

A New Heart And A New Spirit

The expression “a new heart and a new spirit” occurs three times in Ezekiel (11:19, [“one heart”]; 18:31; 36:26). At this point in the book, Ezekiel is writing in 592 B.C. from Babylon and this section (chapters 8-11) is the vision of the exodus of God’s glory from the temple. While the exiles had been interested in every word they could receive from “back home,” those in Judah had generally assumed the wickedness of those deported and were glad they were gone!

In Ezekiel 18:31, the Lord concludes His message by pleading with the people to repent individually from their sins. This chapter is perhaps the most famous in the Bible about personal responsibility, and this was a strong invitation to live. Repentance was available to the people of Israel in Ezekiel’s day. Individual effort and activity are needed in order to effect repentance and enable spiritual reformation to take place. Furthermore, the Lord does not delight in the death of one person who dies because of his or her sin. Therefore, the Lord commands the people to repent and live.

The full significance of these themes is not present in the Ezekiel 11 and 18 passages. Instead, their introduction foreshadows a fuller development in the announcement of blessing in chapters 34-48.

Ezekiel 36:26 adds the statement already found in 11:19: “... and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” Verse 25 adds, “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.” These promises go beyond the return of the Jewish exiles after the Babylonian captivity, for Scripture records no evidence of this kind of spiritual renewal in the post-exilic period. In fact, the account given in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Malachi is just the opposite. The promises apply to the time of Christ when the gospel would be preached and the Jews would welcome Christ as their King. They will experience a spiritual regeneration, a new birth (John 3:3, 5). How are Christians cleansed and born again? By the washing of water (and regeneration) in baptism (Hebrews 10:22; Titus 3:5), for this is where the blood of Jesus Christ is sprinkled on our hearts (Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:2).

The New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 provided for a change of heart and a new spirit. This was a covenant not written on stones but engraved on the human mind and heart; and Christians now share in that covenant (2 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 9-10). The “new heart” it is a feature of both Jeremiah’s and obviously Ezekiel’s prophecy (Jeremiah 32:39; cp. Psalm 51:10: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”). This “new spirit” would be the outpouring of the Spirit promised by the prophets (Joel 2:28-29), and initially instituted in Acts 2:16-21. The “new heart” and “new spirit” would replace Israel’s old heart of stone, which had become so hardened against the Lord and His ways (cp. Zechariah 7:12). It was to result in an obedience to God’s commandments (Ezekiel 36:27), which can only be fully understood in the light of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church at Pentecost. This radical transplantation caused the people to respond favorably to God: “Then they that gladly

received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). The Jews were now given the chance to be saved: “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). While delighting in the gloriousness of these promises, you have to also remember that those who will not believe and obey will be judged (Ezekiel 11:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

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