

Ezekiel 36

God's purposes in aliyah —
the honouring of God's name



Operation
EXODUS™

A Ministry of Ebenezer Emergency Fund International



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'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. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.'

Ezekiel 36: 26-28

Aliyah is the Hebrew word for the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. The word literally means to 'go up'. In temple times the Israelites 'went up' to Jerusalem, located high in the mountains of central Israel, then 'ascended' to the Temple Mount to worship the Lord. The present day aliyah refers to the re-gathering of God's ancient people from wherever He has scattered them throughout the world, with the understanding that their return is ultimately to worship the Lord.

The Israelites were exiled from their land as a result of their disobedience, but many passages of the Hebrew Scriptures (*known to Christians as the Old Testament*), record God's promise to bring His people back from the nations and to settle them



in their own land. Ezekiel 36 shows us that aliyah is much more than a people returning to their ancient homeland; it is about the multiple blessings God brings, especially the transformation of the people's hearts from disobedience to love and obedience. It is about the restoration of His people and the Land. Ezekiel 36 comes at the end of God's prophetic judgement on the neighbouring nations who invaded and ruined Israel.

Ezekiel prophesied in Babylon soon after King Nebuchadnezzar had carried the Jewish people from Judea into captivity. Earlier the Assyrians had taken the people of the 10 northern tribes of Israel into captivity, so now the Land of Israel was virtually bereft of its people. Ezekiel understood that God would bring His people back from Babylon to the land, as had been revealed to the prophet Daniel, but he also understood that God was speaking to him, and through him, of a far greater ingathering — from all the nations where the Jewish people would be scattered.

This final ingathering would bring honour to the name of the God of Israel, reveal to the watching world His faithfulness and His love for His people, and display His character as one who keeps His promises for all time. We can now follow the unveiling of God's purposes through this remarkable chapter.

The Land laid Desolate (verses 1–7).

Understanding of God's purposes for the Jewish people begins with God's eternal covenant with Abraham, whereby He promised to bless the whole world through his seed and promised his descendants a land of their own. Jewish people have no other homeland and God's promise stands for ever. Today we are seeing the restoration of the land.

The chapter opens with God commanding Ezekiel: *'... prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, "... hear the word of the LORD ..."'* Then God speaks about the enemies who boast that the 'ancient heights' have become theirs (v.2). The people of Israel are attacked and utterly humiliated by the surrounding nations and the land laid desolate because of their rebellion against God. Yet despite this desolation and degradation hope arises. God will rescue His people and will judge their persecutors: *'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 ... I swear with uplifted hand that the nations around you will also suffer scorn."'*

The Land will be restored (verses 8–15).

Ruled by one pagan empire after another, the barren land with its ruined towns ridiculed by the nations will become fruitful. The prophet sees a day when the rightful owners would return and walk upon their own land, build houses and cultivate the soil. The people would be restored to the land and the land to the people, and they will know that He is the Lord. The nations will not insult or cause them to stumble any longer. *'But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. I am concerned for you and will look on you with favour; you will be ploughed and sown 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.'*

The exile was deserved (verses 16–20)

Through the prophet, God speaks of His anger at the way the people had behaved, worshipping idols and defiling the land, behaviour which led to their exile and their scattering among the nations.

"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. 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. I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions."

Aliyah Is 'for the sake of His Name' (verses 21–23)

The heart of this passage shows that God is doing this for the sake of His Holy Name which has been profaned amongst the nations.

In scripture a name reflects a person's character, so when the Lord speaks of His concern for His Name he is referring to His concern for His reputation among the nations. Through the restoration of the Jewish people and the land of Israel the nations will see that He is the true God. *"Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I show Myself Holy through you before their eyes"*.

The Final Ingathering & Cleansing (verses 23–33)

To emphasize the importance of this restoration God personally says 'I will' many times in these verses:

He will

Show the holiness of His great name (v.23)

Take them out of the nations (v.24)

Gather them from all the countries and bring them back to their own land (v.24)

Sprinkle clean water upon them and they will be clean (sanctified) (v.25)

Cleanse them from their impurities and idols (v.25)

Give them a new heart and put a new spirit in them (salvation) (v.26)

Remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh (repentance) (v.26)

Put His spirit within them and move them to follow His decrees (v.27)

Be their God and they His people (v.28)

Save them from their uncleanness (v.29)

Cause an abundant harvest (restore the fertility of the land) (v.29)

Resettle their towns and cause the ruins to be rebuilt (v.33)

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches...

Romans 11:17

Spiritual Restoration (verses 24–29)

Restored to the land, the Jewish people benefit from a restored faith and relationship with God. *“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. 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. 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.”*

The Land of Abundance (verses 29–30)

Little more than a century ago the whole land was a desolate wasteland, but as the early pioneers tilled the land and drained it of malarial swamps it has been transformed into a land of plenty. This is the evidence of God's blessing. *“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. 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.”*



Israel's Repentance (verses 31–32)

The day will come when the nation will realise what has happened and turn to God in repentance *“Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. 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!”*

*‘They will say,
“This land... has
become like the
garden of Eden...”’
Ezekiel 36:35*

The Land becomes fruitful! (verses 34–36)

‘The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the eyes of all who pass through it. They will say, “This land ... has become like the garden of Eden ...”



Many passages in the prophetic scriptures speak of Gentiles being involved in the return of the Jewish people to their land. Operation Exodus has been called of God to stand with the Jewish people and encourage and help them in this return. The ministry was birthed in 1991 at an intercessory prayer conference in Jerusalem when the Lord spoke to its founder Gustav Scheller, and said, ‘Now is the time to help my people go home.’ At the end of that year a ship was chartered and in three sailings brought more than a thousand Jewish people from the Ukraine and Russia to Israel. Since then more than 120,000 Jewish people have been helped to leave former Soviet Union countries and immigrate to Israel. Truly a fulfilment of the prophetic word!

Our prayer is that as you study Ezekiel chapter 36 the Holy Spirit will give you fresh understanding of the important place the return of the Jewish people occupies on God's agenda today. Maybe He will speak to you about getting involved in some way.

For more information about Operation Exodus please visit our website at www.operation-exodus.org, or write (see back cover for details)

All Scriptures from the New International Version (NIV), used by permission of International Bible Society

Operation Exodus is part of Ebenezer Emergency Fund International, a Christian organisation called by God to help Jewish people worldwide return to Israel, especially from the former Soviet Union, in fulfilment of Biblical prophecy. Started in 1991 with just three people, it now has a team of over 300, an International Board, offices in the UK, USA, Switzerland and Germany, National Co-ordinators in 27 countries and many bases in the FSU.



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