

Ezekiel 37:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

Analysis

Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. This verse is central to Ezekiel's vision of spiritual restoration following the valley of dry bones vision. The threefold description of sin—"idols" (gillulim, גִּלְלִים, literally "dung pellets," a contemptuous term), "detestable things" (shiqqutsim, שִׁקְוּצִים, abominations), and "transgressions" (pesha'im, פְּשָׁעִים, rebellions)—encompasses Israel's comprehensive covenant violation.

The promise "I will save them" uses yasha (ישַׁאֲשָׁה), the root of "Jesus" (Yeshua), meaning to deliver, rescue, or bring salvation. "I will cleanse them" employs taher (תָּהַר), meaning to purify, make ceremonially clean. This isn't merely external reformation but internal transformation—God Himself will purify His people from defilement. This anticipates the new covenant promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27, where God gives a new heart and writes His law internally.

The covenant formula "they shall be my people, and I will be their God" appears throughout Scripture (Exodus 6:7, Jeremiah 31:33, Revelation 21:3), defining

covenant relationship. This promise guarantees not just political restoration but reconciled relationship with Yahweh through divine cleansing.

Historical Context

Ezekiel prophesied during Israel's Babylonian exile (593-571 BCE), addressing deportees who had witnessed Jerusalem's destruction as judgment for idolatry and covenant violation. The exile seemed to invalidate God's promises—the temple destroyed, the land lost, the Davidic throne vacant. Ezekiel 37 addresses this despair with visions of restoration.

The dry bones vision (37:1-14) depicts Israel as dead and hopeless, yet God promises resurrection and return to the land. Verses 15-28 expand this promise to include reunification of Israel and Judah (divided since 931 BCE) under one Davidic king, with permanent cleansing from idolatry. These promises partially fulfilled in the post-exilic return (538 BCE onward) but awaited complete fulfillment in the Messianic age.

Historically, Israel's idolatry had been persistent and severe—high places, Asherah poles, child sacrifice, and syncretism with Canaanite worship. The exile was meant to cure this idolatry, and indeed, post-exilic Judaism showed remarkable resistance to idolatry. Yet the ultimate cleansing from sin required the Messiah's atoning work and the Spirit's indwelling presence, applying the new covenant promises to both Jewish and Gentile believers.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does God's promise to cleanse His people differ from human attempts at self-purification?

2. What is the relationship between divine cleansing and the covenant formula 'you shall be my people'?
3. How do these promises find fulfillment in the new covenant established by Christ?
4. In what ways do believers today experience the cleansing promised in this verse?
5. What does this verse teach about the permanence and effectiveness of God's transforming work?

Interlinear Text

בְּגַלְוִילֵיהֶם	עַד	וְטִמְאָה וְאַל אַ	H3808 Neither shall they defile	H2930
themselves any more with their idols	H1544			
פְּשָׁעִים מִ	וְבָשָׁק וְצִוָּה מִ	H3605	nor with any of their transgressions	H6588
H8251				
אֲשֶׁר מֵזְבַּחַתִּים	מִכֶּל אַתָּה מִזְבְּשָׁתָה	H3605 H853	but I will save	H3467
H4186				
לֵב אַזְמָעָה וְבָנָה מִ	וְטִבְרָתִים	H853	and will cleanse	H1961
H0				
לְאֱלֹהִים: לְבָנָה מִאֵתָה הַתְּאֵן	לְבָנָה מִאֵתָה הַתְּאֵן	H1961 H0	and I will be their God	H430
H5971				

Additional Cross-References

1 John 1:9 (Sin): If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Revelation 21:7 (References God): He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

1 John 1:7 (Sin): But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Hosea 14:8 (Parallel theme): Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.

Isaiah 2:18 (Parallel theme): And the idols he shall utterly abolish.

Psalms 68:20 (Salvation): He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death.

Psalms 68:35 (References God): O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God.

Jeremiah 31:1 (References God): At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:33 (References God): 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.

Zechariah 14:21 (Parallel theme): Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.