

Ezekiel 36:16-38

36:16 *Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,*

36:17 *"Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.*

36:18 *"Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols.*

In chapter 36 the nation has been decimated, the capital has been destroyed, the Temple was in ruins, the land was desolate, and the people were taken to Babylon. The emphasis of the message is that the nation of Israel needs regeneration before they can enter into the blessings that God has for them.

Verse 17 does not speak of the restoration of Israel per se, but on the defilement of the land. There was a relationship between God, Israel, and the land. The moral evils of the people were viewed as defiling the land, and once the land was defiled, it could not be cleansed again with purification rites. The pollution had to be removed by a divine act of cleansing.

The notion of defiling the land has a long history. The biblical rationale for delivering the land from the Canaanites was that they were defiling the land.

Deuteronomy 9:4-5: "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you. . ."

"Moses takes special care to guard his countrymen against the vanity of supposing that their own merits had procured them the distinguished privilege. The Canaanites were a hopelessly corrupt race, and deserved extermination; but history relates many remarkable instances in which God punished corrupt and guilty nations by the instrumentality of other people as bad as themselves" (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown).

Deuteronomy 18:9-12 warned Israel that if they acted in a similar manner as the Canaanites had, their moral pollution would also defile the land, and they would be driven from it as well (see Deut. 21:23; 24:4; 25:15; 28:15, 21, 24, 63; 29:19-29; 30:16-20).

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah state similar consequences when Israel sinned against God: "The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant . . . Therefore, the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. . . The new wine fails, the vine languishes . . ." (Isa. 24:5-7). Jeremiah asks, "How long will the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither? The beasts and birds are consumed, for the wickedness of those who dwell there. . ." (Jer. 12:4).

So the exile, the removal of the people from the land, meant much more than being one of many punishments that God could have imposed on His people; it pictured the depth of Israel's sin and their removal from the blessings of God.

36:19 "Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.

36:20 "When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.'

36:21 "But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.

Israel had been removed from the land to bring about repentance and teach her obedience, but by disciplining Israel in this way God risked His own reputation among the gentile nations. The people of the ancient Near East believed that a deity, the land, and its people were intimately connected. If for any reason, whether through conquest or famine, the people were forced from the land, the conclusion was drawn that the deity lacked the power to act on the people's behalf. Israel's sins forced God to drive her from the land; as a result, the nations concluded that the God of Israel was weak and thus, His name was profaned. For this reason, the exile itself was a profanation of God's holy name for it was perceived as an event that God was unable to stop.

In past history, it was the misperception of God's actions by the nations that was a concern of Moses, as well. In Exodus 32:12 and Numbers 14:15-16, Moses reasoned that if God destroyed the people as He was threatening to do, the nations would have false views about God that would profane His name.

God would not allow His name to be profaned forever.

36:22 "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 My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

36:23 "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

Verses 22-23 announce that in light of the current crises, God will act. Israel had desecrated the name of God among the nations; God would reconsecrate it.

Ezekiel is extremely clear that when God acts, it is not for the sake of Israel, but for His own sake. He will display His power so that the very nations who saw what happened to Israel would see His greatness.

The lack of compassion and forgiveness is easy to understand: the people had shamefully trampled underfoot the grace of God and had thus forfeited all rights to compassion. God will deliver them from the nations and bring them back to the land (36:24 ff), but His primary motive is to rectify the dishonor

brought upon His name, not make them think that their behavior or status has earned them the right to return.

NOTE: At times when modern readers read verses like Ezekiel 36:22-23, they perceive God as an egotistical monarch who simply acts for Himself and has no compassion for His people.

Is God egotistical, only out for His own self-glory?

1. Even if God were an egomaniac, there is nothing we could do about it. He is God and isn't seeking our opinion of Him. What He has revealed about Himself isn't open for debate. God is who He is and we simply discover this. We don't create Him.

2. God does not need our praise to fulfill a need that He Himself has.

Psalm 50:7-12

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before Me. I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains."

God does not need our sacrifices, prayers, or love. God owns everything. God did not need to make us because He needed something to love. He is fully self-satisfied. And God did not and does not need us to glorify Him.

3. "God does seek to be worshiped. God does demand the allegiance of every created thing. But the reason is not because he needs these things. Nor is it because he has this one small eternal vice. *The reason why he seeks his own glory is because he wants all of creation to be brought into concert with reality. He wants his beauty to be seen because he created us in such a way to find the most fulfillment and satisfaction in a recognition of the way things actually are. And the way things actually are is found in his glory*" (C Michael Patton; <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2013/11/is-god-an-egotistical-maniac/>)

Patton comments,

Is it egotistical for the ocean to roar? Is it egotistical for the sun to shine so bright? Is it egotistical for romantic love to make our hearts drop? Is it egotistical for chocolate to make our mouth water? Is it egotistical for the expanse of the universe to cause us to stand in awe? Is it egotistical for sex to feel good? Is it egotistical for music to affect our emotions? Is it egotistical for the sky to be blue? Yes, all of these are attributes of impersonal things. But they all call out for recognition nonetheless. This recognition brings fulfillment to us, not to the things themselves. When we see a personal God who not only created all these things that summon us to joyful recognition, but is also the very embodiment of them calling on us to glorify him, he is

doing nothing else but what is expected from a loving God. He is calling us to recognize him and his beauty. In doing so, we experience the greatest pleasure existence has to offer. . .

Others who have commented on this subject agree. Albert Mohler says, “. . . when God displays and exhibits his glory, he shares joy with his creatures and wholeness with all creation. Put most directly, without the knowledge of God’s glory, we would be robbed of true joy”

(<http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/02/20/the-divine-egotist-is-god-arrogant-selfish-or-meglomaniacal/>).

John Piper in his book *God is the Gospel*, says it like this:

The best news of the Christian gospel is that the supremely glorious Creator of the universe has acted in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection to remove every obstacle between us and himself so that we may find everlasting joy in seeing and savoring his infinite beauty. The saving love of God is his doing whatever must be done, at great cost to himself, and for the least deserving, so that he might enthrall them with what will make them supremely happy forever, namely, himself. Therefore, the gospel of God and the love of God are expressed finally and fully in God's gift of himself for our everlasting pleasure. “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forever more” (Psa. 16:11; p. 147)

Later he says,

Beholding the beauty of God has always been the supreme desire of those who know him best.

The upshot of saying this is that the love of God and the gospel of God are radically God-centered. God loves us by giving us himself to enjoy. The gospel is good news because it announces to us that God has acted in Christ not just that we may have heaven, but so that we may have God. “Everyone who . . . does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God” (2 Jn. 9). The greatest good of the gospel is “having God” as our treasure forever (p. 148).

Our problem in desiring God is that, “Fallen creatures, blinded by sin, cannot see that to rob God of his glory is to rob ourselves of true joy. It takes the grace of God to make that known to us, and, incredibly enough, God glorifies himself in making himself known to sinners and in saving them through Christ’s perfect atonement for sin” (Mohler).

Piper comments on the problem of man’s sinful self-centeredness at length:

The God-centered love of God is foreign to fallen human beings, especially those who, like most of us, have been saturated for decades with doctrines of self-esteem. We have absorbed a definition of love that makes *us* the center. That is, we feel loved when someone makes much of us. Thus the natural, human definition of love is making much of someone. The main reason this feels like love is that it feels so good to be made much of. The problem is that this feels good on wholly natural grounds. There is nothing spiritual about it. No change in us is needed at all to experience this kind of “love.” This love is wholly natural. It operates on the principles that are already present in our fallen, sinful, and spiritually dead souls. We love the praise of men. It

feels good. Praise is to the ego what sex is to the body. It just doesn't get any better – as long as we are spiritually dead.

The ground of natural love is finally me, not God. If you make much of me, I feel loved, because I am the final ground of my happiness. God is not in that place. He should be, but he is not. That is what it means to be unconverted and natural. The deepest foundation of my happiness is me (p. 149).

Christian conversion is the spiritual awakening of our souls to the glory of God as the ground of our joy. Conversion is the spiritual discovery that being loved by God is not the divine endorsement of our passion for self-exultation. In fact, being loved by God is the merciful destruction of that passion. And the destruction is not an end in itself. It is to make room for the supernatural experience of truly being loved by God – that is, being enabled by him to enjoy God-exultation as an end in itself. Spiritual God-exultation is not a means to the pleasure of self-exultation.

Being loved by God is the wonderful replacement of self as the foundation of our joy. In the place of self comes the glory of God. Most people know that the greatest experiences of joy in this life – the ones that come closest to being pictures of perfect joy in heaven – are not experiences of self-affirmation, but of self-forgetfulness in the presence of something majestic. Those moments are few in this life. Most of the time our joy in some splendor outside ourselves is contaminated by self-awareness and the craving of our ego to have some share in the wonder.

But we have tasted enough of self-forgetting joy to help us know what being loved by God really means. God's best gift is not the gift of self-esteem. God's best gift is God – for our everlasting and ever increasing enjoyment. Being loved by God is the exhilarating deliverance from the hall of mirrors we once thought would bring us happiness – if we could just like what we see. Heaven is not a hall of mirrors. Or maybe we should say, heaven is a world in which all created things have become mirrors, and all of them are tilted to a 45 degree angle. Everywhere we look – in every creature – we see the reflection of God (p. 151, 152).

Love is doing whatever you need to do to help people see and savor the glory of God in Christ forever and ever. Love keeps God central. Imitating Jesus in this does not mean that we love by seeking to display *our* glory. Imitation means that we seek to display *his* glory. Jesus sought the glory of himself and his Father. We should seek the glory of Jesus and his Father. Jesus is the one being in the universe for whom self-exultation is the highest virtue and the most loving act. He is God. Therefore, the best gift he can give is the revelation of himself. We are not God. Therefore, it is not loving for us to point people to ourselves as the ground of their joy. That would be an unloving distraction. Love means helping people see and savor Christ forever (p. 153-154).

Piper asks, "Do I rejoice in God's unwavering commitment to uphold and display his glory—do I rejoice in God's God-centeredness? Or am I God-centered only because deep down I believe God is man-centered, so that my supposed God-centeredness is really man-centeredness, even me-centeredness?"

Ted Kirnbauer

Does my opposition to God's God-centeredness reveal that my supposed God-centeredness is just a cover for wanting myself at the center, and the use of God to endorse that because he is so centered on me?"

3. In Ezekiel 36:22 and 32 the glory of God is mentioned as the preeminent motive for Israel's salvation, but the glory of God is behind God's purposes in redemptive history from start to finish. The aim of God in all that He does is the praise of His glory. The following is edited from a message by John Piper (Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/conference-messages/is-jesus-an-egomaniac>):

- **God elects Israel for his glory.**

Jeremiah 13:11: I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory.

- **God saves them from Egypt for his glory.**

Psalm 106:7–8: Our fathers rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake that he might make known his power.

- **God restrains his anger in exile for his glory.**

Isaiah 48:9–11: For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you For my own sake, for my own sake I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

- **God saves us for His glory**

Ephesians 1:4–6: God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

- **God sends his Son at the end of the age for his glory.**

2 Thessalonians 1:9–10: He comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at in all who have believed.

God's God-Centeredness is Found from Start to Finish.

Before the foundation of the world, God planned a redemption in Christ with this great and ultimate goal: that we would praise his glory. And the apex of that glory would be the glory of his grace.

So from the very beginning, we see that God made his exaltation and our salvation one piece. You don't have to choose between God's glory and your joy, because the apex of your joy is praise, and the apex of his glory is grace.

So if Jesus wants you to feel most alive, most joyful forever, what would he show you?

John 17:24 "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory* that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

When all is said and done, and the history of the world is complete, and the new heavens and the new earth are established, and the infinitely joyful age to come is here, the ultimate joy, the ultimate climax of history for our aching hearts is, "we will see his glory," and we will be transformed by it into the kind of people who can enjoy it fully and not be incinerated by it.

And what makes this so spectacular is that the foundation under our salvation is not our value but God's value. The consummation of our salvation is not that heaven is a hall of mirrors where we like what we see, but that we will be glorified and the universe will be glorified to the point where we can fully enjoy the glory of Christ.

Here is the end of the matter: God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is not the act of a needy ego, but an act of infinite giving. The reason God seeks our praise is not because he won't be fully God until he gets it, but that we won't be happy until we give it.

This is not arrogance. This is grace.

This is not egomania. This is love.

How is God going to display His greatness and power to the nations? How is He going to stop His name from being profaned? . . . by restoring the nation of Israel both inside and out (36:24 ff.).

36:24 "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

36:25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

36:26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

36:27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Verses 24-27 emphasize the future restoration of the nation of Israel. Verse 24 promises that God will bring them back to their land – a promise made to them in Abraham (Gen. 12).

But Yahweh's efforts will go beyond simply bringing them into the land; He will also revitalize the relationship between Himself and His people. First, He will cleanse them from their defilement. He will also remove their hearts of stone and give them ones of living flesh. He will also infuse them with His Spirit.

In other words, the basis of Israel's final regeneration is the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31–34, and other places. It will be a covenant made with both houses of Israel (Jer. 31:31).

There are a number of outstanding characteristics of the New Covenant that need to be emphasized:

- 1) The people in the New Covenant will be cleansed from their sins (36:25).
- 2) Their hearts of stone that are dead to the things of God will be removed and they will be given new hearts (36:26; cf. 11:19).
- 3) The Holy Spirit will be given to them (36:27).
- 4) The regenerate heart and spirit will enable the people to walk in newness of life (36:27).
- 5) Everyone will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest (Jer. 31:34).

This imagery was no doubt in Jesus' mind when He spoke to Nicodemus in John 3, as He presented what was necessary to enter into the Kingdom of God.

36:28 "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

God's restoration "climaxes with the announcement of the fulfillment of Yahweh's ancient ideal: a transformed people living in their hereditary homeland, covenantally related to their divine Lord" (Block, 356). "With the restoration of these relationships, not only have ancient Near Eastern perceptions of normal relations among deity, people, and land been satisfied; but Yahweh's name has also been sanctified and his own ancient ideal for the nation is finally achieved" (Block, 357).

Supernatural fertility of the land is one of the accompaniments of the kingdom (see v. 35; 47:1-12; Isa. 35:1-2; 55:13; Zech. 8:12).

36:29 "Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you.

36:30 "I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

"These verses carry the restorative activity of Yahweh to their logical conclusion. Yahweh's reputation is not rehabilitated simply through Israel's occupation of their homeland; it depends also on the quality of their life in the land. Before the prophet elaborates on this issue, however, he reminds his audience once more of the psychosomatic nature of the current problem. The productivity of the land is contingent on the cleansing of the nation, here described remarkably as salvation from defilements. . . The people's salvation is accompanied by the rejuvenation of their land. Yahweh will cause it to yield its bounty for the welfare of the people once again" (Block, 357).

"Although some delete verses 26 to 28 as secondary, these verses are crucial within the present literary context. According to prevailing ancient Near Eastern perceptions, and specifically according to the

terms of Yahweh's covenant with his people, the productivity of the land is a natural outgrowth of the normalization of relationships among God, people, and land" (Block, 357- 358).

36:31 "Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.

36: 32 "I am not doing this for your sake," declares the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!"

"When Yahweh has completed his salvific work on Israel's behalf, the people will look back and remember their past conduct, characterized here as evil conduct and improper behavior... The present statement indicates that for those who have experienced divine grace, the memory of guilt deserving of judgment should not be suppressed "(see 6:9; 20:43; Block, 359).

36:33 '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 will be rebuilt.

36:34 "The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.

36:35 "They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.'

36:36 "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it."

The words, "Thus says the Lord," introduce a new section. This section can be divided into three parts: (1) Yahweh's action toward His people (v. 33b), (2) His action toward the land (vv. 33c-34), and the public response (vv. 35-36).

When a new heart and a new spirit are infused into the people, their evil behavior stops and their guilt is removed. The account has been closed. As long as the land lies devastated, however, the name of Yahweh is slandered. Shalom must exist not only between deity and people, but also between deity and land, and between people and land.

"Verses 33b-34 address this territorial issue in overtly materialistic terms. Not only will the land become fertile again (vv. 29-30) but also the cultural signs of human occupation will return: the cities will be occupied, the ruin heaps rebuilt, and the devastated land cultivated. All who pass by will be amazed at the transformation of the landscape" (Block, 363). They will say that the wasteland has been transformed into a paradise like Eden.

They also notice that the cities have been totally rebuilt. "In this cultural context city is by definition a permanent settlement surrounded by defensive walls" (Block, 363).

36:37 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

36:38 "Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.""

God has apparently spared some of the nations to serve as outside witnesses to His saving action and give testimony to his renewed covenant with Israel.

Verse 37 demonstrates how radically the relationship between Yahweh and his people has changed. For the first time in the book, He permits Himself to be entreated by the house of Israel. The opening of His ear to human inquiries symbolizes the radical transformation of his disposition.

The growing size and the population would be an encouragement to the exiles. Yahweh's judgments have severely reduced the number of people in the land, through battle, famine, disease, and dispersion. Here, God promises to bless the sons of Abraham. The future population can be compared with flocks of sheep, jamming the streets of Jerusalem at festival time.

Block (vol. 2, 365-367) makes some wonderful applications to chapter 36:

First, although the Lord's ways may be mysterious, they are not hidden. His activity is played out in the public arena for the world to observe and to draw their conclusions. Sometimes the inferences about the character of God drawn from human experience are incorrect. This had been Israel's problem. For them the exile created an intense crisis of faith. They had come to look on God as a sentimental dispenser of gifts, whose primary role was to cater to their needs. When he failed to defend them against the Babylonians, they perceived him as unfaithful to his covenant. Even though their disaster was the result of their own sin, Yahweh took their doubts seriously. Concern for his reputation drove him to act soteriologically on their behalf. For outsiders, with their simplistic perceptions of patron deities as resident landlords defending turf and home, and their inability often to distinguish between divine and human causation, this oracle affirms the morality of all Yahweh's actions. The mockery of the nations over his apparent incompetence or betrayal of his people could have been resolved simply by reuniting land and people. But the taunting world must witness his transforming power in recreating a people intent on serving him.

Second, God's actions in human history are driven by revelatory aims: that his people and the world may know that he is Yahweh. The recipients of divine grace are easily deluded into thinking that they are the center of the universe, that their desires determine God's agenda. They may even be offended that sentimental pity toward a person in need takes second place to his concern for his own reputation. But the universal Lord is concerned that all may see his glory and his grace. He acts to preserve the sanctity of his reputation.

Third, the only solution for the fallen human race is a fundamental cleansing, a heart transplant, an infusion of the divine Spirit. It is tempting in our context in particular to imagine that social ills can be healed by economic, social, and educational programs. But Ezekiel's radical theocentricity finds the answer in God alone. While efforts to advance the social conditions of

all humankind must be lauded, to propose these as the answer for a person's needs without reference to the fundamental problem, the depravity of the human soul, is to continue the idolatry of the Israelites. What is needed in our day is a dramatic reversal and return to the biblical heart imagery, and to a recognition that the required transformation can be achieved only by the gracious act of God. Only God can remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh; new life comes only by the infusion of his Spirit.

Fourth, the future of Israel rests in the eternal, immutable promises of God. In 586 BC the nation saw all their hopes and aspirations dashed. To the exiles all God's promises regarding their status as his covenant people, their title to the ancestral homeland, the right of the Davidic dynasty to rule, and the residence of God in Zion seemed in vain. But Ezekiel reassures his people that God has not forgotten his covenant; the ancient promises still stand. Therefore, the population must be regathered, their hearts transformed, and their community return to the homeland, there to enjoy the blessings of God. After all, his honor is at stake.

How these prophetic promises will be fulfilled remains an open question. Nevertheless, to reduce these oracles to symbolic language and restrict their fulfillment to the NT church is to annul the hope that the prophet was attempting to restore. But Ezekiel does not assume that access to the benefits promised here is automatic. The principal operative in 586 still applies. Apart from personal and national spiritual renewal, those who claim to be heirs of Abraham have no right to the blessings that Yahweh promises to his covenant people.

Ezekiel 37

37:1 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones.

37:2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.

37:3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."

37:4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'

37:5 "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.

37:6 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'"

37:7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

37:8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.

37:9 Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'"

37:10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Ezekiel is transported to a valley of dry bones. To emphasize the number of the dead, he is taken down the middle of the valley and made to pass among the bones (37:2). Ezekiel is amazed at the volume of bones and their extreme dryness; it was clear that the dead had not received a proper burial and that the dead had been dead a long time.

In verse 3 God asks if the bones can live. Ezekiel answers, "You know." His answer puts everything back in God's court. He doesn't rule out the possibility of life returning to the bones (for all things are possible with God, and Yahweh has control over life and death), nor does he betray the hopelessness of his contemporaries. "Instead he casts himself entirely upon the will and power of God" (Block, vol. 2, 375).

The following verses make it clear that the bones will live again and Ezekiel is to take part in their resurrection by prophesying over them. His prophesying was speaking on God's behalf. The promise to give life to the bones involves connecting the bones with sinews, covering them with flesh and skin, and giving them the breath of life - the reverse of the decomposition process. Creation, even inanimate creation responds in utter obedience to God's word; it is man, the only intelligent being besides angels, who acts in rebellion against it.

In verses 7-8 as Ezekiel prophesied, the bones began coming together and were fitted with flesh and skin. However, there was no life in them (37:8). Ezekiel is then told to prophesy to the breath and call it from the four corners of the earth (the four directions of the compass where Israel was scattered) to return to the slain. As he spoke, they came to life and the people stood to their feet.

The identification of the lifeless corpses as the *slain corpses* offers the first clue to the identity of the deceased. The bones are the remains of victims of some enormous battle. While the oracle expresses no interest in which battle they might have fallen, Ezekiel would naturally have thought of his compatriots, casualties to Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah and Jerusalem (cf. v. 11).

But why have they not been properly buried? The answer is to be found in the covenant curses. The practice of throwing bodies out into the open to be eaten by wild animals is well attested in ancient near Eastern sources. The treatment was applied especially to those who had broken contracts and treaty oaths ... Ezekiel probably viewed the present scene as evidence of the fulfillment of Yahweh's own covenant curse in Deuteronomy 28:25-26: "The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away." Indeed, his contemporary, Jeremiah, had predicted its fulfillment in 34:17–20: "Therefore thus says the LORD, 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor. Behold, I am proclaiming a release to you,' declares the LORD, 'to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 'I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts--the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf--I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.'" While Ezekiel would undoubtedly had been reminded of this curse, the command to prophesy to the breath to enter these corpses that they might live offers hope. Yahweh is hereby announcing the lifting of the curse! (Block, vol. 2, 377-378).

The interpretation follows in verses 11 to 14.

37:11 *Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'*

37:12 *"Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.*

37:13 *"Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.*

37:14 *"I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD."*

"These bones" in verse 11 suggest that God is explaining the preceding vision.

"Verses 12–14 involve a significant shift in the visual metaphor. The bones strewn about the valley have disappeared and have been replaced by bodies buried in graves" (Block, 379).

As Block states, "the bones on the surface of the valley do not represent just any victims of Nebuchadnezzar's wars who have been denied a proper burial; *they represent the entire house of Israel*, including even those who had been exiled by the Assyrians more than 130 years earlier. The scope of Yahweh's restorative activity, which had been affirmed earlier in 36:10, will be reiterated in 39:25 and 45:6, and reflects the consistent prophetic picture of the people of Yahweh as encompassing the entire twelve-tribe house of Israel" (Block, 379-380).

The people were thinking "our bones are dried up and our hope has perished"; Yahweh's response is that He will open the graves of His people and bring them back into the land of Israel. The nation would be resurrected (this is not speaking of bodily resurrection); it would be restored.

As a result, the people will know that God is the Lord.

37:16 "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.'

37:17 "Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.

37:18 "When the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?'

37:19 say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand."'

37:20 "The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.

37:21 "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

37:22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.

37:23 "They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.

37:24 "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.

The gathering of the bones pictures the gathering of Israel. This meaning is clearly stated following the question raised by the people in verse 18, "What do you mean by these (sticks)?" The imagery of the sticks represents God reuniting the tribes to form one nation. The "one king" of verse 22 symbolizes the solidarity of the nation (this king is revealed in verse 24), and the mention of the land in verses 21 and 22 shows in biblical language the restoration of the trifold connection of deity-people-land.

God will also restore their spiritual integrity (v. 23). This involves two actions on the part of God. First, He will rescue them from their transgressions and cleanse them (v.23). Secondly, He will install the great Davidic King over them who will shepherd them and guide them in the paths of righteousness (v. 24).

37:25 "They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.

37:26 "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.

37:27 "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

37:28 "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.""

Verses 25-27 emphasize the permanent nature of the restored deity – nation – land relationship.

Land: Israel will inherit their hereditary homeland *forever* – a reaffirmation of God's covenant commitment with Abraham, though called the land that God gave to Jacob (See 28:25; Gen. 28:13-15; 35:9-15; but also Gen.13:14-17; 17:1-8).

Deity: Israel will enjoy the rule of David, Yahweh's servant, *forever* (37:24), and God will set his sanctuary in their midst *forever*. He will be their God and they will be His people (37:26-27).

People: In verse 26 God also promises that He will multiply them and fulfill the promise to Abraham to multiply his descendants as the stars of the sky, the grains of the sand of the sea shore, and the dust of the earth.

In verse 26 God will also make a covenant of peace with them. This emphasizes the gloriously harmonious, eternal relations between all the parties in the deity-nation-land association.

Verse 28 concludes by reiterating that God's saving work on Israel's behalf is not driven primarily by pity for his people, but by a concern for His reputation. God, dwelling in the midst of His people, will finally convince the nations of His sanctifying power. This will be the final proof of their election as a holy nation, consecrated to God for His glory.

Note: In my opinion, Ezekiel 36- 37 is one of the many places that makes the amillennial interpretation questionable. It is clear that Ezekiel is speaking of a literal land, a literal Israel, and a literal regeneration experience. Those who want to deny these things give no valid reason for departing from the literal sense, and even when they do, their comments are forced to treat the promises as literal.