

Spirit-Filled Heart

Bible Background • [EZEKIEL 36–37](#); [TITUS 3:1–11](#)

Printed Text • [EZEKIEL 36:22–32](#)

Devotional Reading • [ISAIAH 43:14–21](#)

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **AGREE** that a Spirit-filled heart makes a difference in the lives of believers; **APPRECIATE** the gift of His Spirit; and become **RECEPTIVE** to the work of God's Spirit in our lives.



Tammy Wigington was a very successful bank executive. She had received many awards for her exemplary work. Her office wall was covered with certificates and plaques that Tammy proudly boasted about to everyone. But no one knew her big secret. When Tammy was hired 15 years prior, she had lied about her credentials on her resume. She had not graduated college with a Bachelor's Degree, but an Associate's Degree. Her best friend Tracey, who worked for the bank, did not check her credentials. So Tammy was hired as a bank manager and worked her way up to her current position. However, during the last month, the bank began auditing all the employees' personal files. Tammy was horrified and knew she could be fired.

One day she was notified that she had to attend a meeting about discrepancies in her file. Tammy went to the meeting, and when confronted with their findings of her education, she confessed. After talking with her, they decided not to fire her. After being a successful corporate executive, she would now be demoted to a bank manager until she fulfilled the educational requirements. After she graduated, Tammy could reapply for an executive position. Tammy felt relieved and thanked God for a second chance. She knew she needed a new heart of honesty and humility to succeed in the future.

What causes us to do wrong even when we know the consequences? In today's lesson, we will discover how God's grace can propel us to change.

Keep in Mind

“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 a heart of flesh” ([Ezekiel 36:26^L](#)).

KJV

[Ezekiel 36:22](#)  Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD: I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went.

23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

25 Then will I sprinkle clean waters upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

26 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 a heart of flesh.

27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

29 I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.

30 And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.

31 Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.

32 Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed

NLT

[Ezekiel 36:22](#)  “Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign LORD: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations.

23 I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign LORD, then the nations will know that I am the LORD.

24 For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land.

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols.

26 And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.

27 And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

28 And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God.

29 I will cleanse you of your filthy behavior. I will give you good crops of grain, and I will send no more famines on the land.

30 I will give you great harvests from your fruit trees and fields, and never again will the surrounding nations be able to scoff at your land for its famines.

31 Then you will remember your past sins and despise yourselves for all the detestable things you did.

32 But remember, says the Sovereign LORD, I am not doing this because you deserve it.

The People, Places, and Times

Ezekiel. Ezekiel's name means "God strengthens." He was a priest ([Ezekiel 1:3^L](#)). His wife died the day the siege of Jerusalem began in 588 B.C. (24:1, 15–18). He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, who ministered to the people still in Judah. Ezekiel was deported to Babylon in 597 B.C. with King Jehoiachin. His prophetic ministry among the Babylonian exiles was from 593–571 B.C.

Babylonian Captivity. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and took the captives to Babylon. The three deportations of Israelites to Babylon occurred in roughly 597 B.C., 587 B.C., and 582 B.C. God allowed them to be held by the Babylonians for seventy years. Most of the captives were treated as colonists. The Babylonian exile was brought to a close after the fall of Babylon by Cyrus the Great, who issued a decree at approximately 536 B.C. for the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem ([Ezra 1:2^L](#)). How did Ezekiel's relationship with God affect the reality of being a captive in Babylon?

Background

Ezekiel demonstrated to the people that God had a right to punish them for their sin-ful behavior and send them into captivity in Babylon ([Ezekiel 18:25–29^L](#), [33:17–20^L](#)). He wanted the people to know that God's chas-tening had a purpose: to correct and prevent the sinful behavior. In the book of Ezekiel, the phrase "then they shall know that I am the Lord" is used seventy times, indicating the purpose of God disciplining His people.

After showing that the people were at fault for their punishment and captivity, Ezekiel promises that God will punish the nations that rejoiced over Israel's fall (Ezekiel 25–32). Eventually, God would restore the Israelites both spiritually and physically (Ezekiel 33–48). God is gracious and compassionate toward His people then and now.

How can the discipline and chastisement of God produce righteous living?

At-A-Glance

1. The Holy Name of God ([Ezekiel 36:22–24](#)^L)
2. The Spiritual Restoration and Physical Restoration (vv. 25–30)
3. The Remembrance and Repentance (vv. 31–32)

In Depth

1. The Holy Name of God ([Ezekiel 36:22–24](#)^L)

God was going to restore the Israelites to protect His holy name. His name is His identity and reputation by which He is known. God's past acts of deliverance sufficiently revealed His true nature. In spite of this, the behavior of the Israelites did not live up to God's holy character. They had profaned His name or made it unholy. This wasn't done secretly; it was done in public "among the nations."

The Israelites did not deserve to be restored or blessed by God. They had shamed God with their evil behavior. But in spite of their sins, God extended mercy anyway. He revealed His true nature for all the nations to see.

God is merciful, gracious, and compassionate toward us. These are His eternal attributes and they are not predicated on us.

What do we need to modify in our lives in order to better reflect the character of God?

2. The Spiritual Restoration and Physical Restoration (vv. 25–30)

God's first step was to spiritually restore the people. Ezekiel refers to the ritual act of cleansing with water, which was to symbolically purify them (v. 25). The water was mixed with the ashes of a red heifer that did not have a defect or blemish when sacrificed (Numbers 19). Humans could not make themselves clean. Today, the blood of Christ has supreme cleansing power to take away our sin ([Hebrews 9:13–14](#)^L).

The "heart of flesh" represents a pliable, teachable heart versus the "heart of stone," which is hard and stubborn. God promises to give the Israelites a new heart for following Him and infuse

His Spirit within them to transform and empower them to submit to His will (vv. 26–27; [Psalm 51:7–11](#)). This is needed because on their own, they would always fail to live up to God’s standard. The new covenant is promised once again ([Jeremiah 31:33–34](#)), and would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ. After the spiritual restoration occurs, God promised to physically restore the Israelites as well. The Israelites would return to their homeland and the land would yield abundant harvests (vv. 28–30).

What is the appropriate way to demonstrate our gratefulness to God for His manifold blessings?

3. The Remembrance and Repentance (vv. 31–32)

After God spiritually and physically restores the Israelites, they will remember their past sins, hate them, and then repent (v. 31). The Lord makes sure that the Israelites know that their goodness is not why He blesses them. God’s goodness leads to repentance—in other words, God is God! The blessings that He bestows are not subject to our behavior, but to His identity as God who is gracious and compassionate and full of love for His people. Do we take for granted all the blessings we have been given, not realizing that God’s grace is why we have these blessings?

It is easy for us to be proud of our accomplishments and behavior as if they are why we have received so much favor in life. The truth is that no matter how many good deeds we do, we still need God’s grace. To think otherwise is an exercise in self-righteousness. This should make us evaluate our lives, repent of wrongdoing, and give thanks to God. He alone is worthy of all honor and glory.

How do we develop a greater sensitivity and receptiveness to the Holy Spirit’s nudges toward repentance?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why was God going to act on behalf of Israel ([Ezekiel 36:22](#))? 2. What transformation could be expected when God gave the Israelites a new spirit (v. 27)?
2. What transformation could be expected when God gave the Israelites a new spirit (v. 27)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How should we respond to God’s grace and mercy toward us?
2. Assess the role confession and repentance have in our spiritual renewal. Is confession more important than repentance, or is it the other way around? Why or why not?

Lesson in Our Society

The world seems to be overrun by people who do evil things. It can make one wonder if people can really change. We do not understand how a heart transformation can occur, but just as God blessed and transformed your life, He can do it for others as well, regardless of their sins.

Transformation occurs through the Spirit working on the inside, and eventually, we see it on the outside.

In many African American churches, the culture dictates dressing nicely and being emotionally expressive in services. There is nothing wrong with these things, but we should never judge a person based on their outfit or whether they know how to shout in church. These things do not equate to the inner transformation of the heart, which is what God wants to change and transform.

When you compare your spiritual life now to what it was five years ago, what differences can you identify?

Make It Happen

To have a new heart of flesh is a privilege and a responsibility. With this in mind:

- Repent and thank God for the Spirit that is transforming your life.
- Ask God to make you sensitive to His active work in your life as well as in the life of others.
- List the ways that God has already helped you to make changes in your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do?

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

Ezekiel 36:22–32^L

22 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.

This passage is the first of three oracles in Ezekiel 36. An oracle is information transmitted from the deity to human beings. An oracle usually either answers important questions or provides a revelation about future events.

In the book of Ezekiel, the problem is that the Israelites have profaned the Lord's name. Furthermore, the Israelites have sullied His name while they were among "the nations to which

you came”—the Babylonians who did not follow the Lord. Through the prophetic oracle, the Lord announces preparation to take action in order to protect His name.

23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. 24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

The Lord’s name and holiness among the goyim (“nations”) are of utmost concern. The Hebrew term goy (pl, goyim, GOY; goy-EEM) means a nation, people, or community. In this plural form, it always refers to non-Hebrew peoples. Here, the oracle is most likely referring to the non-Hebrew people whom the Israelites encountered when they were taken into exile. The Israelites had profaned the Lord “in front of company,” and therefore have been sent into exile. The exile was intolerable but necessary. The Lord had to take action to ensure that His name’s holiness or transcendent power might be vindicated in human history. Specifically, in this oracle, the Lord promises a return of the exiles to their home in the Judean territory.

25 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.

One way the ancient Israelites reinforced their understanding of themselves as different and set apart from other nations was by establishing boundaries. Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites mark certain things or activities as “clean” or “unclean.” Leviticus 17–26 (the Holiness Code) provides examples of this concern for purity and impurity including religious and cultic cleanliness. Stressing the decree to be holy because Yahweh is holy ([Leviticus 19:2](#), [20:7](#)), these laws contain stipulations regarding illegitimate sacrifice, the proper treatment of blood, prohibitions against a variety of sexual sins, blasphemy, and the role of the priest. These sorts of rules and concerns would have undoubtedly crossed the minds of Ezekiel’s audience.

Here, taking center stage are the Hebrew verb *taher* (Heb. ta-HAIR), which means “to pronounce clean” or “to purify,” and the adjective *tahor* (Heb. ta-HOR), which means “clean.” The Lord promises to sprinkle clean or pure water on the people. As a result, the people will be clean from all of their uncleanness. Finally, the Lord will purify the people from their idols.

This language hearkens back to the stipulations for holiness and points to a theological hypothesis for the Babylonian exile and the experience of the Judean exiles. For prophets like Ezekiel, one reason for the exile is that the Israelites turned from the Lord and adopted many of the practices of other communities. In so doing, the Israelites defiled themselves or made themselves unclean. As a result, the Lord used the exile to cleanse the people and the land and to restore order. Much of the exilic prophets’ concern is identifying what went wrong so that the Israelite community could avoid another catastrophe like an exile in the future. The answer for Ezekiel is attending to ritual and social cleanliness.

26 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. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Building upon the idea that the exilic Israelites have turned away and committed some form of apostasy (the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief), the Lord proposes to correct the situation by changing their heart (Heb. lev, LEB). Here the word “heart” is used metaphorically to represent the center of something. Note that the ancients did not use detailed psychological vocabulary to make the fine distinctions as in our modern speech. The Israelites thought of the whole human being and personality with all its physical, intellectual, and psychological attributes when they used “heart,” which was considered the governing center for the entire personality. The heart (the core) makes and identifies the person ([Proverbs 4:23^L](#)). Character, personality, will, and mind are modern terms which reflect something of the meaning of “heart” in its biblical usage.

In essence, to change one’s heart was to change the will or character. The Lord commits to endow the Israelites with a new will that would be sensitive to Him. In an effort to reclaim the wayward Israelites, the Lord promises to give them a new desire that is an expression of His own spirit. In this way, the covenant relationship might be restored.

The biblical writer paints the Lord as one who is willing to go above and beyond to make things right regardless of who is at fault. This is an encouraging word for modern believers. We serve a God who is willing to extend Himself in order to bring us back into a covenant relationship, even if we have turned away from that relationship.

28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Endowed with a new heart and spirit, the Israelites may now benefit from a return to their land. The Lord’s promise to return them to the land of their ancestors hearkens back to the Abrahamic Covenant ([Genesis 12:1–3^L](#)), which includes a promise to make Abraham’s people into “a great nation” with the promise to bring them into a vast land ([Genesis 15:18–21^L](#)). This is the land that the Israelites inhabited until Nebuchadnezzar seized Jerusalem and deported members of the community to Babylon. The prospect of returning must have held great meaning for the exiles. Beyond leaving their exilic state, returning to “the land that I gave to your fathers” signaled the return to a right relationship with the Lord. The Lord affirms the mending of the covenant relationship with the assurance, “I will be your God.”

29 I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.

The Lord extends further grace by promising not only to purify the Israelites, but also to protect them from famine. In some ways, these external material changes (plentiful grain in the face of famine) reinscribe the notion of the inner heart changes made by the Israelites in verse 26. For an agrarian society whose economy is heavily dependent upon crops, animals, and farmland for sustenance, a famine would have dire consequences. If the fields do not produce crops and grain, the people and their animals do not eat. In this way, a famine was synonymous with death.

The Hebrew noun ra‘av (rah-AB) may be translated as “famine” or “hunger.” Beyond being physically hungry, this word is also used for a famine of God’s Word ([Amos 8:11^L](#)). There is something to be said for being hungry for the Lord. Many modern readers may have experienced situations in which they found themselves in a spiritual famine. In those moments, the urgency of

reestablishing and maintaining a relationship with the Lord becomes a life and death situation. God is able to provide divine salvation from the consequences of uncleanness.

30 And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. 31 Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.

These verses extend the idea that the Lord will command nature to produce on behalf of the Israelites now that they have been restored to right relationship. The produce of the land would be responsive to the Lord's command, and the famine associated with judgment earlier in the book would be a thing of the past ([Ezekiel 14:21](#)^L). Additionally, the old ways of the Israelites would be abandoned and forgotten. They would no longer be tempted to turn away from the Lord, but would have an instinctive reaction at the mere remembrance of their former, evil ways. These verses recall Israel's early, sinful history and at the same time warn that this should not be forgotten, but instead be remembered, with real revulsion at the guilt and horror of the past.

32 Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

Returning to the motive outlined in v. 22 ("Not for your sakes do I this"), this verse reiterates that the Israelites' self-promotion and reckless pride associated with their special relationship with the Lord is the central concern of this oracle. The closing imperative ("Be ashamed and confounded") does not call members of its intended audiences to rejoice, but rather to repent.

Responsible discipleship does not lose sight of the fact that we always run the risk of falling short of the conditions of our covenant relationship. We may turn away from the Lord. We may neglect our participation in rituals and customs that reaffirm our relationship to the Lord. We may even align ourselves with things and people that are not godly. And when that happens, the Lord is well within His right to respond in ways that do not bring us joy. As an oracle, however, the words of Ezekiel are meant to serve as a warning. Therefore, for modern readers, this text may serve as a reminder that our relationship with the Lord carries responsibility.

Say It Correctly

Oracle. OR-uh-kel.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A New Covenant of the Heart
([Jeremiah 31:31–34](#))

TUESDAY

Nations Will Know the Lord
([Ezekiel 36:33–38](#))

WEDNESDAY

The Lord Will Restore Israel
([Ezekiel 37:11–14](#))

THURSDAY

Restored as One People
([Ezekiel 37:15–23](#))

FRIDAY

Making a Covenant of Peace
([Ezekiel 37:24–28](#))

SATURDAY

Profitable Actions for Everyone ([Titus 3:8–11](#))

SUNDAY

I Will Restore My Holy Name
([Ezekiel 36:22–32](#))