EZEKIEL

Chapter 36

*A Prophecy to the Mountains of Israel*

**“Son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD.  2 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: The enemy said of you, “Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession.”’  3 Therefore prophesy and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because they ravaged and hounded you from every side so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations and the object of people’s malicious talk and slander,  4 therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, to the desolate ruins and the deserted towns that have been plundered and ridiculed by the rest of the nations around you—  5 this is what the Sovereign LORD says: In my burning zeal I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, for with glee and with malice in their hearts they made my land their own possession so that they might plunder its pastureland.’  6 Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I speak in my jealous wrath because you have suffered the scorn of the nations.  7 Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I swear with uplifted hand that the nations around you will also suffer scorn. 8 ”‘But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home.  9 I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown,  10 and I will multiply the number of people upon you, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.  11 I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the LORD.  12 I will cause people, my people Israel, to walk upon you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children. 13 “‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because people say to you, “You devour men and deprive your nation of its children,”  14 therefore you will no longer devour men or make your nation childless, declares the Sovereign LORD.  15 No longer will I make you hear the taunts of the nations, and no longer will you suffer the scorn of the peoples or cause your nation to fall, declares the Sovereign LORD.’” 16 Again the word of the LORD came to me:  17 “Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman’s monthly uncleanness in my sight.  18 So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols.  19 I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions.  20 And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave his land.’  21 I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. 22 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.  23 I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes. 24 ”‘For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.  25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.  26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.  27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.  28 You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.  29 I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you.  30 I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine.  31 Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices.  32 I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel! 33 ”‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt.  34 The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it.  35 They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.”  36 Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’ 37 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep,  38 as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”**

Except for the words “son of man, prophesy …” (36:1), found also in 35:2, there is no indication, such as a word-event formula, that a new chapter begins here. In fact, functionally, 36:1–15 should be designated 35:16–30. But practically, for commentary purposes, we have no choice but to follow the traditional chapter and verse divisions. (CC)

If one feels compelled to outline chapter 36, one can describe 36:1–15 as addressed to the mountains of Israel, while 36:16–38 is an address to the people of Israel. But it is more fruitful to consider chapter 35 and 36:1–15 to comprise a single oracle, consisting of two parts, each beginning with a corresponding vocative. Ezek 35:1–15 is addressed against “Mount Seir,” while 36:1–15 is addressed for “the mountains of Israel.” In fact, Yahweh’s overriding interest to proclaim salvation to “the *mountains* of Israel” in 36:1–15 probably explains why in chapter 35 he had virtually always spoken against “*Mount* Seir” rather than using the country’s name, “Edom” (only in 35:15). (CC)

**36:1–15** The comforting counterpart to ch. 6. Verses 1–7 announce punishment for the nations, vv. 8–15 restoration for Israel. (CSB)

**36:1** MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL – The address to “the mountains of Israel” is similar to that first heard in 6:2–3, except that the tone is entirely different. There it had been used to denounce their idolatrous associations. Here the immediate contrast is with 35:12, describing Edom’s blasphemous boasts against the mountains of Israel. Now the phrase describes the land and its people whose deliverance has already been announced in veiled terms by the judgment oracle against Edom in chapter 35. As we said about the oracles against the nations in chapter 25–32, judgment against enemies is part of God saving his own people. Ezek 36:1–15 promises salvation to Israel through the form of antitheses to that threat against Edom. (CC)

**36:2** *The enemy said of you.* See 25:3; 26:2. (CSB)

 *Aha!* See note on 25:3. (CSB)

 *ancient heights.* The promised land, of which the elevated region between the Jordan Valley and the Mediterranean coast was the central core. (CSB)

The boast put in Edom’s mouth here is very similar to those we have already heard in chapter 35. The noun “possession” (מוֹרָשָׁ֖ה) is derived from the verb יָרַשׁ, which may mean either “possess” or “dispossess,” since occupation by one people usually involves expulsion of another. The noun and verb are used in God’s promises of the land and Israel’s conquest of Canaan, although more prominent in Deuteronomy and Joshua is נַחֲלָה, “inheritance,” used in Ezek 36:12. Similar claims to the land using “possession” (מוֹרָשָׁה) had been made in 11:15 and 33:24 by the Judeans who had escaped deportation. As such, it here expresses Edom’s intent to take definitively for itself land that had long been Israel’s gift from God; thus Edom wanted to do to Israel what Israel had done to the prior heathen Canaanite inhabitants. (CC)

**36:3** *rest of the nations.* All nations that in the past had conquered parts of Israel—until finally they took full possession. (CSB)

In spite of uncertainties in translation, the general sense of the verse is clear. It functions as an expansion of 36:2 in the form of a direct address to “the mountains of Israel” (36:1). They have been so battered and pummeled that they can offer no resistance to any occupier. Ezekiel usually uses שְׁאֵרִית, “rest, remnant,” of those who have survived divine judgment (5:10; 9:8; 11:13), but here it must refer to any and all groups, including the Edomites, who were still intact after the Babylonian invasions. And the slanderous gossip probably involved a jibe at Israel’s earlier confidence in the inviolability of Jerusalem as God’s elect. So violated a land as Judah might have colloquially been referred to as one that devoured its own people, as the faithless Israelite spies had once described the land (Num 13:32). (CC)

The careful reader will not fail to notice that every verse from Ezek 36:3 through 36:7 begins with לָכֵן, “therefore.” Even critics acknowledge the word’s genuineness since it is hard to imagine editors so careless that they would allow such repetition. Keil’s approving quotation from the critic Ewald seems in order:

Ezekiel is seized with unusual fire, so that after the brief statement in ver. 2 “therefore” is repeated five times, the charges brought against these foes forcing themselves in again and again, before the prophecy settles calmly upon the mountains of Israel, to which it was really intended to apply. (CC)

**36:4** *mountains … hills … ravines … valleys.* See 6:3 and note on 1:5. (CSB)

This verse, obviously an expansion of the previous verses, is the beginning of Yahweh’s reply. The list of four topographical expressions, “the mountains, hills, valleys, ravines,” comes from 6:3 and is obviously intended to say that this oracle of salvation is intended to reverse the judgment oracle in which it had earlier been used. It is strengthened by the addition of “desolate ruins” and “abandoned cities.” The mention of “plunder” parallels the use of “food” (אָכְלָה) in 34:8 and 35:12. “Ridicule” (לַעַג, used in Ezekiel only here and in 23:32) parallels the two expressions at the end of the previous verse. “Plunder” translates בַּז, a derivative of the geminate verb בָּזַז, but its similarity to the third-*he* verb בָּזָה, “to despise,” suggests paranomasia. Plundering and ridiculing the defeated victims often go together, so one may take “a source of plunder and an object of ridicule” as a near hendiadys here as well. The objective element of desolation and the subjective one of ridicule easily merge. (CC)

**36:5** *my burning zeal.*† The Lord was offended by the ridicule of the nations because it was his special land they were mocking and plundering (see “my land” later in the verse). (CSB)

The same thoughts are reiterated in heightened form, stating some of the reasons for Yahweh’s wrath, and in the form of an oath. The same fiery “zeal” that had once been stoked by Israel’s affronts (e.g., 5:13) is now fanned by the arrogance of “the rest of the nations.” But for the first and only time in 36:1–15, “Edom” is specified as representative of all the nations who coveted or actually seized Israelite territory and as the main country against which, just as in chapter 35, this oracle is aimed (although, factually, we already knew it was “Edom” because of 35:15). What the Edomites intend to appropriate for themselves, Yahweh calls “my land,” reminding us of 35:10, when he had insisted that he was still there. And finally, the unrestrained glee and visceral malice with which they were proceeding simply rubbed salt in the wounds. Yahweh could not allow such an insolent and disdainful challenge to his Word to go unanswered. (CC)

 *Edom.* Singled out because of their long-standing hostility to Israel (see ch. 35, especially vv. 2, 5 and notes). (CSB)

**36:6-7** As 36:1–15 moves into the oracle of salvation, which it mainly is, it summarizes the coming punishment upon the adversaries in terms of the great reversal, the turning of the tables, measure for measure—a common OT theme. The concluding verses of the oracle (36:12–15) will return to this theme, forming a sort of frame or inclusio. (CC)

**36:7** *with uplifted hand.* See 20:5 and note. (CSB)

**36:8** *branches and fruit.* Signs of productivity (see 17:8, 23) and the Lord’s restored favor (see Lev 26:3–5); to be contrasted with Edom’s desolation in 35:3, 7, 15. (CSB)

Before he addresses his people (36:16–38), Yahweh first speaks to the land upon which they will again live. The salient feature of that land is the very hilly or mountainous character of most of it. Such terrain is not conducive to any large-scale cultivation of grains and vegetables, but trees and shrubs will flourish even on steep slopes, which in Israel were apparently terraced at an early date, as is still evident today. This accounts for the importance attached to fruit trees in this and many other passages. Compare Deut 8:8, where five of the seven things with which the land is blessed are fruit trees or shrubs or their products. God had created those mountains to be “mountains of Israel,” and instead of the present war-ravaged and desolate landscape, they will again perform their God-given function for his people. (CC)

Greenberg nicely observes the parallel with the creation narrative of Genesis 2. As God had planted fruit-bearing trees in Eden before placing Adam in it—“and arboriculture preceded agriculture (Gen 2:5–16; 3:17–19)”—so here the growing of edible fruit precedes the return of the people. Greenberg does not mention the “new creation” motif, and it goes beyond the surface perimeters of this pericope, but in the quasi-eschatological atmosphere, it is relevant. In total biblical perspective, Israel’s return is a type of returns of infinitely greater scope, part of the realization of which still awaits us at the end of history. After the return of Jesus Christ, the present fallen creation itself will give way to a new heavens and a new, abundantly fruitful earth (Isaiah 11; 65; Revelation 21–22) that can be likened to “the garden of Eden” (Ezek 36:35), as Yahweh will reveal more fully to Ezekiel in chapters 40–48. (CC)

 *soon.* As judgment neared (7:7; 12:23), a speedy return of the exiles was announced. (CSB)

How “soon” (Ezek 36:8) the return home would be was not revealed to Ezekiel. Earlier eschatological imminence had been predicted of judgment on Israel in 7:7–19 in terms of the “day” of Yahweh (in 30:3 also applied to Egypt) and similarly in 12:22–28. Precise dates were not given then either, and usually are not in genuinely biblical eschatology. (An exception was the revelation to Jeremiah that the exile would last “seventy years” [Jer 25:11–12; 29:10].) Part of the reason why God generally does not reveal his timetable is the existential element that always accompanies the “day” language in Scripture: every day is a judgment day as God acts to condemn and punish sin, and every day is the day of salvation, at least for the believer (see Heb 3:7–8, 15; 4:7). But there have always been those who were not satisfied with such uncertainty, and, at best, have succeeded only in skewing the main biblical message as a result. Greenberg notes that Jewish chiliasts of the fourth century a.d. were cautioned by Rabbi Abba that the “sign of the end-time” in this verse was as explicit as they would get, by which, Greenberg surmises, Rabbi Abba intended to discourage such speculation. Greenberg adds mordantly, “In the event, it has inspired theurgic fantasies down to the present.” And Christians will be only too aware that they have had to endure comparable impulses all through their history, as people wrongly predict the return of Christ on a certain date or espouse false millennial eschatologies, such as the current “left behind” scenarios (based on premillennial dispensationalism). Some millennial groups are even based on anti-Christian heresy, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and similar caricatures of Christian faith. (CC)

**36:9** *I … will look on you with favor.* Cf. Lev 26:9 for the identical clause in a similar context. (CSB)

Both formally and materially, Ezekiel expresses the great reversal by changing the hostile orientation formula, which usually means “I am against you” (most recently in 35:3), into its opposite, “I am for you,” or “I am on your side,” as some paraphrase it. This is the only time in the OT that this clause appears with this meaning. “I … will look on you with favor” is NIV’s paraphrase of the literal “I will turn toward you,” which again is the opposite of a common hostile idiom, where God “hides his face from” those with whom he is angry (e.g., Deut 31:17–18). The language here differs only slightly from that of the Aaronic benediction (Num 6:24–26), with which Ezekiel, a priest (1:3), would have been well-acquainted. Clearly this and the following verses are connected to the covenant blessings of Lev 26:9, although in the context there, God’s blessing is contingent (see Lev 26:3), while in the context here, blessing is predicted absolutely. (CC)

**36:10** *even the whole house of Israel.* In this chapter (as in 37:15–23) Ezekiel is speaking of the restoration of all Israel. (CSB)

This and the next verse are concerned with the repopulating of the land. How and when this should happen Ezekiel again does not say. On the empirical plane, Canaan had its ups and downs—and still does. Its ultimate application must be to the Christian missionary mandate to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth (e.g., Acts 1:8). By adding “all of it” (כֻּלֹּ֑ה), Ezekiel probably intends to include also the “ten lost tribes” of northern Israel, which had politically, but not theologically, been sundered from “Israel.” After this and other intimations in the book, Ezekiel will develop this idea in detail in 37:15–28. (CC)

**36:11** *be fruitful and become numerous.* Identical terminology to the divine blessing at creation (Ge 1:22, 28; see Ge 8:17; 9:1, 7) and the subsequent covenant blessing (see Ge 17:6; 35:11; 48:3–4; Ex 1:7). (CSB)

This is a restatement and amplification of 36:10, as is immediately apparent in the inclusion of animals in the coming plenitude of life. The assertion that the land’s fertility will exceed anything previously known again hints at a paradisiacal state, like “the garden of Eden” in 36:35. Since Christology should be included in the ultimate picture, theology’s *felix culpa* (“blessed fault”) formulation inevitably comes to mind: in Christ, the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45), mankind gained more than he lost in the fall of the first Adam. (CC)

 *Then you will know that I am the Lord.* These words of recognition, used throughout the book to express God’s revelation through judgment, here point to God’s self-disclosure in salvation (see note on 5:13; cf. 34:30). (CSB)

**36:12** *walk upon you.* The mountains of Israel are still being addressed. (CSB)

Repopulation means repossession. The use of the verb “walk” seems strange. It could imply a contrast to the curse on Edom (35:7) that God would cut off from it “all who come and go.” But Greenberg may correctly discern in the word “the popular legal conception that ownership of land may be established by walking through it.” He cites God’s command to Abraham to do just that (Gen 13:17) as well as God telling Joshua how he caused Abraham to walk through the land (Josh 24:3). (CC)

That Israel will “take possession” (יָרַשׁ) of the land sounds as though it intends to counter the hopes of other nations to occupy it as their own “possession” (מוֹרָשָׁה, 36:2–3, 5). And in near parallelism stands the more theologically loaded noun נַחֲלָה, “inheritance,” frequent in Deuteronomy and Joshua. The Israelites were no mere squatters or migrants, but as people of the promise, they could claim the land by divine right, just as Christians do with their “land,” a promise already fulfilled at the first advent of Christ, but also awaiting its consummation at his return. (CC)

 *deprive them of their children.* The mountains are poetically pictured as having contributed to the depopulation brought by the exile. This may refer to the fact that Palestine contained the Canaanites and their religious centers (“high places”), which had led Israel astray and so brought God’s wrath down on his people (see 6:3 and note). (CSB)

The last phrase in the verse clearly uses the verb שָׁכַל (in Piel, transitive), which means to cause a miscarriage or otherwise bereave someone of children. The idea is taken up again in the next verses, and 36:14 and 36:15 probably use the same Hebrew verb (see the textual notes). The expressions that the land deprives the people of their children (36:12–15) and devours people (36:13–14) hardly make sense literally, but must be metaphorical of the land, pictured as a mother, being invaded and depopulated, thus losing her children (cf. Is 47:8–9). This view of the land was ancient, having been heard and repeated (using the verb אָכַל, “devour”) already by the faithless spies in Num 13:32. We know too little of Canaan’s pre-Israelite history even to guess what underlay that reputation at that early date, but the defeat of the Canaanites by invading Israelites meant the land had vomited them out because of their abominations (Lev 18:25, 28; cf. Lev 20:22). In turn, the deportations of the northern Israelites by the Assyrians and of the Judeans by the Babylonians would seem applicable here. (CC)

**36:13-15** These verses are a sort of summary of 13:1–15. The subjectless אֹמְרִ֣ים, literally, “they are saying,” must refer to all who observe Yahweh’s miraculous restoration of his land and people. The masculine plural of the dative לָכֶ֔ם, “to you,” must have the “mountains of Israel” (36:1, 4, 8) as its antecedent. The idea of the land depriving the nation of its children (36:13–15) continues the thought introduced in the previous verse, and “the taunts of the nations” (36:15) refers back to 36:6. Formally, throughout these verses, the land is personified as the owner of its inhabitants, and hence the predominance of feminine Hebrew forms. (CC)

Noteworthy in 36:14 is Yahweh’s characterization of the restored population as a גּוֹי, “nation.” Most often גּוֹיִם (the plural, “nations”) appears in reference to the “Gentiles, heathen.” Yet its usage partially overlaps with עַם, “people,” since ancient Israel was a political as well as an ethnic, cultural, and religious unit. But there is no doubt that עַם, “people,” is the preferred term when there is a desire to accent Israel’s special status as the elect, covenanted people, especially with the first person suffix, “*my* people” (e.g., Ex 3:7, 10). עַם is so applied hundreds of times in the OT, and the same theology largely continues with the use of λαός, God’s “people,” for Christians in the NT (e.g., Mt 1:21; Lk 1:17; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9–10). In contrast, גּוֹי, “nation,” rarely is suffixed, and its usage often resembles that of ἔθνη for “Gentiles, heathen, pagans” in the NT (e.g., Mt 6:32; Lk 2:32). Yet already in the promise to Abraham, God spoke of Abraham’s descendants becoming “a great nation” (Gen 12:2). But only in (the Qere of) Zeph 2:9 does Yahweh call Israel “my nation” (גֹּויִי), and only in Ps 106:5 is Israel referred to as “your [Yahweh’s] nation” (גּוֹיֶ֑ךָ). By using גּוֹי, “nation,” of Israel here, Yahweh wishes to emphasize that the people of God will be a divinely governed entity on the repopulated land. The Christian heirs of OT Israel can no longer claim any “land” (in its ordinary sense of real estate) by divine right, but neither is the church a purely spiritual (subjective) entity of the heart. God comes to us now in physical ways in his Sacraments. Through Baptism we are heirs of God’s promises to Abraham, and in the Lord’s Supper, we receive a foretaste of the feast to come—the wedding supper of the Lamb, to be celebrated in the new heavens and new earth, our true promised land, where God shall dwell with his redeemed in Christ for eternity (Revelation 19–22). (CC)

**36:16–38** Summarizes all that Ezekiel prophesied concerning Israel. (CSB)

**36:17** Yahweh’s address begins with a reminder of why it had been necessary for him to expel Israel from its own land and scatter it among the heathen. The reason is summarized as the defilement of the land, described under the simile of the defilement or uncleanness caused by menstruation. Although Ezekiel elsewhere speaks of people defiling (or not defiling) themselves (e.g., 4:14; 14:11; 20:7, 18), the temple (5:11; 9:7; 23:28), Yahweh’s holy name (43:7–8), and a neighbor’s wife (18:6, 11, 15; 22:11; 23:17; 33:26), this (36:17–18) is the only place he speaks of the land itself as defiled. A land could be defiled either by pagan invasion (Ps 79:1) or by the misbehavior of its occupants, the case here. In Lev 18:25–28, Yahweh described the land as defiled by the Canaanite inhabitants to the extent that the land vomited out its defilers, referring to the Israelite invasion of Canaan and the removal of the previous population. In Lev 20:22 he warned that the land would likewise vomit out the Israelites if they defiled the land in the same ways. Both ceremonial and moral infractions (not always strictly distinguished in the OT itself) could defile, but the latter were more serious and required more than some ritual act of cleansing, including also repentance and sacrifice for removal. (CC)

Those labeled an “abomination” (תּוֹעֵבָה) were the worst. Thus homosexuality (see the commentary on 33:26), incest, bestiality, child sacrifice, and occult practices are abominations that defile the land and require the inhabitants to be expelled (Leviticus 18 and 20). The land could also be defiled by other kinds of sexual unchastity, unexpiated bloodshed, overnight exposure of an executed criminal, touching a carcass, experiencing a bodily discharge, as well as idolatry of any sort. The simile here must not be pressed beyond its intent: the accent is on the people’s behavior, which pollutes the land, but the land itself does not become culpable, any more than a menstruant was considered morally guilty because of her discharge. The point is more that menstrual uncleanness required separation or segregation from the community for a given period of time (Lev 15:19–24; cf. Lev 15:25–33). (CC)

**36:18** *shed blood … defiled it with their idols.* A summary reference to Israel’s social injustices and idolatrous religious practices (see 22:3 and note). (CSB)

The two motive clauses (“on account of … and for …”) help explain the transgressions described in the preceding verse. Apparently they included both moral and liturgical offenses, all of which are sins against the First Commandment. “Fecal deities” (36:18) relates to “uncleanness” (36:17) because idolatry involved unclean rites and liturgical abuses (e.g., the “abominations” in chapter 8). “The blood they had poured on the ground” (36:18) alludes to the “menstruation” (נִרָּה) element of the simile “like the uncleanness of menstruation” (כְּטֻמְאַת֙ הַנִּרָּ֔ה) in 36:17. Their outpouring of “blood” implies murder, a moral offense. This pouring of blood on the land has its own defiling consequence, as we have noticed previously, classically in Abel’s blood in Gen 4:10–12. Since the people had “poured” out blood, God correspondingly “poured out” his “wrath.” (CC)

 *idols.* See note on 6:4. (CSB)

**36:19** Block plausibly suggests that the analogy of a menstruous woman was evoked by the ancient covenant curse that the land would be devoid of its inhabitants until the land had received its divinely allotted sabbatical rests, a command that the preexilic population had ignored (Lev 26:33–45; cf. 2 Chr 36:21). As a menstruant was considered unclean for a fixed period of seven days (Lev 15:19–30) and was not to be approached in the meantime, so the land would be unclean until the sum of the years when it had not been left fallow, as it should have been, had been made up. Block builds part of his case on the similarity between the phrases “when you live on it” (בְּשִׁבְתְּכֶ֥ם עָלֶֽיהָ) in Lev 26:35 and (literally) “they were living on their land” (יֹשְׁבִ֣ים עַל־אַדְמָתָ֔ם) in Ezek 36:17. (CC)

**36:20-21** The sense of the statement that Israel “profaned” (וַֽיְחַלְּל֖וּ and חִלְּל֨וּהוּ֨) Yahweh’s “name,” repeated in these verses, is somewhat of a crux. Since the Piel verbs are transitive, the translation “profane,” “defile,” or the like is beyond dispute. But in what sense? God’s name in 36:21–24 perhaps does not quite have the hypostatic connotations it often has in Deuteronomy, especially with the Hiphil of שָׁכַן, where God promises that he “will cause his name to dwell” at the sanctuary (Jerusalem) he will choose, where he was present “incarnationally,” dispensing his grace through divine worship. Nevertheless, the “name” still appears here almost as a personal manifestation of God, capable of suffering—as indeed God would suffer in Christ, who bore the curse, shame, and defilement of crucifixion. Here God’s “name” is not specifically related to his dwelling place and worship, but to the land Yahweh had given his people (20:15; 28:25; 37:25). The primary problem is in the perception that Yahweh is unable to hold his people and his land together. (CC)

The expression “profane (God’s) name” was probably originally at home in liturgical contexts, since it occurs first in Lev 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32, referring to child sacrifice, idolatry, false swearing, and improper behavior in connection with offerings brought to the sanctuary (cf. “defile my sanctuary” in Ezek 5:11; 23:38). In ethical contexts, to profane God, his name, or his holy things implies a deliberate flouting of his will, in violation of his commandments, as in 13:19 and 22:26 (with חִלֵּל, “to profane,” as in 36:20–21) and also in 43:7–8 (with טִמֵּא, “defile, make unclean”; cf. 23:7, 13, 17). Yahweh tends to relate desecration of his name to historical events, and three times in chapter 20 (20:9, 14, 22), he explains how he acted for the sake of his name in ways that seem very similar to the language of 36:20 here: unless he acted for the sake of his name, he would be discredited by the misfortune of his people, when the nations to which they came drew negative and false conclusions about the Israelites’ “god” (as they would view him), as though he was unable to protect his own people or had been bested by the gods of the nations who conquered Israel. Israel’s condition of exile from its land and dispersion to other ones reflects negatively on its God. Probably a majority of interpreters understand this passage in that way. (CC)

It is worth noting that already Moses in his intercessions on behalf of the people had expressed similar fears. In Num 14:15–24, after the people had rebelled upon hearing the negative majority report of the spies and Yahweh threatened to disown them and choose other people, Moses expresses the fear that the nations will conclude that Yahweh was powerless to bring the people to the land he had promised them. Even worse, after the golden calf apostasy (Ex 32:12–13), Moses expresses the fear that the Egyptians will conclude that Yahweh was really malicious and destructive, and by appealing to Yahweh’s reputation, the intercession of Moses gains the people’s pardon. (CC)

However, there is another line of interpretation of Ezek 36:20–21, which commends itself. We must consider the possibility that the Israelites had profaned God’s name by their behavior during their exile among the heathen. Many other passages in the book describe the deportees as exemplars of depravity. In 12:15–16, in a passage similar to ours, the scattered survivors will relate all their abominable acts “among the nations where they go.” Similarly, in 14:22–23, the survivors will convince the exiles that the disaster was deserved because of “their behavior and their actions.” Later in this chapter (36:31), there is a retrospection where the redeemed will loathe themselves for their sins and abominations. One may add Yahweh’s characterization of Israel’s deportment as worse than that of the heathen (5:6–7) or, again, as shocking even by Gentile standards (16:27). (CC)

I find it difficult to choose between these two alternatives. Other commentators seem not to take into consideration the second as much as the first. Yet both are plausible in the general context, and perhaps both were intended. (CC)

**36:20** *they profaned my holy name.* Because Israel had been removed from her land, it seemed to the nations that her God was unable to protect and preserve his people (cf. Nu 14:15–16; 2Ki 18:32–35; 19:10–12). (CSB)

**36:22-23** By all kinds of syntactical devices, Yahweh stresses that the grace he is about to show his people is not motivated in the slightest by any merit or virtue in them (cf. Ps 115:1). This passage thus contributes to the biblical doctrine that justification cannot be by works; it is sola gratia, “by grace alone.” Participles are intrinsically tenseless, but because of the futuristic context, “I will act” or “I am about to act” seems required for God’s promise here in 36:22. The people have long since forfeited any claims to Yahweh’s compassion or other obligation to help them in their plight. This profound perception of total human depravity supports the dictum non posse non peccare, that since the fall, humans are “not able not to sin.” In contrast, for Jesus Christ, who is true but sinless man and also God the Son, this expression applies: non posse peccare, Christ was “not able to sin.” (CC)

One notes the surface divergence of this passage, with its accent on human sin, from a passage like Is 43:1–44:5, where the accent on Yahweh’s love is much more up front. Of course, the two are not contradictory, but Ezekiel’s language is at this point much more theocentric. He expresses his thoughts under more formulaic language that stresses God’s name and his holiness. Yahweh’s people cannot be vindicated and restored as long as Yahweh himself is in the disrepute in which the nations now hold him—or at least the cosmic and redemptive import of his actions will never be grasped. Here too we need to remember the importance of the First Commandment as *first* (see, e.g., Ex 20:3; Deut 6:5; Mt 22:37; 1 Jn 5:2). (CC)

Since God’s holiness implies his aseity, his inner essence, the way he is as true God, the use of the Piel verb קִרֵּשׁ (“I will *sanctify* my great name,” Ezek 36:23) implies more than what we usually hear under the translations of either “glorify” or “sanctify.” In this context, it implies not only evidence of his triumph over all other “gods,” but the winning of the awe and dread of his name, manifested through his mighty acts (see Josh 7:9). As in Ezek 20:41, the reversals in Israel’s condition will manifest God’s dread sanctity in all in whose sight it had been impugned. And since the Israelites in their unbelief had despaired in their apparent abandonment by God, it was necessary that Yahweh also reestablish his “great name” among them also. (CC)

**36:22** *It is not for your sake.* Not because God did not care for Israel, but because they did not deserve what he was about to do (cf. Dt 9:4–6). Statements like these make Ezekiel a preacher of pure grace. (CSB)

 *for the sake of my holy name.* The reason given in ch. 20 for the withholding of divine punishment (see 20:9, 14, 22) is here given as a reason for divine restoration. (CSB)

**36:23** *Then the nations will know that I am the Lord.* The ultimate purpose of God’s plans with Israel is that the whole world may know the true God. (CSB)

**36:24** *I will take … gather … bring you back.* The first of four stages of restoration in this central passage of Ezekiel: return of the exiles. (CSB)

Ezek 36:24–30 is a detailed exposition of “I am about to act (אֲנִ֥י עֹשֶׂ֖ה) in 36:22. These verses reverse 36:19 and expand on 11:17–20. Block calls this section “the most systematic and detailed summary of Yahweh’s restorative agenda in Ezekiel, if not in all the prophetical books.” That Yahweh is the explicit subject of most of the verbs in the section hammers home the “not for your sake” (36:22), sola gratia motif of the previous verses. The promises are arranged in an ABA' pattern, with the internal spiritual dimension at the center (B: 36:25–29a) and the external promise of return from the exile to the homeland on the exterior (A: 36:24, and A': 36:29b–30). (CC)

Ezek 36:24 clearly uses “new exodus” terminology, which occurs nine other times in Ezekiel (once, in 29:13, for the Egyptians) and becomes most prominent in the context of the restoration oracles in chapters 34–39. Its antitypical use here by Ezekiel, some eight centuries after the original exodus under Moses, in turn becomes a type of the still greater exodus in the life and work of Jesus Christ, whose suffering, death, and resurrection are *the* “exodus” (ἔξοδος, Lk 9:31) that has procured redemption for all people. The baptismal language that the NT uses for the original exodus (1 Cor 10:1–2) supports relating the water imagery in Ezek 36:25 to the Sacrament of Christian Baptism, through which the benefits of Christ’s redemptive “exodus” are applied to the baptized (e.g., Acts 2:38–39; Rom 6:1–4; Titus 3:5–6). The language here is especially close to that of Ezek 34:13 except for the replacement of הוֹצִיא, “bring out,” a classical exodus verb (e.g., Ex 3:10–12; 6:6–7), with the unusual לָקַח, “I will *take* you from the nations” (as in Deut 30:4), and the inconsequential change of עַמִּים (“peoples”) to גּוֹיִם (“nations”). (CC)

**36:25** *I will sprinkle clean water.* For sprinkling with water as a ritual act of cleansing see Ex 30:19–20; Lev 14:51; Nu 19:18; cf. Zec 13:1; Heb 10:22. (CSB)

 *I will cleanse.* See v. 33; 37:23; Jer 33:8. (CSB)

As the regathering in 36:24 was a reversal of the exile in 36:19, this verse promises a reversal of 36:17–18, an absolution of the accumulated impurities caused especially by bloodshed and idolatry. The metaphor of the uncleanness of a menstruant (36:17) will no longer be applicable. The verb זָרַק, “sprinkle,” is most often used in connection with the sprinkling of blood. It is the verb used when Moses sprinkled “the blood of the covenant” on Israel to inaugurate the covenant (Ex 24:8), which forms the background to “the new covenant in my blood” in Jesus’ Words of Institution (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). זָרַק, “sprinkle,” is often used in Leviticus for the sprinkling of sacrificial blood (e.g., Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13). זָרַק is a synonym of נָזָה, also meaning “sprinkle,” used in Lev 4:6, 17; 5:9 for the sprinkling of the blood of the sin offering, and climactically for the sprinkling of blood in the rituals of the Day of Atonement ceremonies in Lev 16:14–19. Such passages are the OT background for NT expressions that speak of the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7), particularly with “sprinkling,” such as, “the sanctification of the Spirit into obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:1–2; see also Heb 12:24). (CC)

Ezekiel, however, here seems to mix the metaphors of blood-sprinkling and other priestly cleansing ceremonies featuring the sprinkling of water. Rituals that involved sprinkling or washing with water included the consecration of priests (Ex 29:4) and Levites (Num 8:6–7), the ablutions of the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:4, 24), the red heifer ceremony (Numbers 19), and the ceremonial washing of garments (Ex 19:10). In metaphorical texts that speak of cleansing, the use of water probably should not be divorced from that of blood. The expression in Rev 7:14 rings in one’s ears: “they *washed* their robes and made them white in the *blood* of the Lamb.” See also Heb 10:22: “with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (RSV). (CC)

Ezekiel uses the phrase מַ֥יִם טְהוֹרִ֖ים, “pure/clean water” (36:25). It is a unique phrase. It could be a euphemism for מֵי נִרָּה, “water of impurity” (Num 19:9, 13, 20), a lustration for those who were unclean. More likely here, however, the adjective is resultative: water that renders people clean, removes their impurity. That is supported by verses such as Lev 14:8–9; 15:13; 17:15, where a person who follows Yahweh’s command to wash in “water” (מַיִם) is then rendered “clean” (the verb טָהֵר). (CC)

Using other words, there are other references to Yahweh “washing” and thus cleansing his people from sin (Is 4:3–5; Ps 51:2, 7). There are other passages that challenge hearers to “wash themselves” as a sign of repentance (Is 1:15–16; Jer 4:14). It is impossible to determine whether these are mere figures of speech or correspond to either fixed or voluntary ritual actions. In these passages, as in Ezek 18:31, the contextual emphasis is on personal human responsibility. (CC)

In any case, it was just as true for the OT faithful as it remains today according to orthodox Christianity: it is impossible for people to cleanse themselves spiritually, even by synergistic cooperation with God; he alone can cleanse sinners so that they are clean. Although psychologically it may appear that *we* repent, believe, and seek Christian Baptism, we confess that our repentance, faith, and cleansing in Baptism are ultimately all God’s work, made possible through the sacrifice of his Son. Hence Saul of Tarsus was invited, “Be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16; see also, e.g., Acts 2:38–41; 8:12, 35–38). (CC)

 *idols.* See note on 6:4. (CSB)

**36:26–27** Contains “new covenant” terminology (see Jer 31:33–34).

**36:26** If one does not press the comparison or divorce the two, one might say that the cleansing from sin spoken of in 36:25 corresponds to justification, while this verse speaks of the sanctification that follows. That is to say, one might assert that 36:25 expresses in brief what is summarized fully in the Second Article of the Creed, while 36:26 corresponds to the Third Article. Ezek 36:26 is a virtual quotation of 11:19, and it simply repeats the promise made there. On the surface, it contrasts with 18:31 (“get for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit”), but in total biblical context that verse does not imply self-salvation, but simply the need for each individual to believe and live God’s promise. (CC)

 *new heart.* See notes on 11:19; 18:31. (CSB)

Regeneration is here formulated in terms of a new “heart” and a new “spirit.” The Hebrew pronominal suffixes throughout the verse translated “you” and “your” are plural, but in good Hebrew idiom, the singular forms of לֵב, “heart,” and רוּחַ, “spirit,” may be used for constituents that are common to a number of persons. The concept is essentially parallel with the “new covenant” of Jer 31:31–34. (CC)

The promise is that both will be made “new.” Sometimes, when the adjective is used in theological contexts, it does not imply complete discontinuity with the “old” (but here it certainly does). The word generally carries a certain dialectical dynamic with it, as well as eschatological implications involving “now but not yet.” Already now, all in Christ are “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), yet not until the Last Day will the old sinful nature be completely gone, and God will declare, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). Not for nothing have Lutherans traditionally prayed David’s earlier equivalent of Ezek 36:26 in Ps 51:10–11 as their Offertory every Sunday: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.” (CC)

 *put a new spirit in you.*† Transform your mind and heart. Here and in 11:19 God declared that he would bring about the change. In 18:31 (see note there) he called on his people to effect the change. (CSB)

“Heart” and the human “spirit” are near synonyms, but are not to be totally fused. “Heart” has to do with rational faculties, but in Hebrew psychosomatic thought it involved emotion and will as well. What is implied by a “new heart” is defined more closely in 36:26b. A heart of “stone” obviously implies obduracy, obstinacy, incorrigibility, coldness, unresponsiveness to God. Ezekiel had ample experience with that kind of “heart,” for example, the obduracy of the people at the time of his call (2:4–10; 3:4–11), and had learned that such refractoriness could be overcome only by miraculous divine intervention. God in the Hebrew idiom literally speaks of removing the heart of stone from the “flesh” (בָּשָׂר) and replacing it with a heart of “flesh” (בָּשָׂר, the same word; English usage requires “body” in the first case for the sake of clarity). That is, like the flesh (meat) on a body, the new heart will be impressionable and malleable—yielding to God, his will, and his Spirit, who works through his Word. The implication is that “the heart of stone” (obdurate sinful nature) is incompatible with the creaturely frame that God had originally given Adam and Eve, and incompatible with God’s redemptive purposes. The sinful nature cannot simply be trained or tamed; it must be surgically removed. This is essentially the same as the Pauline teaching that we must die to sin by baptismal burial with Christ, so that we may rise to new life with him (Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–13). (CC)

“Spirit” (רוּחַ) is an even more elusive, multivalent word than לֵב (“heart”), but perhaps one may summarize by saying that the human spirit refers to one’s attitudinal, energizing, and animating impulse. That the two words are not interchangeable is shown by the different prepositions used after נָתַתִּי. The new heart will simply be given *to* (לְ) the Israelites after the excision of the old organ, while the “new spirit” will be placed (literally, “given”) בְּקֶרֶב (“within/inside”) them. The distinction will be further explained in the following verse (36:27), where it is God’s own “Spirit” that he promises to put in his people. Thus the new human “spirit” in 36:26 is intertwined with the gift of the Holy Spirit in 36:27, just as in Ps 51:10–12. There it is difficult to decide whether רוּחַ in 51:12 and possibly in 51:10 should be capitalized in English (“Spirit”) as in 51:11 or whether it refers to the regenerated “spirit” of the believer (and translations vary). Thus the Third Article of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds begins, “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” who effects the believer’s regeneration and sanctified life of faith. (CC)

 *heart of flesh.* “Flesh” in the OT is often a symbol for weakness and frailty (Isa 31:3); in the NT it often stands for the sinful nature as a God-opposing force (as in Ro 8:5–8). Here it stands (in opposition to stone) for a pliable, teachable heart. (CSB)

**36:27** *my Spirit.* God bestows his Spirit to enable the human spirit to do his will. Verses 25–27 are closely paralleled in Ps 51:7–11. (CSB)

The source of the “new heart” had not been identified in 36:26, but here it is. It will be “my Spirit,” Yahweh’s own רוּחַ. Restated in the language of fulfillment, that is, of the NT, we do not hesitate to speak in explicitly Trinitarian terms. In Rom 8:1–17 Paul describes how God the Father has sent his Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—to dwell in us and give us resurrection life. Endowed with the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, bringing to the believer a new divine energy, it will finally be possible to do God’s will and live accordingly. This had been promised already in Ezek 11:20, but without so explicit a reference to “my Spirit,” which appears in the book first here and will be repeated in 37:14 and 39:29. The formulation is also very similar to Lev 26:3 (see the commentary on Ezek 36:29). The parallel is also very close to Jeremiah’s “new covenant” prophecy that God’s תּוֹרָה, “Torah,” will be written on men’s hearts (Jer 31:33), but, in a way, this verse goes even further: through his Spirit Yahweh participates directly in man’s new obedience! (CC)

The language almost sounds coercive, as though God is making it impossible for them any longer to be anything but faithful and obedient. Obviously, that is hyperbolic, but it is a way of emphasizing again that nothing short of direct divine intervention will ever make it possible for God’s intended covenant relationship to be implemented. Sinful man is completely unable to cooperate with God or even begin to lead a life pleasing to him. The “new obedience” is made possible only as the Holy Spirit works saving faith, so that the believer abhors his old way of life and lives “in the newness of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6; see also Rom 8:2–16). Compare Ezek 2:2, where the prophet was like a dead man until the “Spirit,” working in conjunction with God’s oral Word, raised him to his feet, and 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; and 11:1, where again the prophet is passive and is lifted up and sometimes transported by the “Spirit.” Orthographically, Biblical Hebrew has no distinct capital or lowercase letters, and it was debatable whether “spirit” should be capitalized or not in 36:26, though there is no doubt here because of the pronoun (“my Spirit”). In one sense, the springs of energy do not cease to be those of the believer, who remains a sinner at the same time that he, regenerated (“born of water and the Spirit,” Jn 3:5), is a saint through forensic justification, but God’s “Spirit” in the OT is so often hypostatic (already in Gen 1:2; see also Gen 41:38; Ex 31:3; Num 11:25–29) that his occupation in the “temple” of man’s body is but an extension of his “incarnational” dwelling in the OT temple and its NT antitypes. As St. Paul says in Gal 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God,” and in 1 Cor 6:19, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.” (CC)

**36:28** *my people … your God.* Covenant language (see 11:20 and note). (CSB)

That the Israelites will live in the land implies a permanent stay there, because it had been their faithlessness to the covenant (see 36:27b) that had caused the exile in the first place. The clause “(that) I gave to your fathers” occurs only here in Ezekiel (cf. 20:42; 37:25; 47:14), but it and similar expressions are frequent in Jeremiah, upon whom Ezekiel seems dependent in this section (both deriving their message from Yahweh). And bound up with the gift of the land had been the pact of covenant mutuality, which Ezekiel repeats here: “you will be my people, and I will be your God.” In it, the suffixed “*my* people” and the pronoun “I” have a contrastive function: no longer will the people have any “fecal deities” (36:25), but instead Yahweh will be their sole God to the exclusion of any possible alternatives. (CC)

**36:29** *from all your uncleanness.*† From sinful defilement (see v. 25; 37:23). (CSB)

At first blush, it seems strange that Yahweh should promise, “I will save you from all your impurities” (טֻמְאֽוֹתֵיכֶ֑ם, literally, “your uncleannesses”) because in 36:25 he had already promised the removal of “all your impurities” (the same word, טֻמְאוֹתֵיכֶ֛ם). Hence predictably some critics consider 36:25b–36:29a to be secondary, thereby—by no accident one suspects—removing some of the most profoundly theological material in the book. The reference here can only be such defilements as are still possible after the renewing of the people, during the “not yet” time (this present earthly life) in which they still live. In, for example, Romans 7, St. Paul details his own (and every believer’s) ongoing struggle (sometimes unsuccessful) against relapsing into the old pre-conversion sins, a struggle that shall cease only after death in Christ, and in that way, the believer shall finally attain the victory over all sin, death, and the devil (Rom 7:24–25). In light of that future victory, Yahweh can proceed to make still further promises. (CC)

That the “impurities/uncleannesses” are energized, nearly personified, is not due to primitive, dynamistic thinking, but because they fracture covenant solidarity and evidence the work of a competing spirit. Evil deeds proceed from the evil one. A possible, and perhaps preferable, translation of the final petition of the Lord’s Prayer asks for deliverance not merely from abstract “evil” but from the personal devil, “the evil one” (ὁ πονηρός, Mt 6:13; see the same phrase in, e.g., Mt 5:37; 13:19, 38). (CC)

That conception may explain why the verb “save” (Hiphil of יָשַׁע) is used here. Although this Hebrew verb is one of the most common OT words for “save,” in Ezekiel it occurs elsewhere in the book only in 34:22 and 37:23. The idiom הוֹשִׁיעַ מִן, “to save [someone] from,” usually denotes rescue from some person or power that holds one captive or by whose authority one is oppressed. The language here implies that the Israelites have been and can again be held captive, not so much by human enemies as by their own uncleanness. (CC)

Perhaps the influence of Leviticus 26 can still be detected in that Lev 26:3, which prescribes obedience to God’s commands, is followed in Lev 26:4 by a promise of “rains in their season,” and here in Ezekiel fertility and productivity of the land follow in 36:29b–30. Yet that connection between inner obedience and the external condition of the land pervades the entire OT, as is evident even in so late a book as Haggai (1:7–11). (CC)

 *I will call.* As at the beginning when God called creation into being (cf. Ge 1:5, 8, 10). (CSB)

The verb translated “summon” the grain is, literally, to “call to” it (אֶלקָרָא, Ezek 36:29). God is personally involved in what especially our secular age considers the impersonal processes of “nature.” A land that had been considered by observers as one that devoured its inhabitants (36:13), undoubtedly by famine as well as other means, will be shown to be fruitful under God’s blessing. Both thoughts continue in the next verses.(CC)

Ironically, some contemporary “Earth Day” observers who chatter about “earth justice” come close to deifying nature again. Indeed, some neo-pagans do believe in a “mother goddess” and/or worship “mother earth.” The old myths (which pagans believed described realities) have never really been expunged from our language and culture. The religion of native Americans is a good example of their continuing existence. Even Christians may carelessly use terms like “mother nature,” but if they do, it is only as a metaphor, and so a modern example of what I call “exmythological” language, used without believing the myth. But it is better for Christians to speak creedally of God as Father and Creator of the world. (CC)

**36:30** *disgrace.* As in v. 15. (CSB)

This verse is little more than a restatement of 36:29. The “disgrace/reproach/scorn of famine” is apparently part of “the scorn of the peoples” in 36:15, as is clear from 34:29. Famine is specified in both 36:29 and 36:30, perhaps because of Canaan’s vulnerability to droughts and the inevitable out-migrations that would follow (e.g., Ruth 1:1). (CC)

**36:31** *Then you will remember.*† God’s undeserved grace leads to recollection and repentance (cf. 6:9; 16:63; 20:43; Ps 130:4; see 2Co 7:10). (CSB)

The oracle returns sharply to its starting point in 36:16–21. This verse is almost identical with 20:43, and the various parallels with the entirety of chapter 20 suggest that this restoration oracle is intended as a sort of sequel. Both chapters manifest the somber tone even of Ezekiel’s messages of hope, in contrast to the celebratory atmosphere of many other prophets. Together with the next verse, 36:31 emphasizes that only after God acts sola gratia in restoring the people will they be capable of true contrition over their past behavior. The simple indicative verbs, “you will remember your evil actions and your misdeeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves,” suggest that these actions are a natural, inevitable, almost involuntary part of true repentance. (CC)

The word translated “misdeeds” here is מַעֲלָלִים. This is the word’s only occurrence in Ezekiel. However, it is common in Jeremiah, where it is commonly paired with רֶּרֶךְ, “way, path,” as it is here and as is the related Hebrew word for “(mis)deed,” עֲלִילָה, in Ezek 36:17, 19. (עֲלִילָה, in turn, is not used by Jeremiah.) In other contexts, מַעֲלָל (“deed”) can be neutral, but here it is qualified by the litotes אֲשֶׁ֣ר לֹֽא־טוֹבִ֑ים, “that were not good (ones),” which echoes 20:25. “Loathe yourselves” is, literally, “feel nauseous in your face” (cf. 6:9 and 20:43). (CC)

**36:32** *not … for your sake.* See note on v. 22. (CSB)

The revulsion is not to be suppressed, but is commanded. Repentance is no mere generalized feeling of being less than perfect, but is a particularized self-examination, with a confession of sins of omission and commission—to the extent that one is aware of them—combined with the knowledge that one’s whole being is sinful. It is for this reason that the church historically encourages *private* confession and absolution. In the liturgy we confess ourselves to be “poor, miserable sinners.” (CC)

The use of two Niphal imperatives, “let it be known” and “be disgraced,” suggests that true knowledge of sin and grace inevitably involves such a reaction of disgrace. And as the ultimate reason for such a reaction, the words of 36:22 are repeated (“not for your sake I am about to act”), underscoring the rejection of all self-glorification or illusions about deserving God’s grace, which dominates this entire oracle. (CC)

**36:33** *On the day.* Connects the promise of cleansing (vv. 24–32) and the promise of repopulation (vv. 33–36). (CSB)

A repetition of the citation formula, “thus says the Lord Yahweh,” begins the addendum (or two addenda, 36:33–36 and 36:37–38), which somewhat repeats already familiar themes: the vindication of Yahweh’s honor, and the restoration of life on the renewed land. (CC)

Ezek 36:33a largely repeats 36:25b. Ezekiel here speaks in more general terms of purification from “iniquities” (עֲוֹנוֹת) than the somewhat more specific offenses mentioned in 36:25. It surely is no accident that the verse speaks of Israel’s religious cleansing before it turns to the promise of territorial restoration in 36:33b–36. They form a link with the previous oracle, especially 36:9–10. (CC)

**36:35** *garden of Eden.* Primeval fertility is suggested (cf. 28:13; 31:9). (CSB)

The subject of וְאָמְר֗וּ (a perfect with *waw* consecutive), translated as future tense, “will say,” is an indefinite “they,” probably referring to the “every passerby” of the previous verse. These people’s wonderment at the nation’s restoration is cast in the form of a direct quotation, just as their reaction to the Israelites’ exile had been in 36:20. What impresses the observers here, as one would expect, is not the return as such or even the spiritual regeneration of the Israelites, but the physical transformation of the land. Ezekiel referred to the original paradise of “Eden” in 28:13 and 31:9, 16, 18, but this promise looks forward to the eschatological state, when God’s redeemed shall inhabit a new but greater Eden-like paradise, described further in chapters 40–48 (see also Lk 23:43; Rev 2:7; and especially Revelation 22). Isaiah similarly referred to Eden (Is 51:3). The change in Joel 2:3, where the land that was like “the garden of Eden” is devastated in a conflagration, is the opposite of the change here, where the desolated land becomes like the garden of Eden. (CC)

Since passers-by (36:34) and surrounding nations (36:36) witness the transformation of the land, the speakers in 36:35 may be converted Gentiles, since elsewhere Ezekiel speaks of the conversion of Israel’s neighbors and even of their inclusion in God’s covenant (e.g., 16:53–58). (CC)

 *fortified.* In contrast to 38:11. (CSB)

No less than three semi-synonymous terms are used to describe the utter devastation before the rebuilding: “the cities that were ruined, desolated, and destroyed” (36:35). This trio appears together only here in Ezekiel. What especially strikes the people are the walls (fortifications) surrounding the cities, a sign of permanent and secure settlement. Here we confront a seeming conflict with the assertion of 38:11 that the future Israelite cities will be unwalled and need no defenses. However, even the eschatological new Jerusalem in Revelation 21 has a city wall, though its four gates remain perpetually open because of the absence of any danger or evil. (CC)

**36:36** *nations … will know.* See note on v. 23. (CSB)

What is probably the real aim of this entire addendum emerges here: the confession of the surrounding nations that Yahweh has not permanently abandoned his people, but has seen to their return and the reconstruction of what had been thoroughly devastated. In 36:3–5 these nations had been mentioned three times, and in 36:4 they had been pictured as gloating over Israel’s fall. Now they must sing a different song. The description “the nations that *are left*” (Niphal of שָׁאַר, related to nouns for “remnant”) suggests that they themselves had been decimated, but not annihilated. The historical reference in the OT era is probably to those who had survived Nebuchadnezzar’s campaigns, some suffering more than others, but all having been ravaged to some degree already in Yahweh’s implementation of judgment against Israel by means of Babylon (cf. 30:3 with 29:21). The fact that they have not completely perished in that judgment makes them independent, outside witnesses to Yahweh’s faithfulness to his promises of salvation to Israel and his continued commitment to his people. (CC)

**36:37** *yield to the plea.* Allowing petitions to come to him again, God reversed his earlier refusals to hear (cf. 14:3; 20:3, 31). (CSB)

Another citation formula (like that beginning 36:33) indicates another postscript, almost as an afterthought of Yahweh, but no less important for that reason. In these final two verses, the accent is not so much on the holiness of Yahweh’s name (as in the previous part of the oracle) as on Yahweh’s relation to his people. In the previous verses (36:33–36), Yahweh had addressed the subject of the repopulating of the land from the land’s perspective, but here the human population itself is the issue. (CC)

The initial ע֗וֹד זֹ֛את, “this too,” sounds almost like a “P.S.” at the end of a modern letter, but at the same time, it firmly integrates this piece with the preceding. The phrase had occurred twice before (20:27; 23:38), both times in descriptions of Israel’s transgressions against God, but here it introduces what he will do for his people. What Yahweh wishes to add is no minor item, but speaks of a radical change in his relation to his people in the renewed covenant relationship. Covenant and population increase had been linked from the beginning of the OT (e.g., Gen 17:2; Lev 26:9). “I will *allow* the house of Israel *to ask* me” uses the tolerative Niphal (אִרָּרֵ֥שׁ) of רָּרַשׁ, “seek,” in its common sense of prayer or petition. Twice before, in chapters 14 and 20, Yahweh had curtly rebuffed attempts to be sought by the people because of their sins (14:3, 7, 10; 20:3, 31; see also 8:18). But now in the “new covenant” (or an OT harbinger of it), the people’s many requests for prayer are allowed, and God’s promises to hear those prayers are restored. What the people pray for and what Yahweh promises to grant is a great increase in population, using the simile of a huge flock of sheep. The next verse expands the simile. (CC)

**36:38** *as numerous as the flocks for offerings.* See 1Ki 8:63; 1Ch 29:21; 2Ch 35:7 for the appropriateness of the comparison. (CSB)

We must use our imagination to picture the scene Yahweh describes, but most of Ezekiel’s audience would be quite familiar with it. This verse does not even give proverbially numerous numbers, but for the sake of comparison, King Hezekiah in his reformation sacrificed 3,600 animals (2 Chr 29:33), and Josiah’s paschal sacrifices involved 41,400 animals (2 Chr 35:7–9). The real application of this verse is not to animals, but to the consecrated people, who thus expressed their repentance and renewed devotion to the Lord. The verse also makes plain that the entire land is involved, not only Jerusalem and its feast days. Thus the passage carries forward the message of salvation begun in chapter 34, where the people, now owned as “the sheep of my [Yahweh’s] pasture” (צֹ֥אן מַרְעִיתִ֖י, 34:31), recognize who Yahweh really is. (CC)

Now that the Good Shepherd has come in the flesh, all Christians know that they too are participants in this promise, which has already begun to be fulfilled, thanks solely to his grace for his name’s sake. (CC)