

## THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

### Ezekiel 33—39

In chapter 33 the tone of Ezekiel's oracles begins to shift from that of condemnation and judgement to that of consolation and hope. The tragic news of Jerusalem's fall arrives (v. 21): the prediction of doom on the land had been realized. Hope for the future now lay in the small group of exiles, whose number would soon be increased. Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's call to repentance had been fruitless; now Ezekiel would place emphasis on the remnant's faithfulness so that God's grace could reconstitute the nation.

#### PROPHETIC RESPONSIBILITY

**Ezekiel 33:1-33; (cf. Ezek. 2:17-21; 18:1-32)**

Immediately prior to the tragic news of Jerusalem's fall, God renewed the sense of importance for a responsible prophetic ministry. The responsibility was defined in individual terms: the watchmen and the individual who heard were personally responsible for their actions. In a real sense, the principle of "pastoral care" appeared. Collective Israel would soon disappear historically; the future national existence would depend on an individual response. The basis for a new covenant, a new exodus, and a new Israel was slowly being defined.

In addition to the question of continued national existence, an immediate theological problem was also prevalent: was God dealing justly with His people? Was He not being unfaithful to His promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), Moses (Ex. 19:5,6), and David (2 Sam. 7:13)? Chapters 33 and 34 treat the problem demonstrating God's just dealings with His people: the watchman motif (ch. 33) and the future Good Shepherd (ch. 34) were but preludes to the restoration of the land (ch. 36) and reuniting of the nation (ch. 37). Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel placed the responsibility for the national failure on the people; Yahweh's dealings were just and in accord with His redemptive purposes.

#### The Parable of the Watchman (33:1-6)

The prophet draws a familiar word picture to illustrate his truth. In times of danger, or warfare, the people would choose watchmen and place them in strategic observation points. When the enemy was sighted, a watchman would blow his trumpet to warn the people of approaching danger (vv. 2,3). If the trumpet sound was clear, each hearer was responsible for his or her response. The watchman was not

Chapter 33 presents a shift in Ezekiel's emphasis: from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the oracles begin treating \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

*(condemnation, judgement, consolation, hope)*

The call to \_\_\_\_\_ had been fruitless; the emphasis now will be on \_\_\_\_\_ so that God's grace could \_\_\_\_\_.

*(Compare your answers with the text)*

Once again the \_\_\_\_\_ motif appears reminding the remnant of personal \_\_\_\_\_.

With the disappearance of \_\_\_\_\_ Israel, the future national existence depended on \_\_\_\_\_.

*(watchman, responsibility, collective, individual response)*

MATCH the following passages with the themes they treat:

- |                    |                                     |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Chapters 33 and 34 | the future Good Shepherd            |
| Chapter 33         | reuniting of the nation             |
| Chapter 34         | God's just dealings with his people |
| Chapter 35         | watchman                            |
| Chapter 37         | restoration of the land             |

*(Compare your answers with the text)*

held accountable for the individual reactions (vv. 4,5); however, if the watchman did not sound the warning clearly, he would be held accountable for the lives of those under his watch care (v. 6).

In some mysterious way personal fate is bound up in God's sovereignty and man's freedom of will. There is a divine concern for man's salvation (Ezek. 33:11); however, that concern does not transcend human response. God will not save a person against that one's will. Consequently, two alternatives are clear: repent and live; ignore the divine warning and die.

### Responsible Prophetic Ministry (33:6c-9)

By divine decree, human watchmen were used to warn of judgement and/or salvation. The responsibility of the watchmen was obvious and well established.

The phrase, "his blood I will require from the watchman's hand" (v. 6c) gives a clue as to the teaching of the parable. Yahweh appoints His watchman to stand between Him, the adversary, and the people. The oracle is no longer addressed to the nation but to the wicked individual (v. 8). Since the collective group no longer heard the divine oracle, hope lay with individuals (cf. Ezek. 33:12 for the individual righteousness).

### The Message to Israel (33:10-20)

The prophet identifies himself with the people (v. 10) and then announces God's loving concern even as judgement approaches. God would not destroy without warning.<sup>1</sup> Verse 11 expresses His tender concern: ". . . 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked . . . Turn back, turn back'" (repent, repent) "from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O House of Israel?"

#### Lessons to be drawn from the passage

*A person is not saved by past goodness (vv. 12,13).* There are actions approved by God; however, salvation is a gift from God (cf. John 3:16; Eph. 2:8,9) and is eternal in nature (cf. John 10:27-29; Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 5:9; 7:25; 9:12). The assurance of salvation rests in the nature and power of God, not man. Nevertheless, there is a superficial religious experience that does not stand the test of time or a genuine commitment to the Lord (cf. Matt. 13:4-6; Heb. 6:4-9, an hypothetical situation; Heb. 10:26; 1 John 2:19). From the human standpoint, the test of true salvation is seen in its permanence and in the fruit that it bears.

*Whoever repents or turns from his evil way finds God's ready acceptance (vv. 14-16).* How unparalleled in human

In a mysterious way personal fate is bound up in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

(Compare your answers with the text)

God is \_\_\_\_\_ for man's \_\_\_\_\_.

(concerned, salvation)

Is the following statement true or false?

Divine concern transcends human responsibility.

\_\_\_\_\_

(false)

Human watchmen are used to \_\_\_\_\_.

(Compare your answer with the text)

To whom is the oracle in 33:1-6 addressed?

\_\_\_\_\_

(the wicked individual)

Are the following statements true or false?

God sends divine judgement without warning.

\_\_\_\_\_

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

\_\_\_\_\_

(false, true)

Salvation is a \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_.

(gift, God)

Salvation is \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_.

(eternal, nature)

The assurance of salvation rests in \_\_\_\_\_.

(Compare your answer with the text)

history is the grace of God! God is always ready to forgive the penitent. The only sin that cannot be forgiven is a non-repentant spirit.

*The ways of the Lord are just (33:17-20).* The situation faced by Ezekiel and the exiles was different from that faced by Jeremiah and the ones remaining in Judah. The former were completely cut off from the protective framework of the national institutions. The Exile had produced both skeptics and outspoken defenders of outworn dogmas (e.g., the inviolability of Jerusalem). Some, in the face of despair, lost their faith; others attempted to hang on to an inadequate interpretation of the past, and others simply accused God of being unjust (cf. Job 19:6-12). Ezekiel sharply rebuked their theological folly and placed the blame for the situation squarely on their shoulders (v. 17b). The only hope was repentance and the practice of righteousness (v. 18).

### The enlarged prophetic task

Eichrodt describes the enlarged prophetic task to include that of personal "pastoral care."<sup>2</sup> It is not simply a task of an inward spiritual look, but rather embraces the "whole man." Ezekiel had become a sign and wonder to his contemporaries. Now he stands in front, as a watchman, to form a "protective wall against Yahweh's attack upon his people" (Ezek. 13:5). He will be the first to suffer the attack and to surrender himself to divine retribution. He will know in himself the nature of God's judgement. Here the suffering concept moves beyond that of Jeremiah; however, it does not reach the vicarious depth seen in the servant songs of Isaiah 40—55 (cf. Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13—53:12). Nevertheless, the watchman shares the suffering of his guilty people, even though he himself has found his own forgiveness. In such identification, his message becomes credible to those who hear his words, and he becomes a redemptive instrument in the hand of God who also suffers with His people.

### The Fall of Jerusalem and Desolation of Israel (33:21-29)

The Masoretic Text fixes the date of arrival of the refugees as the twelfth year of the Exile. A comparison with 2 Kings 25:2-8 would suggest about a year and a half for the journey. This seems to be an excessive time lapse. Correspondingly, one suggestion assumes that the date was probably altered from the eleventh year to follow the chronological sequence of Ezekiel 32:17 (twelfth year). Another suggestion bases the twelfth year on the Babylonian calendar, which began in the spring. The dating of Jeremiah 39:2 was based on the Jewish calendar, which began in the fall. The date then would be the twelfth year for Ezekiel and the eleventh year for Jeremiah. The latter interpretation seems preferable: six months after the fall of Jerusalem the news arrived. The time lapse is not improb-

The grace of God is \_\_\_\_\_ in human history; God is always ready to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.

*(unparalleled, forgive, penitent)*

Name at least four ways in which the exiles in Babylon responded to their situation.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answers with the text)*

The Masoretic Text dates the arrival of the refugees from the fall of Jerusalem in the \_\_\_\_\_ year of the Exile.

*(twelfth)*

The dating probably was based on the \_\_\_\_\_ calendar while that of Jeremiah 39:2 was based on the \_\_\_\_\_ calendar.

*(Babylonian, Jewish)*

able: the fugitives could not travel the most direct and open route from Judah to Babylon.

The report, "the city has been taken" (v. 21b), makes a profound impression on the prophet. The night before, the Lord had revealed anew that judgement would fall on Judah for her sins (vv. 23-29). Now the tragic news arrives. The simple but direct literary style makes an impact on the reader even as the dramatic news stuns the hearers.

### **The People's Reaction to Ezekiel (33:30-33)**

To summarize the passage, Ezekiel was well known; the people came to hear him; they talked about his messages; however, they did not heed his words. Nevertheless, one day they would recognize that a true prophet had been in their midst (v. 33b).

Why did God reveal this to Ezekiel? Perhaps it was to keep the prophet from drawing false conclusions about his unexpected popularity. For many years the people had not listened to the prophetic word of coming judgement. Now that the word of doom on Jerusalem had been fulfilled he had become popular (v. 32). Although his strange, past-action sermons had attracted attention, they had not produced commitment. At this strategic moment, Yahweh let His messenger know that this new interest was also superficial. He did not want His servant to suffer a future disappointment based on a false evaluation of his favourable position among his people.

### **THE GOOD SHEPHERD Ezekiel 34:1-31**

The prophet continues his defense of divine justice by contrasting the false shepherds (leaders) in Israel's history with the coming Good Shepherd. The image of the shepherd and flock was well known in the ancient Near East and represented the ruler and his subjects.

#### **The False Shepherds (34:1-10)**

Ezekiel accuses the kings of Israel of ruling for selfish gain (vv. 2,3). They exercise absolute power for personal enjoyment and totally ignore their responsibility to care for the needs of the flock (vv. 4-6). Because of inadequate leadership the flock had become the prey of marauding nations and was scattered "over all the surface of the earth" (v. 6b). Consequently, God would judge the shepherds, and they would no longer rule the flock (vv. 7-10). God could do this for He was the owner of the sheep. The greed and mismanagement of the appointed rulers invalidated their position of trust and consequently produced their

What was the report of the refugees? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Compare your answer with the text)

Ezekiel accused the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ of being \_\_\_\_\_ who ruled for \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(kings, Israel, false shepherds, selfish gain)

\_\_\_\_\_  
The kings exercised power for \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Compare your answer with the text)

removal from power. God was just in His verdict.

### God, the Good Shepherd (34:11-16)

To put an end to the misrule, God Himself will take charge of the flock (v. 11). In contrast to the lack of care given to the flock, Yahweh will deliver them (v. 12), bring them home and feed them in their land (vv. 13,14). Yahweh will give rest to the weary (v. 15), and proper care to the lost, scattered, broken and sick (v. 16; cf. v. 4 for the contrast). As for the "fat and strong" they will face judgement. In this, God is just; He is the Good Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23). The fulfillment of this beautiful passage is seen in Jesus, the Good Shepherd (cf. John 10, especially v. 11).

### Judgement on Israel (34:17:22)

Once again the judgement theme prevails with the rulers receiving severe condemnation (vv. 18,19,21). The urgent call for social righteousness is a dominant prophetic concern (cf. Amos, Micah). Israel is guilty of social injustice; God is righteous in His judgement.

### The True Shepherd (34:23,24)

Following the judgement on the guilty rulers and their dismissal as shepherds of the flock, Yahweh will place "one shepherd, My servant David" over the people as a true Shepherd (v. 23). The messianic hope of the pre-exilic prophets (e.g., Isa. 11:1-5), and the influence of Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 23:5,6) are reflected in these verses; however, Ezekiel makes his contribution by showing that God alone will restore the people to the land. Later, Ezekiel presents the ruling prince from the house of David as more of an administrative figure (cf. Ezek. 44-46). However, here the thought, "my servant David" (v. 24) seems to refer to one of the house of David.<sup>3</sup> The title, "servant" (*e'bed*) implies a special place among Yahweh's counselors, while the term "prince" (*nasi'*) is one calculated to designate dignity.<sup>4</sup> The normal word for king is *melek*. The "prince" does not imply a demotion in rank; however, at the same time, there is a change. Yahweh is free (sovereign) to work out His just rule with the people. He is faithful to His promise to David, but will work out the nature of His righteous rule through the *nasi'* (prince) rather than the *melek* (king). The prince will be a new type of king-shepherd whose selflessness (self-sacrifice) in care for the flock will contrast most decidedly with the selfish shepherds of the Davidic dynasty. Nevertheless, the prince will be of the house of David. The fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth went far beyond the words of this messianic passage as great as it is.

Because of the misrule, \_\_\_\_\_ would take charge of the flock.

(God)

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Who will replace the guilty rulers?

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(Compare your answer with the text)

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"My servant David" (34:24) refers to \_\_\_\_\_

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(one of the house of David)

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UNDERLINE the correct answer:

The true shepherd will be a king, prince.

(prince)

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## **The New Covenant of Peace (34:25-31)**

Following the inauguration of the true Shepherd, Yahweh will make a new covenant of peace with the people of the land (v. 25). The wild beast will be eliminated, and adequate seasonal showers will guarantee bountiful harvest (vv. 25-27). The people will dwell securely and foreign nations will no longer exploit the land (vv. 28,29). The world will know that Yahweh is the God of Israel (v. 30) and that Israel is the people of God (v. 31).

Ezekiel did not create a new vocabulary or introduce new concepts in this section. He used expressions of fertility found in previous prophetic writings (cf. Isa. 29:17ff.; 32:15ff.; Jer. 31:4ff.; Hos. 2:18ff.). However, as Eichrodt observes, he did include speech forms from the priestly law (cf. Lev. 25:18ff.; 26:4-6,16,20,22).<sup>5</sup> These passages deal with blessings on those who are faithful to the Law and were familiar to the prophet-priest from his early years. The new covenant also needed the direction provided by the Law. Once again God's just ways are affirmed: He will establish a new covenant and His protection will be the people's security.

## **AN ORACLE AGAINST EDMOM Ezekiel 35:1-15**

How does this oracle play a part in the future salvation of Israel? Edom took advantage of Judah's fall by raiding and occupying a part of the land (cf. v. 5). As an opponent of Israel, she would do everything possible to prevent the reestablishment of an independent Jewish state. Along with others occupying the land, she claimed the right of possession (Ezek. 33:24); no legitimate claim to the land made by the Babylonian exiles would be recognized. Therefore prior to the restoration, judgement on Edom was seen as a necessity.

Background material on Edom can be found in the commentary on Jeremiah 49:7-22. The Ezekiel material can be outlined as follows:

### **The Prophecy of Doom against Mount Seir (35:1-4)**

### **The Reason for the Destruction (35:5-9)**

### **The Sin of Edom (35:10-15)**

Edom showed no respect for that which belonged to the people of God. Her violence, lack of compassion and

What is the next step following the inauguration of the true shepherd?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Compare your answer with the text)*

The new covenant needed the direction provided by the \_\_\_\_\_.

*(Law)*

Name four reasons for Edom's punishment.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answers with the text)*

arrogant pride would be punished. In her contempt for Yahweh and His people, Edom failed to realize that Israel's punishment was the result of Yahweh's action. Yahweh had not relinquished control over Judah or the land of Edom. His judgement on Edom would be sure and just even as it had been on Israel. Future judgement on Edom would come just as surely as Israel's future salvation.

## THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL Ezekiel 36:1—37:28

The salvation motif continues. The message of hope has moved forward systematically: the initial restoration of the ruler (Ezek. 34) is followed by the elimination of opposition to the restoration (Ezek. 35). Now the prophet presents a third element, the restoration of the land (Ezek. 36), which is followed by the restoration of Israel (Ezek. 37). Ezekiel, the "first systematic theologian," builds his structure precisely and logically.

The interpretation of Ezekiel 36—39 has held strange fascination for the expositors through the ages. It would seem unwise to look for purely a physical fulfillment (historical) in the return from the Babylonian captivity; however, it was to the exiles that Ezekiel delivered his inspired oracles. Subsequently, Christian faith has looked to the past messianic event in Christ Jesus (historical) as a fundamental step in God's redemptive plan (Kingdom of God) which is yet to be finalized. The Apocalypse (Revelation) of John, following the outline of Ezekiel, projects the final victory of Christ over the forces of evil: the second advent (*parousia*) will finally usher in the long hoped-for reign of peace. For Christian faith, King David is a spiritual symbol fulfilled historically in Jesus of Nazareth. The Kingdom of Heaven is a spiritual reign, and not a physical domain or territory. The Church, the body of Christ, has become the New Israel (cf. Matt. 21:33-46; Rom. 2:28,29; 9:6-8; Gal. 6:14-16; 1 Pet. 2:4-8), and to her have been gathered the symbols and shadows of Old Testament prophecy. The fulfillment in substance transcends the physical and is literal in a sense far beyond the understanding of the original expression.<sup>6</sup>

### The Restoration of the Land (36:1-36)

In the projected restoration of the land and people, Ezekiel anticipates the Christian gospel in many aspects.

#### The renewal of the land (36:1-15)

*The reason for the desolation (36:1-7).* The tragedy came because of the "jealousy" of Yahweh (vv. 5,6). His people had forsaken Him for other gods. Nevertheless, the nations will be punished for their abuse of Judah.

The initial restoration of the \_\_\_\_\_  
(ch. 34) was followed in chapter 35 by an \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ of the opposition to the restoration.  
*(ruler, elimination)*

UNDERLINE the best answer.

The promises of Ezekiel 36-39 are best seen to be fulfilled in the historical return from the Babylonian captivity, the historical event of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God in Christ.

*(the historical event of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God in Christ)*

The Apocalypse of John projects the *parousia* as the event that \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answer with the text)*

The New Testament regards King David as \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answer with the text)*

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a spiritual reign, physical territory.

*(spiritual reign)*

In what passage does Ezekiel anticipate many aspects of the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_

*(36:1-15)*

*The blessings of renewal (36:8-15).* In words reminiscent of previous oracles, the land, beasts, people and cities will be restored.

### **The results of sin (36:16-20)**

*Sin contaminates (v. 17).* The first result for Ezekiel the priest was defilement. Sin is never isolated to one person alone: sin contaminates those around as well as the environment. It is infectious.

*Sin brings suffering (vv. 18,19).* The inescapable wrath of God came in judgement on Judah, and the scattering or dispersion of the people was the result.

*Sin results in shame (v. 20).* The people profaned God's holy name and became the object of derision among the nations.

### **Salvation by grace (36:21-23,32)**

The deliverance, which is to be achieved by God, is not for the sake of man but God (v. 22). In biblical thought, the name represents the person. God intends to establish His true character, who He is, through His redeemed people. Because of Israel's failure (sin), the world did not have a true representation of Yahweh's name. The purpose of salvation is to enable "the nations" to know that He is the Lord (v. 23). God's deliverance was not solely for the sake of Israel, but rather for the sake of His redemptive purpose (v. 32). The means He uses are His people.

### **The return and forgiveness (36:24,25)**

God's power will deliver the people from the Exile (v. 24); the first step of inward renewal is a cleansing (cf. Ps. 51:7). The ritual for securing clean water is described in two ways found in Leviticus 14 and Numbers 19. Both require blood, which in turn represents life (cf. Lev. 17:11,14; Gen. 9:4). The reference to a well-known cleansing rite does not refer to an actual physical ritual to be performed when the people return to the land; rather, the verse assures that the defilement will surely be removed. It is God, not the priest, who performs the act. Ultimately God Himself came in Jesus Christ to cleanse from all iniquity (cf. Isa. 52:15; 1 Cor. 6:11).

### **The new heart (36:26)**

In terms reminiscent of the new birth, the people will be given a new disposition. The "heart" represents the seat of human will or volition; the spirit (*ruah*) suggests the totality of the inner life. The creative activity of God will "remove the heart of stone" (cf. Ezek. 11:19; Jer. 31:31-33). Stone is hard, cold and dead. In many ways it is a good illustration for natural man. However, God, on His part, will give (a grace gift) a heart of flesh, pliable, warm and alive. He also gives a spirit, or an attitude (disposition) concerned with an ethical life style. God gives both a new will and a new attitude. Such was the new heart then and so is the new birth now.

List the results of sin found in 36:16-20.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answers with the text)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Why is stone a good illustration for natural man? It is

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_.

*(hard, cold, dead)*

Why is the expression "heart of flesh" an apt description of God's grace gift?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answer with the text)*

God gives a new \_\_\_\_\_ and a new

\_\_\_\_\_.  
*(will, attitude)*

## The empowering Spirit (36:27)

Forgiveness, a new heart and new attitude are insufficient alone for the task ahead. The next step is God's empowering so that the redeemed can continue in the way of salvation and service. How will this come to pass? God will place His Spirit within man. God Himself becomes incarnate in the Person of the Spirit. Jeremiah said that God would write His law in man's heart (Jer. 31:33); however he did not say how. Ezekiel goes a step farther: he says the cleansed heart will be changed, and God will dwell there forever. The assurance of eternal salvation rests on the abiding presence of God in the human heart (personality). The concept of the new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel has taken form. The New Testament will present its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. At the same time, the Church will never be able to divorce herself from the prophetic heritage that clearly projected the spiritual nature of her being.

## The blessings of deliverance (36:28-35)

In terms both spiritual (vv. 28a,31) and material (vv. 29,30,33-35), the prophet describes the blessings of salvation. Fellowship with God heads the list (v. 28), which produces an humble self-recognition (v. 31). The closer one walks with God, the more sensitive one becomes to personal unworthiness before divine grace. Once again material blessings follow the spiritual: restoration to the land (v. 28); fruitfulness of the land (vv. 29,30); and the rebuilding of the cities and waste places (vv. 33-35).

## The purpose of the deliverance and prayer (36:36-38)

The faithfulness of God is that which assures deliverance: the Lord speaks, and the Lord performs the deed. The purpose is redemptive (v. 36): the deliverance of Israel was not an end within itself; it was the means toward a broader goal or world redemption. God saves for service. At the same time, there is a need for the redeemed people to pray, asking God to supply that which is necessary for the spiritual and material needs (vv. 37,38). This experience of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation comes when penitent spirits turn to Him, the source of power: "Then they will know that I am the Lord" (v. 38b). Did Jesus think of Ezekiel when He taught His disciples to pray (cf. Matt. 6:9-13)? There is no question as to the place of prayer in the new covenant.

## The Reunion of the People (37:1-28)

### The political restoration (37:1-14)

In contrast to the experience in the plain when Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh (Ezek. 3:22,23), he now finds himself in a valley full of dry bones (vv. 1,2). The bones in the parable represent the hopelessly dead nation, Israel (v.

God also gives an \_\_\_\_\_  
so that the redeemed can continue in the way of  
salvation.

*(empowering Spirit)*

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UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The assurance of eternal salvation rests on the perse-  
verance of the human personality, the abiding pres-  
ence of God in the human heart.

*(the abiding presence of God in the human heart)*

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The blessings of deliverance are \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_.

*(spiritual, material)*

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The dry bones in chapter 37 represent the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

*(dead nation, Israel)*

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11). Only the power of God could restore or resurrect the nation. This is not a teaching of an individual or personal resurrection; however, if there was no belief in an individual resurrection why would the prophet have used this figure? Also, the resurrection here is not presented as a future, physical happening, but rather is a spiritual principle: the nation will be resurrected from the dead. Israel will live again. Consequently, there is no need to look for the lost tribes and the time of their reunion. Neither is there a need to look for the revival of the physical Davidic dynasty. The fulfillment is seen in the true Shepherd (David) whose rule is everlasting.

God asks Ezekiel if the bones could live (v. 3). Ezekiel is confused. He does not know the divine intention, nor does he know the source of the bones. Diplomatically he answered: "O Lord God, Thou knowest." Then the Lord commands him to prophesy, or to speak to the dry bones. Strangely enough, there is power of life in God's Word faithfully delivered (cf. the gospel).

The prophet prophesies to the bones, and the first sign of life is noise (v. 7), followed by organization as the bones come together, and then comes the breath of life (v. 10). The three (activity, organization, and breath of life) are vital signs of life even for the modern Church. The importance of each cannot be overestimated. Spiritual life depends on the inseparable interdependence of these three component parts. Finally, the Lord promises that Israel would return to the land; by His power and Spirit the political restoration would become a reality (vv. 11-14).

Babylon, the land of the Exile, had become the grave, the dwelling place of death. God would break the prison door, the grave, and resurrect His people from their tomb (cf. Jer. 51). The despair of the moment found hope in the promise of God's miraculous power of salvation and the political reunification of the nation.

### The reunion of Israel and Judah (37:15-28)

Symbolically, the prophet takes two sticks, one representing Judah and the other Ephraim, and binds them together (vv. 16-20). Once again the promise of restoration is made (v. 21) under the messianic symbol of "my servant David" and the true "shepherd" (vv. 22-24). God will make an everlasting covenant of peace with the united nation (v. 26) and "will be with them" in His "dwelling place" (v. 27).

A partial fulfillment was realized with the return from Babylon in 536 BC; however, the repatriates failed in their covenant responsibility as did their forefathers. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Messiah (Gal. 4:4) and the promises became the inheritance of new Israel ruled over by the Messianic King. Finally the missionary task of the chosen people could be realized: "And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel . . ." (v. 28). After the will of God has been put into effect among His people, the nations will know Him, and the new Israel will be the light to the nations as foreseen by Isaiah (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

Name three vital signs of life found in 37:7-10.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*(activity, organization, breath of life)*

The two sticks represented \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

*(Judah, Ephraim)*

**THE OPPOSITION TO AND THE  
FINAL VICTORY OF YAHWEH  
Ezekiel 38:1—39:29**

Ezekiel 38 and 39 break the literary continuity of the restoration (Ezek. 33—37) and the organization of the new community (Ezek. 40—48).<sup>7</sup> Following the reestablishment of the nation in the messianic age, there will be a further uprising of foreign powers against the people of God. The nation had been settled in the land for a long time (38:8). Gog, the leader of a coalition of nations, will come from the North (38:6,15; 39:2) with the purpose of plunder (38:10-13). Yahweh will destroy the invading army (38:22), resulting in worldwide recognition of Yahweh's glory (39:21ff.). Following the victory, there will be a permanent reign of peace (39:25ff.). This basic outline is also found in Zechariah, Daniel and Revelation.

The inspired prophecies have been carefully studied through the ages by devout minds whose varied interpretations have been coloured by their hermeneutical presuppositions. With appreciation for the contributions, sincerity and integrity of those who differ, it seems best to recognize the incipient apocalyptic nature of the text and interpret it correspondingly. Ezekiel is noted for the vividness of his imagination and his unique power of telepathy. He was deeply aware of the glory of God and His transcendence. He marks the transition from the classical prophetic style (cf. Amos, Hosea, Micah) to the future symbolic method (apocalyptic eschatology) where spiritual truths are clothed in hidden terminology because of political opposition.

The enemies seemingly represent people who lived in the remote or uttermost parts of the earth. The names represent the geographical extremes of the world of Ezekiel's day, and are not to be identified by modern nations encased in a prophetic code. The final opposition or battle of evil against good will not be fought by armies using ancient weaponry and riding on horses (38:4,15; 39:9). Rather, the passage is a prophetic parable (rather than allegory): the final triumph of Yahweh will be achieved over massed human opposition.<sup>8</sup> The result will be world recognition of Yahweh and His righteousness. The return from Babylon would be but the first step in the long chain of events yet to be finalized in the return of the Messiah.

Why did Ezekiel include these chapters between the restoration and organization of the community? Without a doubt, it was because of divine revelation; however, the text itself gives evidence to the logical inclusion of the chapters. After a long period of peace (cf. 38:8), it was important to project the future fulfillment of the earlier prophecies against the nations as presented by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Also, the universal redemptive purpose of God needed to be included:<sup>9</sup> the dominion of God over the nations had yet to be established.<sup>10</sup> The major thrust of the chapters is to glorify the name of Yahweh before the nations (cf. 38:16b; 39:21,23,27b). The theme ties directly into Ezekiel 37:28, which sets the stage for the apocalyptic drama that will come about on "that day" (cf. 38:10).

Chapters 38 y 39 deal with \_\_\_\_\_ to  
and the \_\_\_\_\_ of  
Yahweh.

*(opposition, final victory)*

The invading army is destroyed by \_\_\_\_\_

*(Yahweh)*

The permanent reign of peace comes \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answer with the text)*

Ezekiel's basic outline is also found in the writings of

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and

*(Zechariah, Daniel, Revelation)*

The interpretation presented in the study recognizes  
the incipient \_\_\_\_\_  
of the text.

*(apocalyptic nature)*

The major thrust of chapters 38-39 is \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answer with the text)*

## The Opposition of the Nations (38:1-23)

### The enemies of the restored people (38:1-9)

A literal translation of verse 2 is as follows: "Son of Man, set your face toward (i.e., against) Gog of the land of Magog, prince or the head (*rosh*) of Meshech and Tubal, (i.e., chief prince or head prince of Meshech and Tubal) and prophesy against him." The precise identification of Gog is uncertain; however, grammatically the identification of Gog with Russia (*rosh*) is unsupportable.<sup>11</sup> The clearest interpretations are as follows, and in a way, are interrelated: "Gargas," from the Hittite texts, refers to the wild barbarian area on the borders of Armenia and Cappadocia. The Hebrew *Gog* perhaps refers to this area. The other names of the enemies are historical;<sup>12</sup> therefore, it seems logical to deduce an historical location known to Ezekiel's audience with Gog as the personal name of the otherwise unknown leader of the coalition. The nations listed refer to the table of nations of Genesis 10 "and represent the ends of the earth as Ezekiel knew the earth."<sup>13</sup> The enemies will come from the remote four corners of the earth in their attempt to plunder and destroy the restored community.

The second principle interpretation is apocalyptic in nature: the Sumerian term, "Gug," means "darkness." Gog, then, is the personification of darkness or evil and is a symbolic term representing the power of evil in history.<sup>14</sup> The thrust of the prophecy (38:10) would be eschatological in nature; using historically recognizable contemporary people, Gog transforms them into the powers of darkness. Any future powers could fulfill the prophecy;<sup>15</sup> there is no need to seek an identification with any contemporary nation or coalition.

Once again the invaders will come from the North (vv. 6,15).<sup>16</sup> Gog will be conscripted into the service of Yahweh (vv. 4,8,9), and "in the latter years" will come against the restored land (v. 8) like a thunderstorm (v. 9).

### The plot (38:10-13)

Although given the authority to chasten, on "that day" Gog will devise an evil plan (v. 10): the power invested will be used for personal gain, or loot. The appeal of a defenseless land and people presents an attractive target for the invader (v. 11; but cf. Ezek. 36:35 where the cities are fortified). The slave traders of Sheba and Dedan, as well as the merchants of Tarshish, will be ready to exploit the profitable market (v. 13).

### The battle (38:14-23)

Upon the peaceful land (v. 14) the mighty army from the North will come like a thunderstorm (vv. 15,16a). At that time Yahweh will be sanctified: the land belongs to Yahweh; even though Yahweh will bring the force of Gog against His land, He will defend it (v. 18). The elements of Gog's destruction will be an earthquake (vv. 19,20),

A literal translation of 38:2 refers to Gog as prince (head) of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(*Meshech, Tubal*)

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UNDERLINE the correct answer.

Gog is identified with modern Russia, the wild border area of Armenia and Cappadocia.

(*the wild border area of Armenia and Cappadocia*)

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The names listed after Gog are \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(*historical*)

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The invading coalition was \_\_\_\_\_  
into the service of \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(*conscripted, Yahweh*)

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internal strife (v. 21), and exodus-like plagues (v. 22). It is presumed that, as in the exodus experience, Israel will be delivered from the calamities. Once again the recurring central theme appears: both Israel and the nations will know that Yahweh is Lord of men and nature (v. 23).

### The Final Victory of Yahweh (39:1-29)

The recapitulation of the victory does not follow strictly the sequence of chapter 38. The passage 39:17-20 seems to follow the victory; 39:1-20 parallels 38:2-4,14-23.

#### The defeat of Gog (39:1-10)

As in Ezekiel 38:2, the translation "prince of Rosh" is better translated "the chief prince," i.e., "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal." The invading army armed with bows and arrows (v. 3) will be defeated in the mountain of Israel (v. 4). Destruction will be the lot of Magog (v. 6), and the holy name of Yahweh will be glorified (v. 7). The inhabitants of Israel will burn the wooden weapons (shields, bucklers, bows, arrows, clubs, and spears) for seven years; there will be no need to cut firewood during this period because of the spoil left by those who came to plunder the land (vv. 9,10). The number seven, signifying completion, is used symbolically. Priestly influence is evident here and in the verses that follow. The final age of eternal peace is evidently at hand.

#### The burial of Gog (39:11-13)

The cleansing of the land will accompany the age of eternal peace. Gog will be buried in Israel in a valley located to the east of the Dead Sea. Technically this places the burial area outside of the borders of Palestine proper, but close enough to serve as a reminder and memorial (v. 11). Because of the vastness of the task, it will take seven months to complete the task and cleanse the land (vv. 12,13). The unburied corpses will defile the land (cf. Num. 35:33) and contaminate the people (cf. Num. 19:16).

#### The ceremonial cleansing and a sacrificial banquet (39:14-20)

A permanent commission will be appointed to inspect the land (v. 14), and markers will be set up marking unburied bones so that the land can be eventually cleansed (vv. 15,16). The emphasis on the priestly cleanliness had shifted the thrust away from the great victory of Yahweh. Now, the scene shifts back to the immediate battle field: the birds and wild animals will be invited to celebrate in a sacrificial banquet (vv. 17-20). They are to join in the celebration of Yahweh's victory.<sup>17</sup>

Elements used in Gog's destruction are

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answers with the text)*

\_\_\_\_\_

The invading army armed with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ will be defeated in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

*(bows, arrows, mountains, Israel)*

Israel will burn the \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ years.

*(wooden weapons, seven)*

The number seven symbolically means \_\_\_\_\_.

*(completion)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Gog will be buried in \_\_\_\_\_.

*(Israel)*

UNDERLINE the correct answer.

The task of cleansing the land will take seven days, months, years.

*(months)*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ will be invited to celebrate in a sacrificial banquet.

*(birds, wild animals)*

\_\_\_\_\_

## The purpose of the victory (39:21-24)

The dominant theme of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is repeated: the glory of Yahweh will be recognized by all the nations, as well as by the house of Israel (vv. 21-23). The heathen will be compelled to bow down before the power of the Lord.

## The restoration in retrospect (39:25-29)

The section reverts to the thrust of Ezekiel 36 and 37 where the grace of God was projected restoring the land and reuniting Israel. The next unit, Ezekiel 40—48, will treat the organization of the restored community. The verses here reiterate the restoration, the security of the land and people, and repeat the theme of chapters 38 and 39. God will sanctify His holy name (v. 27) and give a new knowledge of himself to his people (v. 28). The particular gathering of Israel from the nations still lies in the future; however, the emphasis here is on Israel's salvation as the nation's place in the divine economy fades into the background. The storm (Gog) has come and gone. Now the scene is set for the organization of the secure community.

What is the purpose of the victory? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Compare your answer with the text)

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Biblical history is replete with warnings prior to divine judgement: e.g., the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; Noah's preaching prior to the flood; the preaching of the eighth-century prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, of *The Old Testament Library*, trans. Cosslett Quin (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 451-52.

<sup>3</sup>Some interpreters have suggested that the prophet envisioned the resurrection of King David from the dead; others deny any messianic import here and interpret the phrase as referring to the reinstatement of the old Davidic dynasty. Both seem to miss the real significance of the passage.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, p. 476.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Ezekiel," *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, ed. by D. Guthrie et al. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 682-84. Beasley-Murray suggests that Ezekiel's Temple and city "was a plan for the era of God's kingdom" and not a projection to be fulfilled in "the Kingdom of Christ" at His return. According to the New Testament, (1) Christ's atonement nullified the Old Testament sacrifices (Heb. 10:18), (2) the heirs of the Kingdom are no longer the Jewish nation but the Church, the New Israel (cf. above), and (3) Revelation 21:9—22:5 adapts Ezekiel to describe the Church in the Kingdom of God removing all traces of Judaism. To speak of a "double fulfillment" of these at the same time "is to demand credence in the incredible." The truth projected in the "Jewish" dispensation will be embodied in the new age under terms suitable to the "new (Christian) dispensation."

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, pp. 519-21, for an evaluation of the structure of the individual visions.

<sup>8</sup>The Apocalypse of John (Revelation) adapts the victory of Yahweh to that of Christ. The truth is projected to New Israel, the Church, and the Messiah, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who will return and defeat Gog and Magog prior to the establishment of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 19—21).

<sup>9</sup>Ezekiel's basic thrust is nationalistic. In fact, he is classified as the "father of Judaism." He does not present the broad universalism of Isaiah 40—66, Jonah or Ruth; however, he does not ignore their teachings.

<sup>10</sup>Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, pp. 520-21, suggests that the language and form of the chapters suggest that the author of these oracles "came from the school of disciples who gathered themselves to Ezekiel." Although plausible, it is entirely possible that these are later oracles of Ezekiel as he came to grips with the delay in his "time schedule." Man's time table (chronological history) does not always agree with God's time table (content history).

<sup>11</sup>The translation, "the prince of Rosh," is questionable, although possible. Grammatically, the expression seemingly refers to Gog, a personal name, the "head" or "chief prince" of Magog (the land).

<sup>12</sup>Magog, Meshech and Tubal are found in Genesis 10:2 as the sons of Japheth; Meshech and Tubal are cities of southern Asia Minor. Verse 5 refers to Persia, Ethiopia and Put (North African area of Lydia); verse 6 has Gomer (Cimmerians) and Beth-Togarmah (Black Sea area, area of Armenia).

<sup>13</sup>C. G. Howie, *Ezekiel Daniel*, Vol. 13 of *The Layman's Bible Commentary* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1961), p. 76.

<sup>14</sup>It has been suggested that Gog was coined from Magog (mgg), a similar process derived from ancient cipher as used by Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 51:1-4): read backward "ggm" would be a play on "bbl" or Babylon, the real recipient of the prophecy. Cf. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), p. 842. If so, this is the only prophecy in the book against Babylon.

<sup>15</sup>Other possible identifications include King Gyges of Lydia (ca. 676 BC), known as "Gugu" in the Assyrian text; the Amarna text refers to the "Gagi," a barbarian people and serves as the basis for "Gog."

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Jeremiah's use of the term; also, between 626-587 BC there were at least five invasions of Palestine from the North.

<sup>17</sup>Revelation 19:17ff. deletes the gruesome details of the passage as the text is reinterpreted.

## Home Study Exercise

**Basic activity** (*Levels 1, 2, and 3*). Read the study guide and answer the following questions:

1. With the fall of Jerusalem, where did hope for the future lie?

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2. Interpret the parable of the watchman (Ezek. 33:1-6).

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3. What are two alternatives faced by the individual?

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4. What is the meaning of the phrase "his blood will I require from the watchman's hand" (Ezek. 33:6c)?

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5. What are four lessons found in Ezekiel 33:10-20?

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6. How was the situation of Ezekiel and the exiles different from that faced by Jeremiah and those in Judah?

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7. Explain Eichrodt's concept of the enlarged prophetic task. What did it constitute? What was the new function as a watchman?

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8. What was the reaction of the people to Ezekiel? Why did the Lord reveal this to the prophet?

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9. Name three things Yahweh will do for the sheep (Ezek. 34:12-14).

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10. Name two contributions Ezekiel made to the Messianic hope of Israel.

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11. Give the meanings of (1) servant (*e'bed*); (2) prince (*nasi'*); and (3) king (*melek*).

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12. List four results following the covenant of peace (Ezek. 34:25ff.)

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13. How does the oracle against Edom (Ezek. 35:1-15) fit into the theme of the future restoration of Israel?

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14. What is salvation as projected in Ezekiel 36:21-23,32?

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15. What is the meaning of forgiveness (Ezek. 36:24,25)?

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16. What is Ezekiel's understanding of the purpose of deliverance (Ezek. 36:36-38)?

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17. Discuss Ezekiel's resurrection.

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18. Identify Gog of Ezekiel 38:2.

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19. What is the evil plan devised by Gog in Ezekiel 38:10-13?

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20. Describe the battle of Ezekiel 38:14-23.

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**Supplementary activity** (*Levels 2 and 3*).

1. What was Ezekiel's reaction to the dogma of the inviolability of Jerusalem?
2. What are the lessons taught in Ezekiel 33? How is divine sovereignty related to human freedom?
3. Relate chronologically the historical periods treated in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah 40—55. Give textual evidence for your dating.
4. What are the characteristics of the Good Shepherd as seen in Ezekiel 34, Psalm 23 and John 10? What do the passages have in common?

**Advanced activity** (*Level 3*). Read an article on "Resurrection" in a Bible encyclopedia or dictionary and answer the following:

1. What two Old Testament personalities escaped death?
2. According to Malachi, when would Elijah return?
3. What was Job's hope (cf. Job 19 and Ps. 73)?
4. What does Daniel teach about a resurrection (Dan. 12)? To whom do the "many" refer?
5. What contribution does Ezekiel make to the Old Testament concept?
6. Could Ezekiel 34:23 and 37:24 refer to David's resurrection?
7. What contributions does Isaiah 53 make towards a Christian understanding of resurrection?

### **Optional Supplementary Reading**

Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pages 496-529.

H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, pages 150-176.

### **Seminar Discussion**

1. Discuss the interpretation of Ezekiel 38—39. Does Gog refer to Russia? Is the passage a prophetic projection of the twentieth century as the end time?
2. Does the interpretation of Gog as prince (head) of Magog eliminate the urgency of preparation for the imminent return of Christ?
3. Evaluate Beasley-Murray's suggestion cited in footnote 6 (Lesson 11).
4. Evaluate the suggestion that the Church, the body of Christ, is the new Israel. (Cf. the New Testament passages listed in the introduction to Ezek. 36—37.)