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How is it possible that God's people were cast out of their land? Is God not powerful enough to protect them? Has He abandoned the ones He chose? These difficult questions were ringing in the ears of the Israelite people as they were in exile. The Lord heard their questions and informed them of His thoughts through the prophet Ezekiel. In order to better understand his message, Ezekiel 36:24-28 will be studied. The broader context will be examined first, followed by the more immediate context. Next, a verse by verse interpretation of the text will be enacted. Finally, the connections of this passage to the broader Biblical narrative will be approached.

Ezekiel's audience is the exiled Israelite people. Those who had been torn from their homes and who had watched their lives be destroyed were longing for an answer as to why this all had happened. They searched for answers and found them in many of the Scriptures, including Ezekiel. His primary goal as he was writing was to clarify why Israel had been cast out of their promised land. Throughout his writing, Ezekiel shows that God had not abandoned His people. He opens the eyes of the people to see that they had sinned. They had strayed from the promises that they had made to God and had to bear the consequences. God is holy and cannot coexist with a people which is so sinful. Overall, this is the purpose of Ezekiel's writings: to show that Israel had strayed

from her position as God's people and that the just and merciful God of the nations would redeem His chosen people.

The text surrounding Ezekiel 36:24-28 clearly shows that God is intentional and particular about His name. His reputation is important to Him because God is known by how He is revealed to people. Human beings can only be in right relationship with God if they truly know that He is the Lord. The way that Israel acted while they were in possession of the promised land made evident that they did not understand in their hearts that God was the Lord. This is seen in verses 16-19 of chapter 36. God is too holy for Him to allow His people to live in a way that defiles His name. Because of this, God cast Israel out of the land. After Israel was sent into exile, Edom and other nations ridiculed Israel and took advantage of the plight of Israel. The world saw that God was punishing His people and they decided that it reflected poorly on God's power and faithfulness. God's wrath against the pride of the nations and His intention to correct their misinterpretation is seen in chapter 35. In order to redeem His name among the nations, God speaks the words of chapter 36: 22-28. In this, He shows that He will redeem Israel and show the world that He holds all power and authority.

God is set apart from the rest of the world. He is holy and deserves all honor and praise. It is only just for the Lord to be seen as He truly is by the nations, the God who created, sustains, and rules all things. It is with this in mind that the Lord declares that He will act for the sake of His holy name in verse 22. Holiness is one of the primary attributes of God that is displayed throughout the Old Testament. The plagues in Exodus show that the Lord is set apart in power and authority from all the gods of

Egypt. The Law is meant, at least in part, to show Israel how to dwell in a land with a holy God. The Psalms declare the beautiful wonder of living with the Almighty God. All throughout the Scriptures, the holiness of God is emphasized. This theme is continued in the Lord's intention to redeem Israel for the sake of His name (Duguid, NDBT, 230). This does not undercut the compassion and grace of the Lord. His name is not only shown to be holy in the actions that He predicts, but also, merciful and generous. It is for the sake of His name that he will act.

All throughout the book of Ezekiel the refrain is that they "will know that I am the Lord" (verse 23). It is repeated as the outcome of whatever the Lord is declaring to Ezekiel. This displays God's desire to be in relationship with His creation. He desires to be known throughout the world. All of humanity ought to be in awe of Him and His glory. This fear of the Lord is a step towards truly flourishing as human beings. This phrase summarizes and is the through line of the passage. Although humanity needs to be aware of the Lord and He desires to be known, the primary purpose of God's action is for the sake of His holy name, not Israel and not the nations (Wells, 177).

Verse 24 begins the promises to the people of Israel. Up until this point, the Lord has been showing the purpose and the occasion for His action. Now He is saying that He will gather His people from the lands they were scattered to and give them back their land. This is reminiscent of the promises that God gave to Israel when they were in Egypt and when they were wandering through the desert. God had promised and given the land to the people that He had brought out of Egypt. In this same way, the Lord promised to lead the Israelites into their own land. This shows that they will be restored

to the covenant relationship that they had abandoned. God first promised this land to Abraham. By promising to bring them back to that place, God is showing that He is not done with His people.

In verse 25, there are many allusions to the processes of cleansing. Since the Lord is a holy God and Israel rebelled from Him, they must be clean before entering His presence again. This is what is meant by the sprinkling of water and the removal of idols. It is clear that the Lord will cleanse and restore His people. He is making it possible for them to dwell with him again. It is worth noting that God is the actor throughout this passage. He is the one who cleans, redeems, and promises. The Israelites are not responsible for the actions that God is promising. The Lord will do it for the sake of His name and through His power. The lack of action on the part of the Israelites further shows the Lord's strength. Since He is the only one acting, His name will be magnified all the more.

Verse 26 is crucial to understanding the general idea of the passage. In this, God promises to give life to the people of Israel where they had none. He will replace the stone with flesh and will enable them to follow Him. It is reminiscent of the creation of man. God forms the person and then breathes the breath of life into him in Genesis 2:7. After this original formation, the Lord promises to give Israel a "new heart, and a new spirit" (36: 26). God will recreate Israel into a people who can truly follow Him with their whole heart. Their heart of stone had led them to stray from His presence, to seek after idols. This new heart of flesh will live and beat for Him.

Not only will Israel become alive in a more full and true way, but they will be able to carry out what God always intended for them to do. He called them to obey His law and participate in His plans. Before this, Israel continually failed to act in the manner that God desired them to. After God has re-enlivened them, God will cause them to live in the way that they ought, which can be seen in verse 27. He will do this through allowing His Spirit to dwell within His people. His Spirit gives life and is the path to redemption. Only through the power of His Spirit can Israel truly follow God's ways. Again, the action of the Lord and the passivity of Israel is seen. God will put His Spirit within Israel and that will propel them into obedience to Him.

The final verse of this passage is the culmination of what God is promising Israel. He promises. "You shall be my people, and I will be your God" (36:28). This is the purpose of giving Israel a new heart and of instilling His statutes within them. The relationship between God and people that began when God called Abraham is being restored once and for all. Flowing out of that right relationship, God promises that Israel will return to their land. This is a sign of the Lord's faithfulness and relationship with Israel. When Israel is following God, they are in possession of the land and a multitude of blessings. When they disobey, there are consequences to their actions. Thus, being back in the land shows that they are pursuing God with their whole hearts. This is only possible because God renewed and restored them from their sinfulness. Through all the work that God is doing, He will be glorified and His name will be praised.

One way that this passage connects to other Old Testament passages is through the covenantal language used. In Exodus 19:5-6, the Lord says that Israel will be His

“treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Here it is clear that the Lord is singling out this nation. They will be different from the rest of the world. They will be the mediator between God and the rest of the broken world. In order to do this, they must follow the ten commandments and the rest of the Law. This will allow them to remain holy and interact with the God who will live in their midst. The similarities between these passages in Exodus and Ezekiel are striking. In Exodus, the Lord reminded Israel how He brought them out of the land of Egypt and is going to bring them to the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Ezekiel, the Lord says that He will gather them from wherever they have been scattered and place them back in the same land promised to their ancestors. Ezekiel 36 is different from Exodus in that God will be causing His people to act in the way of His law. It is clearly God who is acting all throughout the passage. God is the one who will gather, cleanse, renew, bless, and act. This covenant is different because it is entirely God acting. Israel reacts to Him, but is secondary in performance.

God chose Israel to be His plan of redemption for the world, yet they abandoned Him. This broken covenant required God to make a new one. This new covenant is promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. This speaks of a different kind of covenant than the one that was established in Exodus. It is different because, just as in Ezekiel, God is the one who is active. He is the one who will save, forgive, and make the covenant. Verse 33 says, “ I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be my people.” This beautifully aligns with what Ezekiel writes.

Both are showing that the new covenant will truly establish a people of God. Israel was meant to be the light of God to all the world, but through their continual disobedience, they were not able to fulfill this calling. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak of a nation completely living out the identity of being God's people both through walking in the ways of the Lord and through having the law of the Lord written on their hearts.

An additional connection exists between this prophetic passage and the New Testament. In John chapter 3, Jesus is talking with Nicodemus. Nicodemus has come to Jesus with questions regarding His teaching and Jesus tells him that "unless one is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (verse 3). This clearly echoes back to the way Ezekiel has written about replacing the heart of stone with the heart of flesh in verse 26. Additionally, Jesus goes on to discuss how one must be born, not of flesh but the Spirit. This too, Ezekiel addresses as he predicts that God will bring His Spirit to rest upon His people. This is significant because it shows that Jesus knew He would fulfill the new covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel discuss (Beale and Carson, 434). Through Jesus, Christians are given a new heart of flesh and the Spirit of the living God comes upon them. Through this process of being born again, Christians become the people of God. They are forgiven of their sins and cleansed from their idols. It is clear that through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, Christians enter into the new covenant with the Lord.

From all this, it has been seen that Ezekiel 36:24-28 is concerned with the holiness of God. As God sought to make His name well known, He redeems His people. He brings new life and right relationship to His people. As Christians and the new

covenant people of God, we are now able to hold on to the promises that the Lord makes in Ezekiel. Christian must see that God is holy and acts to protect His name. It is out of an overflow of His goodness that He washes our sins away and that He saves a place for our home. We must act in accordance with His Word and we are able since His Spirit is in us. This allows us to truly be God's people and for Him to truly be our God.

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