

EZEKIEL

Chapter 36

Prophecy to the Mountains of Israel

“And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. 2 Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the enemy said of you, ‘Aha!’ and, ‘The ancient heights have become our possession,’ 3 therefore prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people, 4 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, 5 therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Surely I have spoken in my hot 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 pasturelands a prey. 6 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. 7 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I swear that the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer reproach. 8 “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. 9 For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. 10 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. 11 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. 12 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. 13 Thus says the Lord GOD: Because they say to you, ‘You devour people, and you bereave your nation of children,’ 14 therefore you shall no longer devour people and no longer bereave your nation of children, declares the Lord GOD. 15 And I will not let you hear anymore 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.”

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

In order to implement His plan of mankind’s redemption, seemingly halted by the exile, God will reserve and preserve the Promised Land for Israel’s return from captivity. He will repopulate it and shower blessings on it. He makes these promises dramatic by addressing them directly to the mountains of Israel. With a solemn oath (v 7), He assures the mountains that their fate will be different from that of Mount Seir (Edom), destined to become a perpetual desolation (35:9). (TLSB)

36:2–7 *Because ... therefore.* The unbreakable sequence of cause and effect in God’s direction of history is spoken repeatedly. (TLSB)

36:2 *ancient heights.* The promised land, of which the elevated region between the Jordan Valley and the Mediterranean coast was the central core. (CSB)

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

36:5 *my hot jealousy.*† 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. (CSB)

In His jealous wrath, God will turn the tables on the greedy, malicious predator epitomized in Edom. (TLSB)

36:8 *branches...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)

soon. As judgment neared (7:7; 12:23), a speedy return of the exiles was announced. (CSB)
In God’s measure of time, the day is at hand, even though decades were to elapse before the exile was to end (cf Hab 2:3; Rm 13:12; 1Pt 4:7; Rv 1:3; 22:10). (TLSB)

36:9 *tilled and sown.* The exile caused the fields to be fallow. (TLSB)

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

36:11 *be fruitful.* 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)

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 on you.* The mountains of Israel are still being addressed. (CSB)

bereave them of 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. (CSB)

bereave them. The ravages of sword, famine, and pestilence, inflicted on Israel as punishment, devoured young and old (cf 6:11). (TLSB)

36:1–15 Ezekiel prophesies the return of God’s people to the land promised to their ancestor Abraham; imagine the elation for those dwelling in exile. God’s grace fills this prophecy. Today, Christians may rejoice in God’s gift through Christ. Sin places us in exile, just as sin exiled Israel. Yet, Christ has redeemed and forgiven us, setting us free once again to rejoice in His abundant blessings. He grants us the promised land of eternal life. • Lord, creation rejoices in Your wondrous act of redemption. To You be all honor and glory. Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD's Concern for His Holy Name

16 The word of the LORD came to me: **17** “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. **18** 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. **19** I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. **20** 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.’ **21** But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.

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

36:17 *defiled it.* The exile was no accident of history. God brought it about because the people had defiled the land with their ways and their deeds, for which He poured out His wrath on them. (TLSB)

36:18 *blood...shed...idols...defiled.* A summary reference to Israel’s social injustices and idolatrous religious practices. (CSB)

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)

The victors attributed Israel’s disgrace to the Lord’s inability to protect His people and to make them His instruments of worldwide blessings (vv 16–21; cf Nu 14:15–16). Such heathen blasphemy was to stop because it defeated the purpose for which God called Israel. By intervening in the course of history and bringing Israel back from extinction, God will vindicate the holiness of His name through them, so that the nations will know that He is the Lord (Ezk 36:22–24). (TLSB)

36:16–21 The Lord characterizes Israel’s sin by referring to the holiness code of Lv 11:1–15:33. God’s name and reputation are precious to Him. How remarkable that He places His name on sinners like us (Nu 6:23–27), that all may know that we belong to Him. • O Lord, bless us and keep us, that we may call on Your name in every trouble and give You thanks and praise. Amen. (TLSB)

I Will Put My Spirit Within You

22 “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. **23** 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. **24** I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. **25** 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. **26** 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. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 And I will deliver you from all your uncleanness. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. 30 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. 31 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. 32 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. 33 “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. 34 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. 35 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.’ 36 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. 37 “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. 38 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.”

36:22–38 This prophecy of cleansing is based on the imagery of ritual washings practiced under the old covenant (see “clean” and “holy,” pp 6–7). However, the results of this washing (vv 25–27) are clearly connected with the new covenant fulfilled in Christ (cf Jer 31:31–34) and describe His work through Holy Baptism. See pp 1369, 1920; see also notes, Eph 5:26; Ti 3:5; Heb 10:22. In the Hbr of these verses, the Lord used the first person “I” a remarkable 34 times to affirm the certainty of His acts to His people (some examples of the grammar are obscured in the Eng) He emphasizes that His work is solely by grace. “If the ‘new spirits’ say, as they are accustomed, ‘Still Baptism is itself a work, and you say works are of no use for salvation. What, then, becomes of faith?’ Answer, ‘Yes, our works, indeed, do nothing for salvation. Baptism, however, is not our work, but God’s.’ For, as was stated, you must completely distinguish Christ’s Baptism from a bathkeeper’s baptism. God’s works are saving and necessary for salvation. They do not exclude, but demand, faith. For without faith they could not be grasped. By allowing the water to be poured upon you, you have not yet received Baptism in a way that benefits you at all. But it becomes beneficial to you if you have yourself baptized with this thought: this is according to God’s command and ordinance, and besides, it is done in God’s name. In this way you may receive the promised salvation in the water. Now, your fist cannot do this, nor your body; but the heart must believe it” (LC IV 35–36). (TLSB)

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)

God’s name is a capsule-word for everything He is and has revealed about Himself (see notes, Ex 6:3; Ps 8:1). Its essential characteristic is “holiness,” i.e., transcendence above all limited human concepts, definitions, and comprehension. If His prime motive in rescuing Israel from exile is concern for His holy name, none of His fallen, rebellious creatures should presume to dictate to Him that His first consideration in saving them should be love and compassion (cf ch 20). It is not accidental that Jesus

instructed His followers to let their first petition be “hallowed be Your name,” followed by two requests to vindicate His name—by letting His kingdom come and by executing His will (Mt 6:9–10). (TLSB)

36:23 *vindicate the holiness.* The nations had indicted the Lord and blasphemed Him for disciplining His people (v 20). Now the Lord will set the matter straight. (TLSB)

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)

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)

Such consecration was used for the priests and Levites of the old covenant (cf Ex 29:4; Lv 16:4, 24; Nu 8:6–7; 19). If the exiles were to be worthy bearers of God’s promises, He must not only give them back their homeland but also cleanse them. Yet this is no ordinary washing, as v 26 demonstrates. (TLSB)

sprinkle. Term most often used with the blood of the atonement and covenant (Ex 24:8; Lv 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; cf Heb 12:24; 1Pt 1:1–2). Cypr: “The divine benefits can in no respect be mutilated and weakened [by the mode of sprinkling].... For in the sacrament of salvation the contagion of sins is not in such wise washed away, as the filth of the skin” (ANF 5:400–401). (TLSB)

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

36:26 *a new heart, and a new spirit.* Equipped and empowered, they will respond to His goodness by walking in His statutes and observing His ordinances. (TLSB)

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 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)

Chem: “We must also teach how to begin this obedience, on what foundations to build it and where to seek it, that is, not from the natural effort of our free choice but from the Spirit of renewal. In this way and in this order faith comes first, which accepts or receives the remission of sins and offers peace and joy of conscience. As a result of this, by the same faith we receive the promise of the Spirit who creates the new man unto good works and turns our hearts to obedience” (LTh 2:339). (TLSB)

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

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

God is providentially and intimately involved in His creation, even in things we regard as purely “natural” processes, such as the ripening of grain. Cf Ps 145:15. (TLSB)

36:30 *disgrace*. 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)

loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. Mark of repentance. The sincerity of their repentance and changed attitude will manifest itself. (TLSB)

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

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

A return to the luxuriant fertility and undisturbed tranquility of paradise will become a reality in the spiritual bliss and peace of the promised kingdom of God. (TLSB)

36:36 *nations ... shall know*. Restoration of the land from desolation to well-populated cities and the inner transformation of the chastened people will so impress the nations that they will acknowledge that it was the Lord who made it come to pass. (TLSB)

know that I am the LORD. Likely intends that the nations will be brought to true faith. (TLSB)

36:38 *be filled with flocks*. Compares the crowd of animals that formerly stood near the temple with the crowded, renewed cities of the Promised Land. (TLSB)

36:22–38 Ezekiel reveals the reason God will restore His blessings to Israel. Their return will “vindicate the holiness of [God’s] great name” (v 23). God made a promise of a land inheritance to Abraham (Gn 12:2–3). Included in that promise were these words: “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gn 12:3), a messianic promise God fulfills in Christ and through Holy Baptism in His name. • Lord God, turn our hearts away from self-glorification, and focus us on the blessed inheritance You bestowed in Holy Baptism. Amen. (TLSB)