

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"Brought Back to the Mountain"

36:1-15

I'm quoting a Jerusalem Post article from 2009.¹

In honor of the 50th anniversary of Israeli settlement in the Arava desert, a one-day conference was held... at the Sapir Center.

Amnon Navot presented a brief history of Arava desert settlement, focusing on how persistence and vision have overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

"Fifty years ago, a professor of agriculture by the name of Yitzhak Arnon visited the Arava and concluded that it was impossible to settle this region or to farm it. During the first years of the state, there was an army presence in the area, and furthermore, malaria was a problem. In 1958, Shai Ben Eliyahu and Hagai Porat decided that they wanted to found a community at Ein Yahav in the Central Arava. The various government agencies refused to support them, demanding a letter of intent from someone official. So they went straight to Ben Gurion, who turned red with anger when he heard how they had been refused. He wrote them the letter and in 1959, ten families arrived at Ein Yahav.

... they tried growing tomatoes. In 1962 [they] prepared another 250 acres for agriculture. The really big breakthrough came a few years later, when Simha Blatt... invented drip irrigation, and harvest yields increased dramatically. Today, over 6,000 people live in the Arava and supply 60% of Israel's fresh vegetables and more for export. I think that the main thing one needs to live here is faith! In another fifty years, I believe the Arava will change even more than anyone today could envision in their wildest imagination."

¹ http://zionism-israel.com/israel_news/2009/02/zionism-making-desert-bloom-not-just.html

The last fifty years has seen the desert of Israel blossom into a world leader in agriculture. It is exactly what you would expect from reading Bible prophecy regarding the last days.

For example. In Isaiah 27:6 you read,

Isaiah 27:6 Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, And fill the face of the world with fruit.

It's really hard to find stats for fruit production. Here's an old one that shows the fruitfulness of Israel.

Israel, in 1967, supplied only 11% of the world crop [of grapefruit] but, by 1970, her production had increased by 300%.²

Ezekiel thirty-seven is a passage that expresses both the restoration of the land of Israel in the last days and the return of dispersed Jews to the land.

The first section, verses one through fifteen, are about the land itself. They remind us we have witnessed a modern miracle: Israel is a nation again.

Ezekiel 36:1 "And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, 'O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord!

God wanted Ezekiel to "prophesy to the mountains of Israel." God had made unconditional promises to Israel regarding the land. They would possess it forever. But at the time of this writing, and for centuries afterward, they were dispossessed from their land, dispersed all over the world.

None of that could nullify God's plan.

Ezekiel 36:2 Thus says the Lord God: "Because the enemy has said of you, 'Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession,' "

Ezekiel 36:3 therefore prophesy, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because they made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you are taken up by the lips of talkers and slandered by the people" -

² <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/grapefruit.html>

Ezekiel 36:4 therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, the hills, the rivers, the valleys, the desolate wastes, and the cities that have been forsaken, which became plunder and mockery to the rest of the nations all around -

Ezekiel 36:5 therefore thus says the Lord God: "Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country." '

I'm told that in ancient times if a nation was dispossessed the other nations concluded that her 'god' was not powerful enough to protect her. Thus the 'god' of that nation was mocked and profaned.

Edom, the perpetually enemy of Israel, and the other nations mocked the God of Israel. It seemed He lacked the power to help His people.

Notice God, in verse five, called the land "My land." He remained and remains the Landlord. The fact Edom and others had driven out the Jews gave them no right to the land.

They completely missed what was happening. God's love for His people, the Jews, was so intense, so jealous, that He was willing to suffer mocking by the nonbelieving nations while disciplining His people by driving them from the land He promised them.

Christianity has taken a lot of hits over the thirty years I've been saved. Lots of very public scandals. Some were national; others more local.

God's love for His church is so intense, so jealous, that He is willing to suffer mocking by nonbelievers in order to discipline His saints publicly if necessary to stop them from doing even more harm.

Ezekiel 36:6 "Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains, the hills, the rivers, and the valleys, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and My fury, because you have borne the shame of the nations."

In other words, God is going to do something to those nations that mocked and profaned. Instead of thinking themselves superior, they ought to have

seen His dealings with His own people and been very afraid. I mean, if God was willing to put His beloved nation through such harsh discipline, how would He deal with those who opposed Him?

God's dealings with Israel through the centuries should lead any thoughtful person to repentance - *not* to anti-semitism.

Ezekiel 36:7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "I have raised My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame.

God cannot lie. He doesn't need to say things like, "Let Me be honest with you," or "I swear." But here He emphasized the absolute truth of what He would do to those nations by saying, "I have raised My hand in an oath."

The nations of the world should take notice of Israel's rebirth on May 14, 1948. Instead of trying to destroy her, they ought to marvel at her as a miracle - a real, modern miracle. Otherwise the time will come for those nations that they will "bear their own shame."

Ezekiel 36:8 But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come.

Ezekiel 36:9 For indeed I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown.

Ezekiel 36:10 I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.

Ezekiel 36:11 I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 36:12 Yes, I will cause men to walk on you, My people Israel; they shall take possession of you, and you shall be their inheritance; no more shall you bereave them of children."

God promised to restore the land at the same time He regathered the people to it. That is exactly what we have witnessed over the past sixty-plus years Israel has been a nation.

How much prophecy needs to be fulfilled before a person acknowledges that God is the Lord?

Ezekiel 36:13 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because they say to you, 'You devour men and bereave your nation of children,'

Ezekiel 36:14 therefore you shall devour men no more, nor bereave your nation anymore," says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 36:15 Nor will I let you hear the taunts of the nations anymore, nor bear the reproach of the peoples anymore, nor shall you cause your nation to stumble anymore," says the Lord God.' "

Besides punishing Israel's enemies and restoring Israel's land, God will also remove Israel's reproach. The mockery and humiliation (taunts and scorn) Israel had been forced to endure will cease. She will once again be restored to her position of prestige as God's Chosen People.

In one sense I find it hard to comment on these verses. We should just read them, then read the Jerusalem Post, and realize that they either have been fulfilled or are in the process of being fulfilled.

I keep saying this but it bears repeating. Of the estimated 2500 prophecies in the Bible, over 2000 have already been literally, amazingly, fulfilled. Jesus Christ fulfilled over 300 in His life and death alone. The calculations of the odds of that happening are astronomical.

As exciting as all this is prophetically - and it gets even more exciting as we move forward in Ezekiel - there needs to be an application for us beyond the prophecies.

There is. Israel had acted in ways that brought God's name into reproach. So can we as Christians. But we can also live above reproach and reflect positively on the Lord. Listen to this quote.

Christians play a very important role in the society. They are always expected to do the right thing and live lives that serve as role models for others. Even in these times when social structures are collapsing, family life deteriorating and everyone appears to be concerned about acquiring wealth no matter how, a lot of people are looking up to Christians to show the way and provide the answers. The Christian life is to prove that the Christian teachings are true and makes them attractive to those within and outside the Church. As followers of Christ we are under obligation to live as Christ lived and any conduct falling short of the standards given to us in the Scriptures will invite criticism and bring reproach on the name of Christ and inevitably restrict the growth of the Church. The Scriptures assure us that we can partake of the divine character of

Christ, that we can be people of integrity, people who live above reproach. Billy Graham puts it this way, “when we speak of integrity as a moral value, it means that a person is the same on the inside as he is on the outside. There is no discrepancy between what he says and what he does, between his walk and his talk. A person of integrity can be trusted and he is the same person alone a thousand miles away from home as he is in Church or in his home.” The Church needs men and women who live above reproach, who are people of integrity. The Church needs men and women who cannot be bought, whose word is their bond, who put character above wealth and who will make no compromise with wrong and who will be honest in small things as in great things.

Usually this kind of talk deteriorates into behaviors we think a Christian *can* or *cannot* participate in. Drinking, dancing, smoking, tattoo’s, body piercings, watching TV and movies, listening to certain music, styles of dress, holidays. Etc., etc.

A group of pastors I am part of had a discussion about obesity bringing a reproach on the Lord! So it could be just about anything.

The answers to the outward behaviors are in your heart. It’s not what you can’t do, it’s what you ought to do, and that is represent Jesus. If something isn’t inherently sinful, then you must decide if it is something that really, truly, properly represents the Lord to the lost and among the saints.

Because in the end what is going to matter is your motives. Were they godly? Were you keeping yourself in a place where you were ready to see the Lord? Ready always to give an answer of the hope that is in you? Redeeming the time spiritually because the days are evil?

I can only answer those questions for myself. I ask you to do the same. If you are sincere, and sincerely seek the Lord, then you will find yourself acting in ways that do not bring His name into reproach.

If you find that you are bringing a reproach on the Lord, then it’s no good trying to defend yourself. It means you probably aren’t really being truthful about your motives!

Live above reproach. The Lord is coming any moment.