

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“The Comeback Kings-Kids”

36:16-38

An elite Israeli military unit responsible for cyber warfare has been accused of creating a virus that crippled Iran's computer systems and stopped work at its nuclear power station.

The virus is called Stuxnet. According to Reuters news service, Symantec and Kaspersky Labs have both speculated that Stuxnet was specifically targeted to hit Iran, and that the construction of such a virus likely required nation-state support to develop. Langner Communications (formed by cyber attack guru Ralph Langner) has directly stated that the Bushehr nuclear power plant is Stuxnet's intended target.

Computer experts have discovered a biblical reference embedded in the code of the computer worm that has pointed to Israel as the origin of the cyber attack.

The code contains the word "myrtus", which is the Latin biological term for the myrtle tree. The Hebrew word for myrtle, Hadassah, was the birth name of Esther, the Jewish queen of Persia.

In the Bible, The Book of Esther tells how the queen pre-empted an attack on the country's Jewish population and then persuaded her husband to launch an attack before being attacked themselves.¹

The children of Israel are back in their land and they intend to stay there!

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/8034987/Israeli-cyber-unit-responsible-for-iran-computer-worm-claim.html>

More than that: God has brought them back for the last time in order to fulfill all His many promises to them.

Our text in Ezekiel is about the return of the Jews to their land. It is a prophecy coming true before our very eyes.

The opening verses of chapter thirty-six, verses one through fifteen, were about the restoration of the land itself. We saw in those verses the prediction that the land would become fruitful and productive. We saw how that is true of Israel today, which has emerged as a leader in world agriculture. There have also been recent discoveries of vast natural gas and oil fields.

The rest of chapter thirty-six is about the restoration of the people to their land. Ezekiel begins by discussing a little of the history behind their dispersion.

Ezekiel 36:16 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

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

Ezekiel 36:18 Therefore I poured out My fury on them for the blood they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it.

Ezekiel 36:19 So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds.

Ezekiel 36:20 When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name - when they said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.'

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

Under the Law of Moses certain bodily discharges, especially of blood, rendered a person unable to participate in worship. It was therefore an image the Jews were aware of. It would appall them to see someone with a discharge of blood step anywhere near the Temple.

God used that as an illustration to say that the whole nation was defiled by the shedding of blood. This they had done both literally and figuratively.

- Literally they had degenerated into a violent society, shedding blood on the land.
- Figuratively it refers to the fact the leaders were misappropriating the law to oppress the people, especially those most in need of the law's protection.

The dispersion of the Jews brought God's name into reproach. It seemed to bystanders, especially the Gentile nations, as if He was not powerful enough to preserve them in their land. In fact the Lord loved them so much He was willing to suffer reproach while He disciplined them.

Ezekiel 36:22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.

Ezekiel 36:23 And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord," says the Lord God, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.

Again and again God mentions that His name was "profaned" by His people. They ought to have carried God's name to the Gentiles in order to save them. Instead their representation of God was like profanity.

"Profanity" doesn't mean swearing or using foul language. It can include that. It's anything that is inappropriate for worship in God's Temple. The Greek word translated "profane" means *outside the Temple*, thus inappropriate.

Without becoming a weird traditionalist, or legalistic, there are things that are inappropriate in worship. Swearing is one of those things and that's why I can't condone edgy pastors who like to sneak-in cuss words to their sermons.

Personally I think secular songs, written by nonbelievers, have no place in worship.

As we await the return of the Lord more and more things are going to be suggested to be introduced to worship. Let's be open to change and growth but be careful of stuff that really is inappropriate.

Ezekiel 36:24 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.

About once a year we do a prophecy update about the return of Jews from all over the world to Israel. *Aliyah* is the word used to describe the immigration of Jews back to the land of Israel. Someone who 'makes aliyah' is called *olah*, or *olim* (plural). On September 15 the Jerusalem Post posted a story titled, *17,880 immigrants arrived in 5770*.² The article went on to point out that the number of Jews making aliyah continues to rise each year.

It's happening just as Ezekiel said it would!

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

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

This is a promise to the Jews. It hasn't happened yet but will in the future. It is a promise that all Israel will be saved to serve the Lord.

How is that going to be accomplished? God will put Israel through the Great Tribulation.

The Tribulation is a seven-year period of time at the end of our current history during which God pours out His wrath upon the earth to prepare it for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is described in great detail in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, in chapters six through nineteen.

The Tribulation makes no sense unless you understand it is primarily about God preparing the nation of Israel to receive Jesus Christ as their Messiah. It's called the time of Jacob's trouble, referring to the descendants of the patriarch Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel).

People who say the church must go through the Tribulation in order to be somehow 'purified' are wrong on two counts:

² <http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=187135>

1. First, it is the time God has set aside to deal with Israel, not the church.
2. Second, Jesus said He would purify His church not by the Tribulation but by the washing of the water of the Word of God.

The first half of the Great Tribulation will be a time of relative peace for the Jews. The man we know as the antichrist will enforce a peace treaty with Israel allowing them to rebuild their Temple. But exactly half-way through the seven years, the antichrist will enter that Temple, stop the sacrifices, and desecrate the Temple by erecting a statue of himself. He will demand to be worshipped as God.

The Jewish people will be outraged and will refuse to bow down. When they do this, the antichrist will become obsessed with destroying them. That will be his primary goal during the second half of the Tribulation.

The persecution of the Jews will be fierce. But God will supernaturally protect them. At the return of Jesus, in His Second Coming, all the Jews left alive will see him and be saved.

All this is anticipated in verses twenty-five through twenty-seven. Verse twenty-eight follows the Second Coming; it's the establishment of the kingdom on the earth.

Ezekiel 36:28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

This takes place after the Great Tribulation, and after the Second Coming. The Lord will establish a kingdom on the earth for one thousand years. Israel will dwell in the land and worship the Lord. The Lord will rule over the earth from Jerusalem. You can read about it in chapter twenty of the Revelation.

Ezekiel 36:29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you.

Ezekiel 36:30 And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.

Both land and people will finally be blessed and be a blessing as God intended all along.

Ezekiel 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.

“Then” is a summary of what the Lord has been talking about. “Then,” in the last days through the Tribulation and by His Second Coming, Israel will be saved.

Ezekiel 36:32 Not for your sake do I do this," says the Lord God, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!"

Not for any worth or worthiness in them; not for any merit or desert of theirs; not for any goodness in them, or works of righteousness done by them. God chose Israel to reveal His own nature of love and grace.

Salvation has always been by grace through faith. A person believes God and God accounts it to them for righteousness based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. It's how saints were saved in the Old Testament as well as the New.

Ezekiel 36:33 'Thus says the Lord God: "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt.

Ezekiel 36:34 The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by.

Ezekiel 36:35 So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'

The land and the people of Israel will be an illustration of the grace of God to the other nations of the world in the future kingdom on earth.

Ezekiel 36:36 Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it."

Jesus once said that if He does not return when He does, at the end of the Great Tribulation, no flesh on earth would remain. Much of the earth's

population will be killed during the Great Tribulation. Among those who remain will be Gentile believers who will also enter in to the kingdom on earth.

The chapter ends with a picture of kingdom life on the earth.

Ezekiel 36:37 'Thus says the Lord God: "I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

Ezekiel 36:38 Like a flock offered as holy sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem on its feast days, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they shall know that I am the Lord." ' ' "

Three times a year Jerusalem would swell with pilgrims attending the mandatory feasts. In the future kingdom, it will be as if Jerusalem is always swelled with flocks of Jews who have come to inquire of and worship their Lord.

The land of Israel has been and is being restored. Just a few decades ago it was a desert wasteland. Today it produces much of the world's agriculture. Oil and natural gas has been found.

More importantly, aliyah is happening! God's people are returning to the land from all the other nations of the earth.

What Ezekiel saw prophetically, we are seeing literally!