

**Ezekiel 36: The land God sought out.**

***Israel, you are the chosen people of the LORD your God. There are many nations on this earth, but he chose only Israel to be his very own. (Deut. 7:6)***

There is so much in Scripture about the love and care God lavished in choosing the land of Israel for His people.

**The Lord says, ‘This is Jerusalem which I have set in the centre of the nations, with countries all around.’ (Ezek. 5:5)**

**‘On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ (Ezek. 20:6)**

There was great intimacy as well as strategic purpose in all this. **‘I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so that they would know that I the Lord made them holy.’ (20:12).**

The heartbeat of this passage makes it obvious that the God designed the Sabbath not as a legalistic imposition but as a special blessing for His people.

The Lord’s evident pride in His handiwork is immediately followed, however, by the people’s grief over their rejection of Him and His purposes.

**‘Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against My laws and decrees more than the nations and countries around her.’ (Ezek. 5:7).** Ezekiel 20:8 describes the same lack of response from the people, and warns of the inevitable consequences.

**I want to focus here, however, on chapter 36.** The chapter opens with the prophet being called to prophesy to the mountains of Israel. God is speaking His word here not only to the whole land, but also to its people, fully recognising the pressure that has come upon them from the surrounding nations.

The Lord speaks in His burning jealousy **‘against the rest of the nations who ravaged and hounded you [Israel] from every side, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and the object of people’s malicious talk and slander.’ (36:3)**

**The Lord denounces Edom in particular for the glee and malice in its heart as they took God’s land as their own possession (36:5)**

**God declares on oath that, ‘because you have suffered the scorn of the nations, I swear with uplifted hand that the nations around you will also suffer scorn . . . I am concerned for you, and I will look on you with favour. . . 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. (36:7, 9,11 NIV, NKJV).**

**Just as the earlier phrases indicate God going into action against the nations that are going too far in oppressing and opposing Israel, so this final phrase hints at the most important thing of all.**

**Verses 17-20, like the earlier passages we noted, chart Israel's failure to live by His standard or for His glory, with the inevitable result that they were driven from the land. Verses 21-23 make it clear that God was determined to do something about this desperate situation *for His own name's sake*. Verses 24 onward then chart a wonderful spiritual turning that matches and mirrors the physical restoration to the land. We see the God who has exercised great judgement now working out the restoration. He is not powerless to defend His name, but mighty.**

**In our own day, we could put it this way: God has miraculously preserved His people through nearly two thousand years of exile, and brought them back to His land; now we must pray that He will bring them back to Himself. Without our Jewish ancestors we ourselves would have no faith. Without her patriarchs and prophets we would have no Bible. Without the early Jewish believers we would have no Church. Our indebtedness is enormous: now we must stand in faith for their spiritual eyes to be opened – and for them to be given time, space and security enough in which this process may occur.**

**The concluding verses of Ezekiel 36 are full of strong assertions regarding the sovereignty of God. Everywhere you look you find the phrase that above all others highlights God's determination to act according to His own principles and priorities: 'I will.'**

**But notice carefully verse 37:**

**'This also will I do. Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and make their people as numerous as sheep.'**

**Can you discern, in the tenor of this passage, the all-important truth that God hears the prayers of His people, and weaves them into the fulfilment of all that is on His heart?**

**May He inspire effective intercession for the people of God at this next crossroads in their long and turbulent history.**