

AN HEART OF FLESH

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

- Ezekiel 36: 25, 26 -

All Scripture citations are to the KJV

THIS PROMISE applies to no other nation, people, society or religious culture but Jewish Israel. Thus we are at once led to the opening premise. From the earlier and latter verses of this chapter from the book of Ezekiel we may assert with confidence that Israel is found by the LORD in a forlorn state of separation from Him and that He will put matters right. The setting is future: ‘Then . . .’. In this passage the LORD adverts to the contrast that will overtake her when she is converted. The transformation will equip her for her great work toward humanity, forecast in prophecy since the days of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people and all the faithful down the ages (Gen. 12: 1-3):

1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: **2** And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: **3** And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Uncleanness

In our passage from Ezek. 36 Israel is found to be unclean and must be washed – ‘sprinkled’ with ‘clean’ water, uncontaminated with impurities (representing sin); the nation, having been marred by sins accreted over the centuries, needs purifying by the LORD God. By way of illustration see the ritual purification of the Tabernacle Levites when the nation, having settled into its wilderness encampment, was cleansed before engaging in sacrificial service (Num. 8: 6, 7). She was also to be cleansed from ‘filthiness’ – a contamination from association with the ‘heathen’, or Gentile nations, during her various and sundry periods of captivity (Ezra 6: 21; 9: 11).

Idolatry

Next, her predilection for idolatry, of which there not a few instances, is addressed (2 Kings 17: 7; Ezek. 6: 3-7, *inter alia*). The Hebrew word for ‘idolatry’ is *gillul* and signifies a *log* or *block*, the material from which the image was hewn or fashioned.

New Spirit

She will be granted a new ‘spirit’ (*rûwach*), wind, (resembling) breath, energy, mood. This Hebrew word appears many times; it denotes that which can be felt, but not seen; that which manifests the essence of a person or, in this case, a nation.

Heart of Stone-Heart of Flesh

The LORD determines to replace Israel's hard heart with one of 'flesh'. There are very many definitions for the Hebrew word translated 'stone' (*sharp, projecting*), the surface of which may be natural or polished; smooth or angular; large or small; or of the sort Jacob pressed into service as his pillow (Gen. 28: 18; *e.g.*, 'my rest a stone', 'Nearer My God, to Thee'). The analogy holds up well in modern parlance. Hard or stony stands for *perverse*: resistant to softness or tender affection. Israel, the national collective, was characteristically stubborn and wayward (Jer. 16: 11-13). To those who are given much, much is required. Nonetheless, we may sympathise with the Jewish people whose history has been an open book and they have been much maligned throughout it.

Ishmael

Of Abraham's first child we read: The son of Abraham by Hagar the Egyptian, Abraham's concubine; born when Abraham was fourscore and six years old (Gen. 16: 15, 16). Ishmael was thus the first-born of his father and the half-brother of Isaac, who would come later (by Sarai). Of his nature, Scripture predicted that Ishmael 'will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren' (Gen. 16: 11, 12).

He was born in Abraham's house when he dwelt in the plain of Mamre, being thirteen years old on the institution of the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17: 18, 20, 23-27). Comforted by the renewal of God's promise to make of Ishmael a great nation, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away (spurred partly by the jealousy of Sarai*), and they departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. Hagar 'took for Ishmael a wife out of the land of Egypt' (Gen. 21: 9-21). This wife of Ishmael was, in turn, the mother of twelve sons and one daughter. Of the later life of Ishmael we know little. He was present with Isaac at the burial of Abraham. He died at the age of 137 (Gen. 25: 17, 18).

The sons of Ishmael peopled the north and west of the Arabian peninsula, and eventually formed the chief element of the Arab nation, the wandering Bedouin tribes. They are now mostly Moslem and look to Abraham as their spiritual father, as the Jews do also. Their language, which is generally acknowledged to have been the Arabic community, has been adopted throughout Arabia. The term 'Ishmaelite' occurs on several occasions: Gen. 37: 23-28; 39: 1; Judges 8: 24; Psa. 83: 6.

[*Sidenote*: Islamic teaching avers it was Ishmael – not Isaac – who proffered himself on the altar, was spared, and a ram killed in his stead. From the Muslim point of view: 'Muslims believe Ishmael was sacrificed. The lack of early manuscript evidence, in particular the Dead Sea Scrolls naming "Isaac" leaves the matter unresolved for now' (*Muslim Prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus & Muhammad*).]

Conversion of the Nation of Israel

The conversion of Israel on recognition of their Messiah is intimately connected with the establishment of the New Covenant, which will be instrumentalised through the agency of Israel. This momentous event will usher in the Kingdom of God on earth. The plan has already been prefigured and vouchsafed by the gathering of the Jewish people from all corners of the earth and their *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

Despite opposition from the 'Ishmaelite' and Gentile countries, who will eventually turn against her, and, indeed, Israel's prosecution of its own unjust war, by which Tel-Aviv will trade its

independence and virtue in exchange for the protection and approbation of the Gentile powers – she will nonetheless prevail and be delivered by the mighty arm of Jehovah. She will call upon the LORD and ‘*him whom they have pierced*’ and will be wholly saved (Zech. 12: 10; Ezek. 39: 21-29).

31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: **32** Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: **33** But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34** And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. – Jer. 31: 31-34

* * *

Endnote:

* **Gen. 16: 6** But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thine hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly [roughly] with her, she fled from her face. **7** And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. **8** And he said, Hagar, Sarai’s maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. **9** And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. **10** And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, *that it shall not be numbered for multitude*. **11** And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; *because the LORD hath heard thy affliction*. **12** *And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren*. **13** And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? **14** Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. **15** And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son’s name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. **16** And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.