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THE CHARACTER OF GOD VINDICATED THROUGH THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL ON THEIR LAND: AN EXAMINATION OF EZEKIEL 36:22-38

Ian S. Bacon, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

The topic for this year's conference, "Israel, Antisemitism, and War," is a crucial issue to address due to the current public discourse on social media, such as podcasts and YouTube. The unfortunate fact is that these voices are influencing the church. The replacement theology espoused by Covenant Theology has made its way into mainstream conversations, which has caused the church's view of Israel to sour greatly.

This paper will explore Ezekiel 36:22-38 to offer a response to the current debate involving Israel. It will be argued that, according to Ezek 36:23, God's present and future actions on Israel's behalf are a vindication of His character. This is demonstrated in Israel's current regathering in the land in unbelief, and the future restoration of the people and land of Israel. Therefore, the Church should be celebrating what God is doing through Israel in the land as a declaration of the character and glory of God.

To demonstrate that the church must understand the message of Ezekiel 36:22-38, this paper will first establish that God's character is tied to Israel's future. The next section will examine three specific characteristics of God bound up in His relationship with Israel: 1) God is Holy, 2) God is Judge, and 3) God is Creator. Then this paper will address two common

objections made against supporting Israel: 1) the modern state of Israel is unregenerate and is replaced by the Church, and 2) support for Israel undermines the Church and Christ.

LITERARY STRUCTURE OF EZEKIEL 36

The literary structure of Ezekiel 36 offers insight into the message of this important chapter. This chapter presents its information in a chiastic form.

a The condition of the land of Israel (vv.1-15)

b The condition of the people of Israel (vv. 16-21)

c **CENTER:** The reputation of God among the nations through the restoration of Israel (vv. 22-24)

b' The condition of the people of Israel (vv. 25-29a)

a' The condition of the land of Israel (vv. 29b- 38)

This chiasm offers two important insights: 1) the center of the message rests on restoring the reputation of God and 2) an inclusio[1] is formed through the description of the judgment and restoration of the land. The chapter's opening and closing suggest that the priority of its meaning is placed on the land. Thus, the emphatic message of Ezekiel 36 is: God's own character is tethered to the future physical restoration of the land of Israel.

Furthermore, a contrast exists between Ezek 36:1-21 and Ezek 36:22-38. Ezek 36:1-21 primarily describes what has been done *to* the people of Israel and the land in judgment. Ezek 36:22-38 primarily proclaims what will be done *for* the people of Israel and the land in

[1] An inclusio can be "in both prose and poetry." William W. Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 303.

restoration. This is made clearer when one compares the characteristics of the land and people as described in this chapter.

Ezek 36:1-21 **The condition of the land of Israel (vv.1-15)**	**Ezek 36:22-38** **The condition of the land of Israel (vv. 29b-38)**
In Judgment Possessed by other nations Desolate Harassed Ruins Abandoned **In Restoration** Branches bear fruit Cultivated and sown Cities inhabited/populated Fruitful people and animals multiplied	**In Restoration** Grain multiplied No famine Fruit of the trees multiplied Produce of the field multiplied People cleansed from wrongdoings Cities populated Ruins will be rebuilt Desolate cultivated No desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by Land like the Garden of Eden Desolated cities inhabited and fortified Be known that it is the Lord who rebuilt and planted People increased like a flock Cities filled like a flock of people
Ezek 36:1-21 **The condition of the people of Israel (vv. 16-21)**	**Ezek 36:22-38** **The condition of the people of Israel (vv. 25-29a)**
In Judgment People defiled their own land with their ways and deeds Like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity Wrath poured on them Shed blood on the land Scattered/dispersed them among nations/lands	**In Restoration** Clean Cleansed from filthiness and idols New heart and new spirit Heart of stone replaced with a heart of flesh Holy Spirit within them Walks carefully in God's statutes and ordinances Live in the land God's people Saved from uncleanness

The Contrast Between Ezek 36:1-21 and Ezek 36:22-38

This chart shows a complete reversal: an unfaithful people and a devastated land are brought to eschatological restoration. For this to occur, God's awesome attributes will be on full display to His glory.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL

The Vindication of God Among the Nations (Ezek 36:23)

To demonstrate that God's actions in Ezek 36:22-28 reflect God's character, one must first examine the unique phrase, "and I will sanctify My great name" (וקדשתי את שמי הגדול) in Ezek 36:23. Doing so will aid in understanding its weight upon the interpretation of this passage. One would expect that קדש is used in a context that speaks of a people that "defiled" the land (Ezek 36:16), which "profaned" the name of God (Ezek 36:21-23). This would require that the land and people be sanctified.[2] What is interesting here is that the subject is not the land or people of Israel, but rather, it is God. Indeed, this is significant, because as Steven Tuell observes, "This is the only place in Scripture where the Lord acts to sanctify the Lord's own name."[3] Obviously, God cannot place Himself back into a state of holiness, for His very nature is holy.

To comprehend what is taking place here, the factitive action of the verb must be correlated with God's "great name." Walther Zimmerli explains the situation: "During the exile,

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[2] "It requires a special act to bring a thing or person into a state of holiness. The factitive of the verb, to set a thing or person in a state of holiness, is denoted most frequently by the Piel. The focus is on the act of consecration." Jackie A. Naude, "קדש" in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis: Volume 3*, Willem A. VanGemeren, editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1997), 884. The factitive function of the Piel indicates "the subject of the verb in the Piel causes its direct object to enter a state that can be described by the same verb in the Qal." Ronald Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax* (University of Toronto Press, 2007), 59.

[3] Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 247.

however, Yahweh's name, which is bound up with his own people, is ridiculed among the foreign countries. These are Yahweh's people, and they had to leave their land." Ezek 36:21 states that this is the cause of God's name being "profaned." As Daniel Block notes,

> Outsiders were left to conclude that either Yahweh had willingly abandoned his people, or that he was incapable of defending them against the superior might of Marduk, the god of Babylon. The first option challenges Yahweh's credibility and integrity; the second, his sovereignty. In either case, his reputation has been profaned among the nations. Thus, the defilement of the land had led ultimately to the defilement of Yahweh's name.[4]

What must be put back into its proper state is the name of God among the nations. Within the context, one understands that "God's honor was at stake."[5]

Therefore, God's own reputation must be restored. Furthermore, it is more than God's reputation; His very character is at stake. The divine actions Ezekiel describes in Ezek 36: 22-38, taken on behalf of Israel and the land, are meant to vindicate[6] or clear God's character from the suspicion and criticism of the nations of the world. Thus, it will be beneficial to link the three sections of Ezekiel 36:21-38 (Section 1: vv.22-24, Section 2: vv. 25-29a, Section 3: vv. 29b-38) to specific attributes of God that help us understand Ezekiel's theology.[7]

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[4] Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing), 348.

[5] Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48* (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 178.

[6] This might explain why this specific word is chosen in the NASB: "I will vindicate my holy name…" and in the ESV: "And I will vindicate my holy name…" A similar idea is found in the NET: "I will magnify my great name…," in the HCS: "I will honor the holiness of my great name…," and in the NIV: "I will show the holiness of my great name…" The KJV uses a literal rendering: "And I will sanctify my great name…"

[7] Certainly many more attributes of God could be brought into this paper. The attributes chosen for this paper are intentionally narrow to what is being communicated in the selected verses discussed.

God is Holy: God is Tied to Israel in Their Land (Ezek 36:22-24)

God's attribute of holiness permeates Ezekiel. Indeed, the book tracks God's holy presence leaving the temple in judgment (Ezekiel 8-10), only to return to a future restored temple in Ezekiel 40-48. When writing on God's attribute of holiness, Millard Erickson writes, "The sacredness of God is often conveyed to the objects and places associated with Him."[8] One cannot help but notice the union of God's name to Israel and their land in this passage. Regarding Ezek 36:21-23, Zimmerli writes,

> It is now God's unique logic, however, that he does not disassociate his name from his people but, in an inexplicable faithfulness, allows it to remain bound to them. Because of this connection, he begins to be jealous for his holy name. Ezekiel 36:21 says that he is concerned about his holy name. Therefore, he acts.[9]

God's sovereign action on His own behalf is how God's name will be exonerated.

We must understand why God's name is eternally linked with the land of Israel, and therefore His reputation. From the moment God called out Abraham, He set him apart to establish a nation through his descendants (Gen 12:1-3). This promise of land was furthered when God cut the covenant with Abraham in Gen 15:18-21,

> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.

This promised gifting of land is confirmed in Deut 30:1-10. J. Dwight Pentecost offers the background to this covenant by explaining that "the children of Israel, the physical seed of

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[8] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 256.

[9] Walther Zimmerli, *The Fiery Throne: The Prophets and Old Testament Theology* (Fortress Press, MN, 2003), 92.

Abraham, are facing a crisis in their national existence."[10] The problem was that enemies occupied the land God had promised them. Pentecost continues,

> As a result, certain important considerations must be faced by the nation. Is the land of Palestine still their possession? Did the inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant, which all agree was conditional, set aside the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant? Could Israel hope to enter the permanent possession of their land in the face of such opposition? To answer these important questions, God stated again His covenant promises concerning Israel's possession and of inheritance in the land in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, which statement we call the Palestinian Covenant because it answers the question of Israel's relation to the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant.[11]

Not only does it "reaffirm to Israel, in no uncertain terms, their title deed to the land of promise," but it "amplifies the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant."[12] "The amplification, coming after willful unbelief and disobedience in the life of the nation, supports the contention that the original promise was given to be fulfilled in spite of disobedience."[13] Pentecost concludes, "As one surveys the wide areas included in this one passage, which sets forth the covenantal program, one is compelled to feel that God takes Israel's relation to the land as a matter of extreme importance."[14]

This is because God desired to eternally dwell in the land of Israel. The following verses attest to this,

"You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established" (Exod 15:17)

[10] J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1964), 95.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.., 96.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

"Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you" (Lev 26:11)
"I will dwell among the sons of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel" (1 Kings 6:3)
"For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. "This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it" (Psa 132:13-14)
"He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die…Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever" (Ezek 43:7,9)
"Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you" (Zech 2:11)
"Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain" (Zech 8:3)

God Dwelling With Israel in the Land

A holy God whose glory dwelt in the land of Israel was a testimony to the other nations that Israel's God is the one true God.

One of the primary condemnations throughout Ezekiel is the worship of the idols of other nations. In Ezek 36:18-19, God proclaims,

> 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. Also, I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.

At first glance, this appears to be an action that is counterintuitive to preserving God's honor. Indeed, previous generations would have considered such an action an affront to God's name and reputation. Block writes,

> Twice Moses had to move Yahweh to withdraw his threat to destroy Israel by arguing that the nations would draw the wrong conclusions concerning his motivation and character if he carried out his plan (Exod 32:12; Num 14:15-16).[15]

Yet, in Ezekiel's day the situation was such that Israel had to be out of the land to which their holy God was linked. Their exile did also cause insult to God's name, as indicated in Ezek 36:20-21,

> 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.' But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.

For this to be remedied, action was required that only God Himself can initiate.

God is Judge: The People Judged and Restored on Their Land (Ezek 36:25-29a)

When God's holy presence dwelled among the people of Israel on the land, this resulted in the land being a divine space. This means the land needed to be guarded from sin. When Israel engaged in idol worship, it defiled the land (Ezek 36:20). This important concept of the relationship between the defilement and profaning of the name of the Lord is also stated in Lev 20:3; 22:32.[16] Hartley explains,

> Since he sets his name amid his people, they must conduct themselves so they will not defile it. For whenever they transgress any of God's laws, they shame his name, i.e., tarnish his reputation. His reputation is intricately tied up with Israel, for Yahweh has identified himself as the God who delivered Israel from the land of Egypt, where they were in bondage to a powerful nation.[17]

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[15] Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, 348.

[16] It is important to note that this is done through the practice of idolatry, which is said to pollute the sanctuary in Lev 20:3. Jacob Milgrom writes, "Here is the first (and in the Torah, the only) explicit statement that idolatry pollutes the sanctuary (see Jer 7:30; 32:34; Ezek 5:11; 23:38). The importance of this verse should not be overlooked. It is the first time that any non-YHWHistic worship is impure." Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 254. Milgrom believes that this verse establishes the foundation upon which the prophets declare judgment against idolatry. Thus, "idolatry henceforth will become a factor in Israel's destiny." Ibid.

[17] John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 362.

When Israel was faithful and served their God, they also protected the name of their God.

God sent Ezekiel to notify Israel that they were in violation of their obligation as God's chosen people. So much so that Ezek 36:17 says, "Their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity."[18] God needed to judge the people who were in this condition. Therefore, God punished the people through exile out of the land, demonstrating that He is a just God, even in His dealings with His own people who carry His name. Even if that means expelling them from their land, it must be done to satisfy the justice of God. The expulsion of Israel from their land is a demonstration of the justice of God to "everyone who passes by," a phrase used by other prophets.

"And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?" (1 Kings 9:8)
"As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?" (2 Chron 7:21)
"To make their land a desolation, an object of perpetual hissing; Everyone who passes by it will be astonished and shake his head." (Jer 18:16)
"I will also make this city a desolation and an object of hissing; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its disasters." (Jer 19:8)
"This is the exultant city which dwells securely, who says in her heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me." How she has become a desolation, A resting place for beasts! Everyone who passes by her will hiss and wave his hand in contempt. (Zeph 2:15)

Everyone Who Passes By

Yet, leaving an unclean and unfaithful people in foreign lands forever abandoned is not God's divine will for Israel. God will restore His reputation through the restoration of His people.

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[18] This is an allusion back to Ezekiel 16, in which this idea of Israel being a woman who is a harlot is vividly portrayed.

Indeed, when God restores Israel to an Edenic condition, this too will be a demonstration of Israel's God to "everyone who passes by" (Ezek 36:34).

Ezek 36:25-27 reflects the special relationship God has with Israel, which mirrors what is stated in Jer 31:31-33.[19] Yet, what is unique to Ezekiel is the promise of a new heart through the Holy Spirit.[20] Ezek 36:27 reads, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." The point is clear: "Yahweh will cause His people to be obedient to Himself."[21] The just Judge will enable His people to live obediently in relationship with Him.

It is due to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in this passage that Covenant theologians believe that there is a transference of God's chosen people from Israel to the church. Scholars who support this view will often correlate this passage with New Testament passages that speak of the Holy Spirit's work in the church and deduce that a replacement has transpired. For instance, Rodrigo Morales connects Gal 4:6 with Ezek 36:26-27,

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[19] Ezek 36:25-27 is also a restatement of Ezek 11:11-21 and Ezek 18:30-32. Anna Shirav Hamernick distinguishes the two contexts: "Ezekiel 11 provides consolation following the grim prophecies of Jerusalem's downfall, while Ezek 36:16-32 heralds a new covenant with Israel." Anna Shirav Hamernik, *Ezekiel Traditions in the Second Period: 4Qwords of Ezekiel in its Broader Context* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2025), 165.

[20] There is an ongoing discussion among evangelical and dispensational scholars about what constitutes a new covenant passage in the Old Testament. In an exception article on this matter, Dave Fredrickson surveyed the models posited by scholars and offered categories that represent the six primary elements of the new covenant. They are: 1) the enactment of a future, divine covenant with national Israel that is not verbally linked to Abraham or David, 2) the Spirit of Yahweh as an agent, 3) the internal spiritual transformation of the recipients, 4) the uninterrupted permanence of the benefits, 5) the physical regathering of Israel, and 6) the physical (civic, agricultural, economic, military) restoration of national Israel. Dave Fredrickson, "Which are the New Covenant Passages in the Bible," in *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant,* Mike Stallard, editor (Schaumburg, Ill.: Regular Baptist Press, 2012), 61. Under this categorical rubric, Ezekiel 36 should be regarded as a new covenant passage. While the term "new covenant" does not appear in this passage, there is a direct correlation with a changed "heart" (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26) that represents a spiritual transformation of Israel due to the work of the Spirit of Yahweh.

[21] Daniel I Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48,* 356.

> This passage [Ezek 36:26-27], as well as traditions that developed out of it, most likely represents a key part of the background to Paul's statement in Gal 4:6: 'God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, 'Abba, Father!' Given the close linguistic and thematic resonances between the two passages, the restoration eschatology of the broader context of the Ezekiel passage should inform our interpretation of Paul's statement about the Spirit.[22]

Morales concludes, "The logic of this verse reflects Paul's earlier formation in [Gal] 3:14 that the outpouring of the Spirit is integrally connected to the extension of blessings to the Gentiles."[23]

Likewise, Joshua Greever believes that 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 promotes the idea that the church finds fulfillment in Ezek 36:26-27. He writes,

> In Ezekiel, God does not renege on the Sinai covenant's promise of presence, but he locates it within a new and better covenant, which is based on the forgiveness of sins, cleansing from impurity, and the power of the Spirit (see 36:25-29)…Like Ezekiel, Paul conceived of the enduring legitimacy of God's promise to dwell among his people, and such a promise would only come to fruition in and through a new and everlasting covenant. Certainly there was an irreducible discontinuity associated with this new covenant, but the fact that Paul drew from a canonical trajectory tethered to and encapsulated by a promise within the old covenant suggests that for Paul there were significant elements of continuity between the covenants. This continuity is traced along teleological lines, for the old covenant's goal or intention of a restored Edenic relationship with God by means of a covenant now had finally and climactically come to fruition in the new covenant inaugurated by Christ and enjoyed by the church.[24]

These scholars argue the promise of a new covenant in Ezekiel 36 must be correlated with Leviticus 26. Greever explains,

> The content, basis, and canonical trajectory of the promise of God's presence in Leviticus 26:11-12 provided Paul a rich and robust foundation from which to urge believers to holiness. Indeed, Paul's citation of Leviticus 26 in the context of his new covenant ministry suggests that he was aligning himself with Ezekiel's canonical trajectory.[25]

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[22] Rodrigo Morales, *The Spirit and the Restoration of Israel* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 127.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Joshua M. Greever, "We Are the Temple of the Living God" (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1): The New Covenant as the Fulfillment of God's Promise of Presence," in the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 19:3 (Fall 2015), 106.

[25] Ibid.

The rationale for this argument is that the curses in Leviticus 26 describe Israel's breaking of their covenant, and thus they are no longer God's covenantal people. Yet, Ezek 36:25-29 and Jer 31:31-33 make it very clear that God is declaring a renewed covenantal relationship with the people of Israel. Charles Feinberg argues,

> Jeremiah explicitly presents the parties to the covenant: the Lord, the house of Israel, and the house of Judah. Notice that the covenant brings to mind the cleavage of the nation into two kingdoms, but notice also that both parts of the nation are included. The whole covenant is for the whole nation. Significantly, the new covenant will be made with God's chosen people, as was the old. It could not be made with the church because no former (old) covenant had been made with her.[26]

Furthermore, Ezekiel's pronouncements of judgment do align with the curses depicted in Leviticus 26. Yet, what Greever and others miss is Ezekiel's proclamations of blessings upon the people and the land that directly correlate with Leviticus 26.

Blessings	Curses
Fertile land (Lev 26:4-5, 10)	Unproductive land (Lev 26:16, 19-20, 26)
Live safely in the land (Lev 26:5)	Live in foreign nations (Lev 26:33)
Savage beasts removed (Lev 26:6)	Beasts will devour (Lev 26:22)
Sword removed (Lev 26:6)	Sword avenged (Lev 26:25)
Victory over enemies (Lev 26:7)	Defeated by enemies (Lev 26:17, 25)
God's favor (Lev 9)	God's disfavor (Lev 26:17)

Blessings and Curses in Leviticus 26[27]

[26] Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 219.

[27] Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 319.

Ezekiel intentionally draws on this chapter in Leviticus to highlight that the curses of judgment do not dismiss the blessings of restoration. Therefore, one must conclude that covenant theologians are wrong to replace the promise of the restoration of Israel with the church.

Additionally, it is crucial that one observes the context of the interplay between a restored people and their land. Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes this: "The period of the new covenant is virtually linked with the restoration of Israel to her land, and this too will put it into the future."[28] When one observes the details of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, it becomes clearer.

	Jeremiah 31	**Ezekiel 36**
New Covenant promise of a restored land	Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'When the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever" (Jer 31:38-40)	"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers, so you will be My people, and I will be your God. 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. 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" (Ezek 36:24, 28-30)

New Covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Yet, Covenant theologians believe the promise of land in this covenant is conditional, and they argue that the exile is proof of this. Gary Burge makes this argument,

> This terror of land loss came to Judah in 586 BC in the form of Babylonian armies. Psalm 48 records the pride and overconfidence of Israel's view of land: it was a national possession guaranteeing divine privilege. Psalm 137 describes shock and grief that swamped the nation when a Babylonian siege demolished Jerusalem's walls. The entire book of Lamentations wrestles with the confusion of the loss of promise, a loss that Israel

[28] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1989), 357.

> had never imagined- that a life with Yahweh and a life in the land can come to an end (Hos. 9:17).[29]

Burge asserts that a negative view of the land developed, as evidenced in the writings of Josephus,

> They are a people widely distributed throughout the empire without a necessary territorial base. The benefit of life within their ranks is not an eschatological promise of the defeat of the Gentiles and the resumption of an Israelite kingdom. Nor will blessing be found in the land given as reward. Instead, obedience to God within the Jewish framework will result in a better life, longevity, even prosperity. Here we see that Judaism's 'Land Theology' has been entirely redefined. And it will be a redefinition that will deeply influence the formation of Christian thinking in the New Testament.[30]

Burge contends that Jesus reversed the land promises. He writes, "Jesus' central message: the kingdom of God. While he announces the arrival in the land, in no manner is the kingdom linked to the territorial aspirations of Judaism- as were the 'kingdom aspirations of the Maccabean era."[31] Burge has now separated Jesus from any Old Testament theology of land restoration. Burge concludes, "Jesus is at odds with the 'land theologies' of his days."[32]

However, Burge's theological conclusions do not align with the evidence from writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). There are clear indications within the DSS that they relied heavily on Ezekiel's promise of the restoration of the people and the land. Anna Hamernick has conducted research on the text of *Pseudo Ezekiel,* writing,

> The depiction of the desolated land in 4Q386 1 ii, line 2, which mirrors the current state of the land, resembles the portrayal of the land in Ezekiel 36. (e.g. Ezek 36:4,10,33,35,38), wherein it is employed to juxtapose the future gathering and restoration. The desolate condition of the land, as perceived by Ezekiel, serves as the

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[29] Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 7.

[30] Ibid.,23-24.

[31] Ibid., 33.

[32] Ibid.

> starting point of 4Q386 1 ii, as well as the foundation for a critical moment during the establishment of the future promise in Ezek 36:16-32 (especially verses 24-32). To describe the covenant, the author employs the phrase לב חדש ורוח חדשה אתן בקרבכם ('a new heart and a new spirit…" Ezek 36:26), akin to a similar phrase found in 4Q386.[33]

The DSS material correlates the restoration of the land with the key word "plant" in Ezek 36:36. Paul Swarup writes, "The two metaphors, 'an eternal planting' and 'a house of holiness', were used extensively by the DSS community in expression of their self-understanding."[34]

This expectation of Messiah's return to bring the kingdom and restore the land did not dissipate in the New Testament. The disciples expected that Jesus would bring the kingdom in Acts 1:6, which reads, "So, when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus Himself confirmed that He would return to the land in Matthew 24-25. In Matt 25:31, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne." One sees in this verse that Jesus is coming. The interpretative question is: from where to where? Jesus is coming from heaven to the physical earth to reign over His kingdom. The "throne" Jesus refers to would correlate with Ezek 43:7, "He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die." God returning to this temple-throne

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[33] Anna Shirav Hamernik, *Ezekiel Traditions in the Second Period*, 207

[34]Paul N.W. Swarup, "An Eternal Planting, A House of Holiness: A Self-Understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls Community," in *Tyndale Bulletin* 54:1 (NA 2003), 151. Fourteen Dead Sea Scroll texts refer to "planting": 1QHa XIV (VI):13b-19a; 4Q428 Frg. 8:1–5; 4Q429 Frg. 4 1:1–5; (2) 1QHa XVI (VIII):4- 13, 20b–26; IQHb Frg. 2; 4QHb Frg. 10:11–12; (3) 1QS V111:1–10; (4) 1QS XI:7b–9a; (5) CD I:5b–8a; 4QDa (4Q266) Frg. 2 1:10–12; 4QDc (4Q268) Frg. 1:12b–15a; (6) 4Q418 Frgs. 81, 81a: 7b–14; (7) 4Q423 Frgs. 1, 2:1–9; (8) 4QFIor. (4Q174) 111:1–13; (9) 4QShirShabb a (4Q400) Frg. 1 I:1–21; (10) TS a (11Q19) XXIX: 2–10; (11) 1QS V:4–7; (12) 1QS IX:3–6; (13) IQpHab XII: 1–10; and (14) 4Qplsa d Frg. 1:1–8. Ibid., 156, footnote 2. Swarup concludes, "These two metaphors express the deep yearning of the DSS community for a complete restoration of Israel, for a return to Edenic conditions as before the Fall, and for a temple which was pure." Ibid.

will vindicate Himself. Hence, the fulfillment of Ezek 36:25-29 is directly based on God's character. The people back in the land of Israel exhibit that God, as Judge, has allowed Israel to be in His presence.

God is Creator: Land Returned Like Eden (Ezek 29b-38)

When God, in His holiness, judges the people and restores them, God's glory can dwell on the land through Messiah. This will have significantly positive ramifications on the land. A key description of the future land is found in Ezek 36:35, which reads, "They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the Garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited." The phrase "like the Garden of Eden" showcases God's attribute as Creator.

In the Garden of Eden narrative in Genesis 2, the Creator planted a particular place for man to be in His presence. It was God's initiative as Creator. God provided the perfect environment for the first couple to thrive. God provided abundant vegetation and trees that bore fruit for food, and water from the rivers in Eden. The Garden of Eden in Genesis 2 is the divine ideal of the Creator. It was a place of God's sovereign rule over creation and a place of God's dwelling. As such, it was a place that needed to be guarded. When Adam failed to do so, it became a place of judgment. The first couple was expelled from the Garden of Eden into a desolate land. Yet, hope for the return of Eden in the last days comprises the message of Scripture post-fall. Thus, Eden is a place of new creation.

When one understands the motifs that proceed from Genesis 2-3, it is no surprise that Ezekiel utilizes the Garden of Eden narrative in a way that no other biblical author does.[35] There

[35] Of the thirteen times "Eden" is mentioned in the Tanakh (Gen 2:8, 10, 15; 3:23-24; 4:16; Isa 51:3; Joel 2:3), Ezekiel accounts for half of its usage (Ezek 27:23; 28:13; 31:9, 16, 18; 36:35).

is structural movement in Ezek 36:33-36 which demonstrates a reversal from desolation to the height of creation in the Garden of Eden.

From Desolation to Restoration	Highest in the Garden of Eden
Ezek 36:33- Thus says the Lord God, "In 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. Ezek 36:34- And the desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.	Ezek 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.' Ezek 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."

From Desolation to Restoration in Ezek 36:33-36

Ezek 36:33-36 anticipates the expectation of the Edenic divine design of God dwelling on the land. The following graph highlights this movement:

"Waste places" (Ezek 36:33)	"desolate land/desolation" (Ezek 36:34-35)	"Cultivated" (Ezek 36:34)	"inhabited" (Ezek 36:35)	"rebuilt" (Ezek 36:36)	"Planted" (Ezek 36:36)
Ezekiel 6:6; 26:20; 33:24, 27; 36:10; 38:12	Ezekiel 6:14; 14:15; 15:8; 25:3; 29:12; 30: 7, 12; 33:28	36:9	12:20; 26:17,19,20; 29:11; 34:13; 35:9; 36:10, 11; 38:12	36:10	17:5,7,8,10; 19:10,13

From Waste Place to Planted in Eden in Ezekiel 36

It is only God as Creator who will plant Israel in the land, which will produce so abundantly after being judged so severely. It is crucial to note Ezekiel's relationship between the New Covenant and the Creator restoring Eden in Ezek 36:22-38. This is the identical pattern in Jer 31:31-40. Jer 31:31-34 portrays the restoration of the people through the New Covenant, and Jer 31:35-40 establishes that this restoration is predicated on God as Creator. Jer 31:35-40 reads,

> Thus says the LORD,
> Who gives the sun for light by day
> And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
> Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar;
> The LORD of hosts is His name: "If this fixed order departs

> From before Me," declares the LORD,
> "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease
> From being a nation before Me forever."
>
> Thus says the LORD,
>
> "If the heavens above can be measured
> And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
> Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
> For all that they have done," declares the LORD.
>
> "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."

This linkage confirms that the restoration of the people and land of Israel is eternally linked to the Creator. Wayne Grudem writes, "God made the universe so that it would show forth the excellence of His character; this is, it would show forth His glory."[36] Likewise, it is true that when God restores the land of Israel as Eden after its complete desolation, it is a display of the Creator's glory.

COMMON OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S FUTURE PLANS FOR ISRAEL

In an academic context, some may dispute the inclusion of frequent objections against supporting Israel, voiced in podcasts and on social media. Yet these platforms strongly influence culture and the church.[37] The discussions taking place in this arena are driving public support (or

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[36] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 189.

[37] The propagator of anti-Israel material used in this section will be primarily Tucker Carlson. There are two reasons for this choice. First, Carlson has made content attacking politicians for supporting Israel and has invited guests on his show who offer arguments rooted in replacement theology. Secondly, his audience is quite impressive. His YouTube channel indicates that he has 5.74 million subscribers. Tucker Carlson, "Tucker Carlson," found on YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/@TuckerCarlson. Statistics from outside sources are difficult to find.

a lack thereof), and they have sway in how Christians view Israel. It will be beneficial to address the objections commonly offered to reject any future for Israel.

The Modern State of Israel is Unregenerate and is Replaced by the Church

One of the biggest objections put forth in the current discussion regarding Israel is this: The modern state of Israel is unregenerate; therefore, spiritual salvation is only for the church. It is on this basis that they conclude that modern Israel is not biblical, nor should it be supported. Thus, Israel has nothing to do with the Israel of the Bible, and the OT Israel must be distinguished within God's plans from present-day Israel. There is a considerable amount of content on podcasts and YouTube that promotes the idea that the unregenerate nature and outward behavior of the Jews today indicate that they have no importance; the church has replaced them.[38]

One must acknowledge that the spiritual condition of modern Israel is unregenerate because most Jews do not have a relationship with Messiah Jesus. Yet, Ezek 36:26-27 makes it clear that God promises to Israel will be restored. It is vital that one is aware of how this restoration occurs. It will be done in two stages, which Randall Price calls the "two-stage

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This demonstrates that he has far more impact than some might want to admit. Certainly, there are many good YouTube channels that offer content supportive of Israel. Unfortunately, there are many who promote a very negative view of Israel. In fact, too many to cover adequately.

[38] Much of Tucker Carlson's content revolves around this idea. Here are a few examples. In the now-famous interview with Senator Ted Cruz, Carlson questioned why a Christian should support Israel today. After voicing his displeasure with the nation of Israel, he posed this question to Cruz: "So, you're saying I have to support Israel?" Tucker Carlson, "Tucker Confronts Ted Cruz for His Support for Regime Change in Iran," on the *Tucker Carlson Network* at the 52:53-minute mark. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smemFVe0l5E. In an interview that Carlson did with Mother Agapia Stephanopoulos, the issue of Jewish behavior towards Christians was the central focus. They mocked dispensational eschatology, and Carlson asked the guest, "So, Jesus' coming the first time wasn't enough?" The guest's response was, "Yeah, in a way it's like denying the Messiah." Tucker Carlson, "Here's What it is Really Like to Live as a Christian in the Holy Land," on the *Tucker Carlson Network* at the 25:01-minute mark. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y79CfG2R_3g.

fulfillment"[39] of the prophecies in the book of Ezekiel. Price explains, "We can distinguish the separate times of fulfillment in two stages: Stage I: Physical Regathering to the Land; and Stage II: Spiritual Restoration to the LORD."[40] This is evident in Ezek 36:24-27.

Ezekiel 36:24-27
Stage I: "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" (v. 24, NIV) Stage II: "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. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (vv. 25-27, NIV)

Stages of Ezekiel 36:24-27[41]

Ezek 37:1-14 offers more detail on how God will restore an unfaithful people. This text also acknowledges the two different conditions of Israel. The bones are reconstructed into bodies (Ezek 37:8), and then breath comes into them and they "come to life" (Ezek 37:9).

Ezekiel 37:8-10
Stage I: "And I looked, and behold, tendons were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them" (v.8) Stage II: "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."'" 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" (vv. 9-10)

Stages of Ezekiel 37:8-10

The two stages are represented in the two different commands given to Ezekiel to perform in this vision. Notice that Ezekiel first commands the bones to be reconstructed into a body, which

[39] Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy: God's Stage for the Final Drama* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 206.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy,* 207.

represents the first stage of regathering in the land in unbelief. Then Ezekiel commands life to come into the bodies, which is the second stage of spiritual restoration. These two stages, regathering in the land in unbelief and being restored spiritually, are also seen in Ezek 37:21, 23.

Ezekiel 37:21, 23
Stage I: "And say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land" (v. 21) Stage II: "They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (v. 23)

Stages of Ezekiel 37:21,27[42]

These two stages represent two regatherings. In the first regathering, Israel will return to the land in unbelief, which sets the stage for the Tribulation.

Israel- Regathered Before the Tribulation in Unbelief (Current State of the Nation)	**Israel- Regathered Before the Millennium in Belief (Future State)**
Ezekiel 20:33-38; 22:17-22; 38-39 Isaiah 11:11-12 Zephaniah 2:1-2	Deuteronomy 4:29-31; 30:1-10 Isaiah 27:12-13; 43:4-7 Jeremiah 16:14-15; 31:7-10 Ezekiel 11:14-18 Amos 9:14-15 Zechariah 1-:8-12 Matthew 24:31

Key Verses of The Two Regatherings[43]

The following chart demonstrates the characteristics of each stage of regathering.

The Present (First) Regathering	**The Permanent (Second) Regathering**
Worldwide	Worldwide
Return to part of the land	Return to all the land
Return in unbelief	Return in faith
Restored to the land only	Restored to the land and the Lord
Man's work (secular)	God's work (spiritual)
Sets the stage for the Tribulation (discipline)	Sets the stage for the millennium (blessing)

[42] Ibid., *207*.

[43] Ibid.

The Two Regatherings[44]

The second regathering will come through Israel being restored spiritually and gathered through the Shepherd, the Messiah Jesus (Ezekiel 34). This will usher in the future millennial kingdom. This concept is not just represented in Ezekiel. The following chart offers some key Scripture related to these regatherings.

Support For Israel Undermines the Church and Christ

Many Christians today believe that God has replaced Israel's future with the church. This view is being amplified on social media. In an interview Carlson did with JD Greer, Greer said, "The irony is that you have these Christian Zionists who believe we have to bless Jews for God to bless us. They are actually giving away their inheritance; that's our promise."[45] He continues,

> When Mike Huckabee or Ted Cruz, or any other politician or preacher, preaches a message that if you want God to bless you, you need to do x, y, or z for the Jews, they are handing over, handing away Christian promises. These are for us. We have those in Jesus. We are the children of Abraham.[46]

Yet, this does not match the account of Ezekiel 36:22-38. God cannot abandon Israel. His character is intricately tied to the future of Israel.

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[44] Thomas Ice, The Case for Zionism, 77.

[45] Tucker Carlson, "Origins of Christian Zionism, How it Corrupted American Christianity, and Why it's Finally Collapsing," on the *Tucker Carlson Network* at the 11:26-minute mark. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN36yhie2_c.

[46] Ibid., at the 12:49-minute mark. Interestingly, Greer argues that God has abandoned Israel on the basis of God's promises to other nations through the prophet Isaiah. He said, "But Isaiah 19, for example, tells us that the Egyptians will be redeemed by God in the end days, and will be brought to Jerusalem, to Zion, to the promised land. These are nations that are adversarial to Israel." Ibid., at the 15:55-minute mark. So, Greer, in this statement, does acknowledge the end of days and Jerusalem, Zion, as the promised land. It actually appears he is making the case for a future for Israel more than he knows. As does Ezekiel 36, which establishes that God is acting to vindicate His reputation among the nations. His future actions for Israel will benefit the nations, indeed all of creation.

There are some Christians who believe that to support Israel and to proclaim God's future plans for Israel is a betrayal of our Savior. Yet, most assuredly, God's future plans for Israel come through the victorious reign of Messiah Jesus over the world from the land of Israel. This is clearly demonstrated in Ezekiel 37:24-28, which reads,

> 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. 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. 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. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.

The location of this place where God will dwell with His people through Messiah Jesus is the temple described in Ezekiel 43:7, which says, "He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever…" This parallels what Jesus taught in Matthew 24-25. The emphasis of this statement is placed on Jesus sitting on the throne of his glory, which "is rooted in the throne of the Ancient of Days, the universal dominion of the 'one like the son of man' in Dan 7:9-10, 13-14 as well as the 'sit at my right hand' in Ps 110:1."[47] Craig Blomberg notes the picture here is one of grandeur, majesty, authority, and judgment."[48] Indeed, when Jesus returns, He will come as the victorious King over a restored people on their land.

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[47] Grant Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 932.

[48] Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 376.

CONCLUSION

A few questions must be asked directly to the church to induce reflection on why the influence of anti-Israel propaganda is yielding results. The first question is this: Will the church trust that a covenant-keeping God will fulfill His promises to His chosen people, Israel, or will the church accept the lies that God has abandoned Israel to an eternal unregenerate state? Secondly, why does the church rightly encourage and promote evangelism to people of all nations to the exclusion of the people in Israel? Why does the message of the grace of God to save the worst of humanity stop at the doorstep of Israel? Why does the church lack an evangelistic fervor toward Israel?

The Church's negative attitude toward Israel is the thermometer that demonstrates the church has a fever, which indicates there is something wrong in the body. If not properly treated, it will leave the church susceptible to the disease of antisemitism. It causes an illness of the heart that leads to anger and hatred of Jews in their land. The remedy to protect the church against this contagion is a deep study of Scripture, through prophets such as Ezekiel. The church must embrace the doctrine of Israelology to be cured.

A proper hermeneutic, one which examines the grammar to understand the normal meaning of the text, will necessarily lead to important theological conclusions of Ezek 36:22-38. The theology that traditional dispensationalism extracts from Ezek 36:22-38 demonstrates that it is completely within God's character to do two things at the same time. God can work through the church in the current dispensation, while simultaneously preparing Israel for its future. To deny the fulfillment of the prophecies of the future restoration of Israel is to attack the very character of God, according to Ezek 36:23.

Ezek 36:22-38 is a powerful passage that addresses the current issues regarding Israel in the culture and the church. It presents the church with a rebuttal to the voices that promote replacement theology on social media platforms. This destructive dialogue has made its way into mainstream conversations and has affected the church's view of Israel greatly. This paper has shown that Ezekiel 36:22-38 informs the church that God's present and future actions on Israel's behalf are a vindication of His character. This is demonstrated in Israel's current regathering in the land in unbelief, and the future restoration of the people and land of Israel. Therefore, the Church should be celebrating what God is doing through Israel as a declaration of the character and glory of God.