekiel 36:24 – The Return to the Land

The first thing Ezekiel points out is that God will bring His people (those of Judah and Israel) back from the lands He has sent them, and will restore them to the land from which they were expelled – *“their own land”* – v. 24. While Jeremiah also brings up this fact, it is not a part of his treatise in chapter 31:31ff, but earlier in chapter 31 @ vv8ff.

But note Ezekiel's burden regarding this. Judah and Israel will be united, but² interestingly, Ezekiel doesn't deal with this until 37:15-22. Notice as well Ezekiel 37:23-28, as Ezekiel provides a hint which helps us see a possibility for when this will occur. It is not at the return from THIS exile, nor during the times when the OT was recorded, and certainly not now, although a large piece of the puzzle is in place in the form of secular Israel in part of the land promised by God to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15:18-21. But the Davidic Covenant is not yet fulfilled, except that we are aware that *“David my servant, the prince”* is now known by us as Jesus Christ (v. 25).”

Consider why he does it this way. It is clearly stated in 36:8-11, referring to the same event of restoration of the people to the rebuilt land, then in 36:20-23 – *“the nations will know that I am the Lord when I vindicate my holiness through you...”*. In v. 26b, God says flat out, *“It is not for your sake that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy Name...”* This sort of formula re: God making His power known to the nations and to Israel is written throughout Scripture in virtually every prophetic book, and also in Exodus as God redeems Israel – notice Exodus 14:18 – *“And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh , his chariots and his horsemen.”* This is at The Red Sea episode. God's glory is His primary motive for all He does. Oh, the results of His loving and gracious actions are of great benefit to His people, but they are always HIS loving and gracious actions.

His people had profaned His Name and their sin became more than an in-house problem, and had become a devastating profanation of the real power of their God before all the other nations.

This will be, in essence, a new Exodus, and Ezekiel may well be recalling Moses' words in Deut 30:4 – *“If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will take you.”* This idea of God bringing them out of the lands of their exile is referred to 10 times in Ezekiel.

Once the people are restored to their own nation, they shall have a King again (37:24), a sanctuary (37:26), God will be with them (37:27); they will dwell in their land again (37: 25) and they will dwell in safety (28:25-26), and God will get all the glory!

6. Ezekiel 36:25 – The Sprinkling of Clean Water

Next, Ezekiel says that God will “cleanse them” by sprinkling clean water on them,” rinsing off all their uncleanness. Notice the passage of Deuteronomy 30 we just heard – now vv. 6-8. This passage of Deuteronomy helps inform us, hundreds of years prior to Ezekiel, that there will be 3 stages of Israel's revitalization – all planned long before by God, in His providential foreknowledge of all these biblical events! Read Deut. 30:9-10.

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The first step is to purify and erase the defilement of Israel. This is to be more than just ceremonial cleansing because it is carrying the weight of Divine forgiveness, which we know is only possible by the blood of Christ. Certainly, it comes by faith, and also by repentance, or it is just an empty ritual. Ralph Alexander is convinced that this is a symbol of cleansing through Divine forgiveness by blood and cites Ex. 12:22; Lev. 14:4-7; 49:53; Ps. 51:7; and I Cor. 6:11.¹

The text promises that this sprinkling will cleanse them of *“all your uncleannesses and from all your idols.”* This is a promise of sins being forgiven, and v. 29 reiterates this promise. Of course, although stated differently, this parallels Jeremiah 31:34c: *“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

I mentioned this in an earlier sermon, but it bears repeating – see John 3:3-12. It is this passage in Ezekiel (36:25-27) that Jesus is referring to as he teaches Nicodemus about the new birth, and is bewildered that Nicodemus, as a teacher of Israel did not make the connection. He rebukes Nicodemus in v. 10.

¹ Ralph Alexander, Ezekiel, Expositor's Commentary, Vol. 6, pg. 922 – Zondervan, 1986

Ezekiel's intention here in v. 25 is to show that this is the way that God will "*vindicate His holiness before their eyes*" (v. 23), to show the nations that "*I am the Lord.*" As part of the people's restoration to the land, their sins would be forgiven and they would begin their final sojourn as cleansed people, whose sins were removed and with no guilt remaining for past sins.

7. Ezekiel 36:26-27 – Heart Changes & the Indwelling Holy Spirit

God would next give them a new heart, exchanging their "*heart of stone*" with a "*heart of flesh.*" At the same time, God will "*put a new Spirit within them.*" According to Paul Washer, "This passage in Ezekiel is one of the most beautiful and powerful OT passages concerning the NC and provides one of the clearest illustrations of regeneration and conversion found anywhere in Scripture."² – according to Paul Washer

Ezekiel 36:26-27 corresponds to Jeremiah 31:33, although Ezekiel focuses on heart change, while Jeremiah's focus is on the law being written on the heart, and does not mention God's Spirit being implanted in one's heart. Since we are all born with a sin nature and naturally resist God as a result, this sin nature must be eliminated before we can respond positively to the Gospel. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?*" Paul Washer comments on our inability to come to Christ of our own volition;

"The sinner is spiritually dead and unable to respond to divine stimuli. This lack of ability 4 does not excuse him from guilt or make him any less responsible to God, because his inability is his own doing. The sinner cannot respond positively to God because he will not. Although he possesses the necessary capacity to know God and understand His revealed will, he suppresses what he knows to be true. His love for unrighteousness and desire for autonomy makes him so hostile to God that he simply cannot bring himself to acknowledge Him or obey His law." ... and further,

"The unregenerate person before God cannot come to God because he will not come to God, and he will not come because of his love for unrighteousness and his hatred for a holy and sovereign God. Thus, his heart can be compared to stone. It is lifeless and unresponsive to the call of the gospel apart from a supernatural work of the Spirit."³

The Holy Spirit would enable them (as individuals) to live God's way; to follow His commands, Notice how Paul lays this out for us in II Cor. 3:12-18. God will put His Spirit within them and "*cause them to walk in His statutes.*" So, once again, as we saw in our study of Jeremiah 31, the NC is not a change in the law per se, but rather a way of giving God's people the ability to obey it. What was never built into the OC was the power to achieve full obedience to it. It could only condemn. Only the Gospel has the power to change people, because its acceptance begins as a heart change, a nature change so that one

² Paul Washer, *The Gospel Call and True Conversion*; RHB, 2013, p. 81

³ *IBID*, pg. 98, 99

now has the God-given faith and repentance to respond positively to the Gospel call and been saved, with sins forgiven.

So, Ralph Alexander comments,

“Therefore, the NC will replace the Mosaic Covenant by adding those things that made it better, but not eliminating the good, righteous and godly stipulations that described how to live a godly life and empowered people to do so. The NC provided forgiveness of sin once for all and the Holy Spirit’s indwelling.”⁴

8. Ezekiel 36:28-30 – Dwelling in the Land With Abundance

Now, a cleansed and forgiven Israel would return permanently to a land of productive fertility – the land God had given to their fathers. (in the Abrahamic Covenant). God, at that point, would never allow His people to be disgraced by other nations or by famine. They would be clean within, with a new heart, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the law written on their hearts. Since the land would flourish, there would never be famine.

Look just after our text at vv. 33-36. What an incredible change will be effected. The land restored will be in appearance and function like the Garden of Eden (v. 35). Amos 9:13 predicts; *“Behold, the days are coming declares the LORD, when the plowman will overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills flow with it.”* The cities will be rebuilt and inhabited that had lain in ruins and become desolate. They will be fortified and safe for their rightful inhabitants. The result for God’s glory will also be obvious, as stated many times already. V. 36 states, *“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.”*

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The books of the prophets are full of prophecies of this time that will come about, and the people will be changed, the land and its fruitfulness will be changed, the cities will be rebuilt, and the Lord will return to take the throne of David and will reign from Jerusalem over the whole earth. Jeremiah talked about the knowledge of the Lord spreading and all would know Him! Zephaniah 3:9 tells us that this will be made easier when *“For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve Him with one accord.”*

In Ezekiel vv. 29-30, specifics are given which lead to the Eden-like similarities of the restored land. *“The fruit of the trees and the increase of the*

⁴ OP Cit – Ralph Alexander, pg. 922

field will be abundant.” God will “summon” the grain – it will all be under His full control. And the Genesis 3 curse on the land will be eradicated.

9. Ezekiel 36:31-32 – A Reminder of Their Current Situation

In the midst of the promise of future blessing, God, in a sense, pauses to remind His people that this is a future blessing, and can't be imagined when compared to the sins they have committed and will be forgiven for. The exile and destruction and desolation will be happening. When the time comes and God - *“on the day that He cleanses them from all their iniquities,”* – v. 31 – *“Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and abominations.”*

This seems to describe a time of national repentance. This will come about as a direct result of the cleansing with clean water; the new Spirit, and forgiveness and hearts changed from stone to flesh. i.e., they will be born again as the Holy Spirit changes them from within.

And Ezekiel 36:32 adds another proviso. They are to be ashamed and confounded that it has required this significant a discipline God is forced to use on them, and they should also be confounded by their ways. How could they forget God who had done so much for them? How could they turn their backs on Him and trust in idols? How could they snub Him and form alliances with their enemies for “protection”? Incredible and they should ponder it deeply with shame. 6

Here too, God tells them His grace and mercy is not for their sake, although they would rejoice to receive His blessings. No – rather – what He does is for His own sake, for His own glory, so that others would know *“I am the Lord!”*

Once again, I am reminded of yet another passage – Zech. 12:7-13:1. Take note of the time marks: “on that day” (12:9,11;13:1) – salvation, divine protection, a fountain opened! This is the timing for the full application of the NC. Notice how Israel weeps (12:10) as Israel and Judah see Jesus and realize He was and is their Messiah! And they rejected Him! How confounding to those who perceived themselves as devout believers, ‘serving’ God, yet killing His Son!

10. Ezekiel 36: (33) - 37-38 – the Final Blessing

Notice the way that v. 37 is framed: God will increase the people, like a flock, and then the times of the largest flocks are described – “like the flock for sacrifices,” “like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts; but note *the beginning of v. 37;*

“This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do further...”

He wants their active involvement in what He is leading them to. He will do exactly what He has promised, and their active involvement will be a demonstration of their repentance.

Hosea 5:15 adds: *“I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.”*

This section of Ezekiel is finalized with the, by now, well known formula that depicts God receiving well-deserved glory. *“Then they will know that I am the Lord.”*

So, based on Hosea 5:15, which we just looked at, this coming generation will cry out to God to send back their Messiah, and now there will be no rejection of Him and He will willingly gather them together and bless them and rule in their midst seated on David’s throne in Jerusalem under the authority of the New Covenant in the promised Messianic Kingdom.

All of this points to a yet future Kingdom when all these changes will take place. These changes have not yet occurred en masse yet within our history. So this too goes hand in hand with what we’ve gleaned from our studies in Jeremiah of the New Covenant.

We serve and love a God who holds all of time and eternity in His more than capable hands. His plans and purpose will prevail in the end, and that end will be exactly as He has planned it! His, as yet, un fulfilled prophecies will be fulfilled and so we must not swerve from trusting Him for our own lives and those of generations yet to come, should Jesus tarry in returning to be the King of His people Israel and all those He has redeemed on the cross outside of Jerusalem at Calvary almost 2,000 years ago. 7