

Heart and Soul

Ezekiel 36:26-28

Dr. Pierre Cannings

I. Give and Take vs. 26-27

- a. Give - in both passages it is Jahveh who *bestows* the change
 - i. New Heart- **new, fresh** , not yet existing
 - ii. Third, God promised to regenerate the people spiritually by giving them a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (v. 26). No longer would they be characterized by perverse thinking and unresponsiveness to God
 - iii. Ezekiel’s conception corresponds to Jeremiah’s *new covenant*, in which Jahveh’s law is bestowed inwardly, and written on the heart;
- b. Remove
 - i. Heart of Stone- tables of the law
- c. Give
 - i. Heart of Flesh – body
 - 1. that the O. T. does not regard *the flesh* as something evil, or as the peculiar haunt of sin.
 - ii. The change of will from “stone” to “flesh” would be made possible by the new covenant presented in Jer 31:31–34. This new internalized covenant would lead the people to turn to the new shepherd, the Messiah, and exchange their rebelliousness for a new heart, sensitive to the will of God.
 - iii. At present Israel’s heart (the seat of the mind, of inclinations and resolutions; BDB pp. 524–25) is stony; Israel is “tough/hard-hearted”—obdurate and obstinate (2:4; 3:7; see comment). After its purification its heart will be “of flesh”—yielding, malleable, impressionable—of the same element as its body. Implicit is the idea that presently Israel’s inner nature is at odds with its mortal, creaturely frame.
 - iv. Yahweh would creatively endow Israel with new wills that were to be sensitive rather than stony and hard in their reactions to Yahweh’s will.

II. Put in Work vs. 26-27

- a. Put
 - i. new spirit
 - 1. *my spirit*. God, who “fashions the spirit of man”—his animating impulse (1:12 “will”)—“inside him” (Zech 12:1), will replace Israel’s hopelessly corrupted spirit with his own impulsion to goodness and righteousness, his “good spirit” of Ps 143:10: “Teach me to do what pleases you ... May your good spirit lead me on level ground.”

ii. My Spirit

- a. The *gift* or *pouring out* of God's spirit was a principal feature in the hopes of the coming age, e.g. 37:14; 39:29; Is. 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; Hag. 2:5; Joel 3:1, 2 [2:28, 29]; and in later times it was associated with the coming of the Messiah
- b. Thanks to him, their lives would be governed by a new impulse that was to be an expression of Yahweh's own spirit. He would re-make their human natures, so that they marched to the music of the covenant terms that expressed Yahweh's nature and will.

2. Cause

a. Walk

- i. In Statutes- prescriptions, rule
- ii. The Spirit of God will "move" them to follow ("walk in") his laws (v. 27). Inability to keep the law was a primary concern presented by the apostle Paul. He lamented his struggle and failure to keep the law in his own strength (Rom 7:13–25) and followed that lament with the solution in Rom 8:1–39. The solution to his dilemma was living in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:16–26).
- iii. The enabling power to do this would be provided by a "new spirit" within them. God called this new spirit "my Spirit" (v. 27), meaning Yahweh's Holy Spirit (11:19–20; 18:31; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29), who would empower them to obey the law of God.
- iv. *and I will bring it about that ye walk in my statutes and do them*] The opening expression is hardly paralleled in the Hebr. of the O. T.; the rest of the sentence recalls the language . Lev. 18:4; 19:37; 20:8; 25:18; 26:3 etc., Dt. 4:6 (*keep and do them*) 7:12; 16:12 etc., Josh. 23:6; see further *ch.* 5:6 *n.*, 37:24.—

III. Live it Out v. 28

a. Careful to Observe

- i. Ordinances in the legal decisions of Yahweh , **judgements**

b. Live

- i. In the Land
- ii. I gave to Forefathers

c. Be My People

i. I will be your God

1. The people will live permanently in the land that God gave their forefathers (v. 28). The word “live” is from the root *yāsāb*, which means “to dwell” as a permanent resident and is antithetical to *gûr*, “sojourner,” or “a temporary resident or resident alien.” The covenant relationship of the Hebrews will be reaffirmed (cf. 11:20; 14:11)
2. *become to me a people ... become to them a God*] See 11:20 *n.*, Lev. 26:12: the ideal relation between Jahveh and Israel will be established

Word Studies

Give

New Heart- **new, fresh** (:1: |ψי and |ψינ Lv 26:10), not yet existing²

Put

New Spirit –

Remove

Heart of Stone- the tables of the law

Give

Hear of Flesh – body

Put Spirit

Walk –

Statutes - **prescription, rule**

¹:: in contrast with

² Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 294.

Background

INTRODUCTION

For the average reader of the Bible the Book of Ezekiel is mostly a perplexing maze of incoherent visions—a kaleidoscope of whirling wheels and dry bones that defy interpretation. This impression often causes readers to shy away from studying the book and to miss one of the great literary and spiritual portions of the Old Testament.

Authorship and Date. The author of this book is “Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi” (1:3). The name Ezekiel means “God will strengthen” or “God will harden.”

Like Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1) and Zechariah (Zech. 1:1; cf. Neh. 12:4, 16), Ezekiel was a priest (Ezek. 1:3). Ezekiel’s father Buzi is mentioned only in 1:3. Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Ezekiel were the only prophet-priests; and all three prophesied during the exilic or postexilic periods. Ezekiel’s priestly background explains in part his emphasis on the temple in Jerusalem, the glory of the Lord, the actions of Jerusalem’s priests, and God’s future temple.

The date for Ezekiel’s ministry can be determined by noting the chronological notations in his book (1:2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21; 40:1).

All Ezekiel’s prophecies are arranged chronologically (starting with “the 5th year of the exile,” 1:2, and ending with “the 25th year of our exile,” 40:1, except the prophecies introduced in 29:1, 17). These two variations may be explained by the fact that they are grouped topically as part of the prophecies against Egypt in chapters 29–32.

Ezekiel’s ministry began “in the fourth month on the fifth day” of “the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin” (1:1–2). Jehoiachin came to the throne in December 597 B.C. after Jehoiakim died (2 Kings 24:1–12). After a reign of only three months Jehoiachin was captured by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon. The fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile was 593 B.C., and the fourth month was the month Tammuz. According to Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein (*Babylonian Chronology: 626 B.C.–A.D. 75*. Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1956) the month Tammuz (Akk., *Duzu*) began on July 27 in 593 B.C. Therefore Ezekiel began his ministry on July 31, 593 B.C. (the “fifth day” is inclusive, counting both July 27 and 31).

Ezekiel also said his ministry began “in the 30th year” (Ezek. 1:1). Scholars debate the exact meaning of this statement, but many feel it refers to Ezekiel’s age. If so, he was commissioned as a prophet at the age he was qualified to enter the priesthood (cf. Num. 4:3).

The last dated prophecy in Ezekiel was “in the 27th year, in the first month on the first day” (Ezek. 29:17). Since Ezekiel began prophesying in 593 (the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile, 1:2), this prophecy was 571 B.C. (March 26). So Ezekiel’s prophetic activity spanned at least 22 years (593–571 B.C.), from age 30 to 52.

Till recently few Bible scholars had doubted the unity, authorship, or exilic date of Ezekiel. Arguments challenging these items have been satisfactorily answered by conservatives (e.g.,

Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Rev. ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, pp. 368–76; and John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 13–20).

Historical Background. For a discussion of Judah's history in Ezekiel's time see "Historical Background" in the *Introduction* to Jeremiah.

The Book of Ezekiel was written during the time of Judah's bondage to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar's rule. Ezekiel lived with a group of captives in Tel Aviv (not the modern-day city in Israel by that name), located beside the Kebar River (3:15) in Babylon. The exact site of this settlement is unknown, but the Kebar River has been identified with the Grand Canal (Akk., *naru kabaru*) in Babylon. This canal branched off from the Euphrates just above Babylon and flowed east of the city. It continued through the site of ancient Nippur and then reentered the Euphrates near Uruk (biblical Erech).

During these final years Ezekiel was ministering in Babylon, predicting the coming collapse of Jerusalem. His message fell on deaf ears till word of the city's destruction was received in Babylon. The fall of the city prompted a change in Ezekiel's prophetic message. Before Jerusalem fell, Ezekiel's message focused on Judah's forthcoming destruction because of her sin. After Jerusalem's fall, Ezekiel's message centered on Judah's future restoration.

Structure and Style. The structure and style of Ezekiel's book has at least four major characteristics. 1. *Chronological arrangement.* As noted earlier under "Authorship and Date" a definite chronological movement is evident within the book. Ezekiel is the only major prophet with such a precise chronological arrangement but the Books of Haggai and Zechariah have a similar arrangement. 2. *Structural balance.* In addition to its chronological arrangement Ezekiel's book also has a structural order and harmony. The first 24 chapters focus on the judgment of Judah; chapters 33–48 focus on the restoration of Judah. These two extremes are balanced by chapters 25–32 which deal with God's judgment on other nations. The glory of God departed from the temple in judgment (9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:22–25) and reappeared in the temple for blessing (43:1–5). Ezekiel was commissioned to deliver a message of judgment (chaps. 2–3) and later was recommissioned to give a message of deliverance (chap. 33). 3. *Focus on the glory and character of God.* Ezekiel emphasized the glory and character of God. Having received a vision of God's glory before he was commissioned, Ezekiel continued to refer to God's glory throughout the book (1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:22–23; 39:11, 21; 43:2–5; 44:4).

God's character determined His conduct throughout the book. Fifteen times God declared that He had acted for the sake of His name to keep it from being profaned (20:9, 14, 22, 39, 44; 36:20–23 [twice in v. 23]; 39:7 [twice], 25; 43:7–8). Over 60 times God said He had acted so that the people would "know that I am the LORD" (e.g., 6:7, 10, 13–14). 4. *Use of literary devices.* Ezekiel used unique literary devices to drive home his message to a "hardened and obstinate" people. These included proverbs (12:22–23; 16:44; 18:2–3); visions (chaps. 1–3; 8–11; 37; 40–48); parables (chap. 17; 24:1–14); symbolic acts (chaps. 4–5; 12; 24:15–27); and allegories (chaps. 16–17).

By these means Ezekiel presented his messages in dramatic and forceful ways, thus getting the people's attention so they would respond.³

³ Charles H. Dyer, "[Ezekiel](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1224–1226.

Commentary Studies

26–28.

This fresh start, wonderful as it was, was not enough. How could Israel hope to maintain Yahweh's covenant standards, after their signal failure in pre-exilic times? The promise of 11:19–20 is echoed (cf. Hossfeld, *Untersuchungen* 336). The two statements of v 26a are unpacked in v 26b and v 27. Yahweh would creatively endow Israel with new wills that were to be sensitive rather than stony and hard in their reactions to Yahweh's will. Thanks to him, their lives would be governed by a new impulse that was to be an expression of Yahweh's own spirit. He would re-make their human natures, so that they marched to the music of the covenant terms that expressed Yahweh's nature and will. Only thus could the covenant relationship become a living actuality rather than a doctrinal truth. Only thus could the old ideal of Yahweh's people in Yahweh's land (cf. v 20) become a reality.⁴

26. I will give you *a new heart and a new spirit*] See 11:19 *n.*; in both passages it is Jahveh who *bestows* the change; in 18:31 His people are told to *make* it for themselves; the full truth is arrived at by combining the two statements, as in Phil. 2:12, 13, on which St. Augustine remarks, 'Nos ergo volumus, sed Deus in nobis operatur et velle; nos ergo operamur, sed Deus in nobis operatur et operari' (*de Don. Persev.* (tom. x. 838 ed. Ben.).—*and I will remove the heart of stone ... and give you a heart of flesh*] Incidentally it may be noticed (with Dav⁵. in loc.) that the O. T. does not regard *the flesh* as something evil, or as the peculiar haunt of sin. This verse holds an important place in Rabbinic discussions on the *yēšer hā-ra'*; it is the proof text for the belief that the evil inclination or tendency of human nature will ultimately be expelled by God. Two points are emphasized: (*a*) the process will be gradual, for the *yēšer hā-ra'* is like a high rock standing at the cross-roads, which caused men to stumble, until a king had it broken up by degrees, and cleared away, Midr. *Pesiḳta* fol. 165*a* (ed. Buber); and (*b*) this rooting out of the evil impulse will take place, not in the present world, but in the world to come, Midr. R⁶. *Exod.* § 41, *Num.* § 17, *Cant.* § 2; Midr. *Tanḥuma Exod.* p. 114, *Lev.* p. 8 (ed. Buber). This passage also suggested *the stone* as one of the seven names of the *yēšer hā-ra'*, because the feet of Israel stumbled at it, TB⁷. *Berākoṯh* fol. 32*a*, *Sukkah* fol. 52*a* and *b*. In each of these references the present v. is quoted. For the Rabbinic treatment of the subject see Bacher *Tannaiten* ii.

⁴ Leslie C. Allen, [Ezekiel 20–48](#), vol. 29, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 179.

⁵ Dav. A. B. Davidson *Ezekiel* (Cambridge Bible) 1892

⁶ Midr. R. Midrash Rabbā

⁷ TB. Talmud Babli

(1890), 273 f., 546; Porter in *Yale Bibl. and Sem. Studies* (1901), 130 ff.; Schechter *Aspects of Rabb. Theol.* (1909) chs. 15 and 16; Moore *Judaism* i. (1927), 493. Ezekiel's conception corresponds to Jeremiah's *new covenant*, in which Jahveh's law is bestowed inwardly, and written on the heart; as some of the Rabbis perceived, e.g. in Midr. R.⁸ *Cant.* § 2 and Midr. Tanhuma *Exod.* fol. 114 (in some Mss) Jer. 31:33 is referred to along with Ez. 36:26.—**27.** *And my spirit I will put within you*] The *new spirit* in man is to be supplemented by a gift of *Jahveh's spirit*, the divine energy which acts on human lives; cp. Ps. 51:12–14 [10–12]. The *gift* or *pouring out* of God's spirit was a principal feature in the hopes of the coming age, e.g. 37:14; 39:29; Is. 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; Hag. 2:5; Joel 3:1, 2 [2:28, 29]; and in later times it was associated with the coming of the Messiah, Mk. 1:7f. The N. T. records the first stage in the fulfilment of the prophetic hope, Acts 2:16–21; and St. Paul insists upon its continuance in the Christian Church, Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:13f.; 4:30.—*and I will bring it about that ye walk in my statutes and do them*] The opening expression is hardly paralleled in the Hebr. of the O. T.; the rest of the sentence recalls the language of ⁹H and ¹⁰D, e.g. Lev. 18:4; 19:37; 20:8; 25:18; 26:3 etc., Dt. 4:6 (*keep and do them*) 7:12; 16:12 etc., Josh. 23:6; see further *ch.* 5:6 *n.*, 37:24.—**28.** *ye shall dwell in the land*] See 28:25 *n.* The condition of the Jews' return to inhabit Canaan is faith and obedience to Jahveh's commandments, v. 27.—*which I gave to your fathers*] Cp. 20:28, 42; 47:14; so in Jer. 7:7; 11:5, going back to Dt. 1:8, 35; 11:9, 21.—*become to me a people ... become to them a God*] See 11:20 *n.*, Lev. 26:12: the ideal relation between Jahveh and Israel will be established.—¹¹

Second, God will cleanse them from their impurities and especially their idolatry, which had defiled the land (v. 25; cf. vv. 17–18). Ezekiel used his favorite word, *gillûlîm*, for “idols” (vv. 18, 25; see comments on 6:3–7). Cleansing and forgiveness were symbolized by sprinkling with clean water to wash away their impurities (cf. Ps 51:7). While the reference was to ceremonial cleansing that was necessary to reestablish worship (Num 19:13, 20), it is important to remember that ceremonial cleansing was an external rite, but it was a ritual that also called for internal repentance.

Third, God promised to regenerate the people spiritually by giving them a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (v. 26). No longer would they be characterized by perverse thinking and unresponsiveness to God (see comments at 11:17–21). The change of will from “stone” to “flesh” would be made possible by the new covenant presented in Jer 31:31–34. This new internalized covenant would lead the people to turn to the new shepherd, the Messiah, and exchange their rebelliousness for a new heart, sensitive to the will of God. The enabling power to do this would be provided by a “new spirit” within them. God called this new spirit “my

⁸Midr. R. Midrash Rabbâ

⁹H Holiness Law, Lev. 17–26

¹⁰D Deuteronomy, Deuteronomist

¹¹G. A. Cooke, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*](#), International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 391–392.

Spirit” (v. 27), meaning Yahweh’s Holy Spirit (11:19–20; 18:31; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29), who would empower them to obey the law of God.

The temptation to find the fulfillment of the “new heart” and “new spirit” of 36:25–27 exclusively in Christian conversion in this age should be resisted. New Testament conversion is only a preview of the massive spiritual revival God has in store for all of true Israel and Gentiles who believe. The New Testament concept of redemption came out of the theology of the Old Testament. The similarities exist because what God wants to do for Israel is what he wants to do for everyone. The point of Israel’s election to nationhood in Exod 19:1–8 was that they be mediators of the message of God’s salvation by fulfilling their missionary role as a “kingdom of priests.” When Israel did not fulfill its role, God used the New Testament church as a means of presenting the message of redemption. So the church will be used ultimately to reach Israel as well (Rom 10:1; 11:25–33).

Fourth, the Spirit of God will “move” them to follow (“walk in”) his laws (v. 27).⁵¹²⁵ Inability to keep the law was a primary concern presented by the apostle Paul. He lamented his struggle and failure to keep the law in his own strength (Rom 7:13–25) and followed that lament with the solution in Rom 8:1–39. The solution to his dilemma was living in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:16–26).

Fifth, the people will live permanently in the land that God gave their forefathers (v. 28). The word “live” is from the root *yāsāb*, which means “to dwell” as a permanent resident and is antithetical to *gûr*, “sojourner,” or “a temporary resident or resident alien.” The covenant relationship of the Hebrews will be reaffirmed (cf. 11:20; 14:11).¹³

26–27. Elaborates 11:19–20 and contrasts with 18:31: “Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit”; see ¹⁴l, 341. Vs. 26a is explicated by vss. 26b–27a. At present Israel’s heart (the seat of the mind, of inclinations and resolutions; BD¹⁵B, pp. 524–25) is stony; Israel is “tough/hard-hearted”—obdurate and obstinate (2:4; 3:7; see comment). After its purification its heart will be “of flesh”—yielding, malleable, impressionable—of the same element as its body. Implicit is the idea that presently Israel’s inner nature is at odds with its mortal, creaturely frame.

my spirit. God, who “fashions the spirit of man”—his animating impulse (1:12 “will”)—“inside him” (Zech 12:1), will replace Israel’s hopelessly corrupted spirit with his own impulsion to goodness and righteousness, his “good spirit” of Ps 143:10: “Teach me to do what pleases you ... May your good spirit lead me on level ground.”

¹²⁵⁵ “Move” translates an unusual use of עשה, “to do, make.” BDB (795) gives the sense here (also Eccl 3:14) as “bring about.” Allen (*Ezekiel 20–48*, 175) translates “ensure.”

¹³ Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, vol. 17, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 316–317.

¹⁴l *Ezekiel 1–20*, Anchor Bible (followed by page number)

¹⁵BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907 (corrected impression, 1952)

and so bring to pass. With this use of *‘sh* Cooke rightly compares Eccl 3:14: the sage climaxes his reflection on the immutable decrees of God with the deterministic assertion: “and God has brought to pass that men revere him” (NJP¹⁶S; following H. L. Ginsberg, *Qohelet* [in Hebrew] [Tel Aviv: Newman, 1961], p. 73, who compares our Ezekiel passage).

that you shall follow my laws, etc. After the language of Lev 26:3: “If my laws you follow, and my commandments—you carefully observe them.” Just as the sequel in Lev 26:4 states the result of obedience (“I will give you rains in their season”), so does the sequel here in the next verse.

28. *Then you shall dwell in the land.* “Since you shall follow my laws and my rules you shall dwell (= stay put) in the land, and she shall not lose you again [as said above, 36:12], for it was your failure to observe them that was the cause of the exile” (MenbS¹⁷h).

that I gave to your fathers. Only here in Ezekiel, repeatedly in Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 16:15; 24:10).

while I (w’ nky). Only here in Ezekiel is this long form of the first person pronoun found; however, it is frequent in Jeremiah and in his covenant formula of mutuality (Jer 11:4; 30:22); see esp. Jer 24:6–7, like our passage a promise of future restoration. For the contrastive function of the pronoun, see Muraoka, *Emphatic Words*, pp. 54ff.¹⁸

¹⁶NJPS The new Jewish Publication Society of America translations of the Holy Scriptures: *The Torah*, 2d ed., Philadelphia. 1967; *The Prophets: Nevi’im*, Philadelphia, 1978; *The Writings: Kethubim*, Philadelphia, 1982

¹⁷MenbSh Menaḥem bar Shim’on (see bibliography in Ezekiel 1–20)

¹⁸Moshe Greenberg, [*Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 22A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 730–731.