

Lessons from the Old Testament

Lesson II—Ezekiel 36:25–28

“A New Heart”

The Condition of the People

2 Kings 36:1–23



The city of Samaria was rebuilt by Herod the Great (and named *Sebaste*) in honor of Emperor Augustus.

He also built a temple to Augustus (emperor worship) with a monumental staircase over the palace area of the Israelite kingdom. The temple was destroyed, but the staircase still stands at the top of the tell.

Herod the Great built three Imperial Cult Temples — all less than 40 miles from Nazareth/Capernaum. By the time Jesus began his public ministry these Imperial Cult Temples (at Caesarea Maritima, Sebastia/Samaria, and the one near Caesarea Philippi) had been in existence for over 40 years.

Samaria is the hilly country in what is today referred to as the West Bank. Due to its high elevation, it was named "Samaria", which in Hebrew means "watch mountain" or "watch tower." The Samaritan hills are not very high, seldom reaching over 2,600 feet (800 m). It lies approximately 31 miles north (50 km) north of Jerusalem.

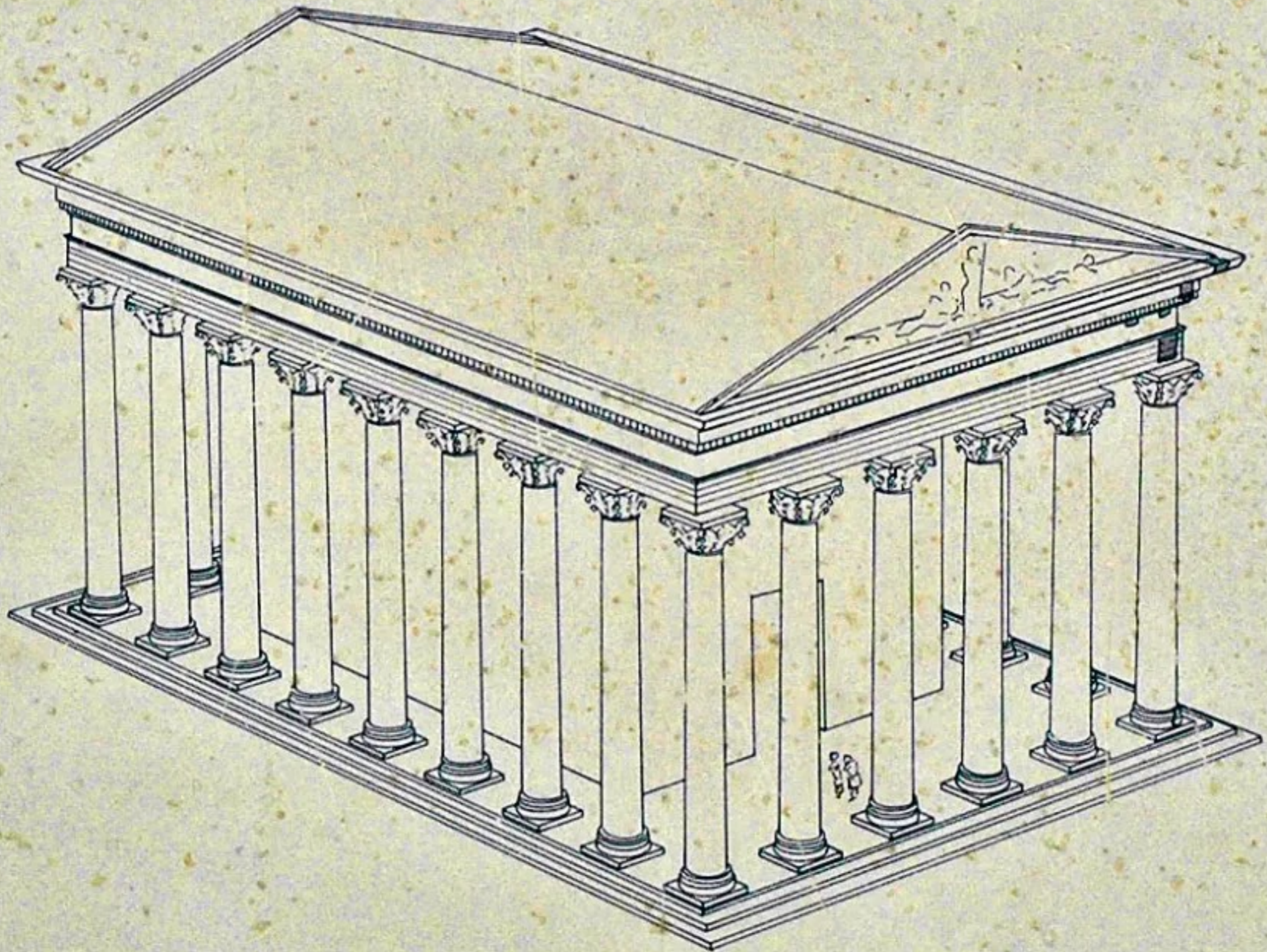
Samaria—“pertaining to a watch,” “watch-mountain” (1) of a mountain and of a city built on it, which was the metropolis of the kingdom of Israel from the time of Omri, (*Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*)

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Construction of the massive city of Caesarea Maritima began in 30 BC, during the reign of Herod the Great, who named the city in honor of Caesar Augustus. Like many of Herod's construction projects, Caesarea was built to rival the grandest cities in the Roman world. It stretched across more than 150 acres and featured a palace, civil halls, an amphitheater, a hippodrome, aqueducts, a high defense wall, and an exquisite temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus. It stretched along a 40-mile inhospitable Mediterranean coastline without any natural harbors.

Caesarea Maritima (Acts 9:30, 10:1, 18:22)

The most important biblical reference to Caesarea Maritima is in Acts 23–26, as the location of Paul's trial before the Roman governors Felix and Festus and King Herod Agrippa II. After claiming the right of a Roman citizen to be tried before the emperor, Paul began his long journey to Rome from the port at Caesarea.











Caesarea Maritima is mentioned several times in the Book of Acts. By the early first century, Caesarea was the capital of the Roman province of Judea and the location of the governor's residence. According to Acts 10, the city was the site of the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius. The city is mentioned several times in association with Paul's missionary journeys.

“The harbor at Caesarea was an engineering marvel. On a stretch of eastern Mediterranean coastline known for its dangers to mariners and lacking sheltered anchorage, Herod built a harbor as large as the port of Athens. Two breakwaters, one on the north and one on the south, with a 60-foot entrance between them, enclosed a protected anchorage. The breakwaters extended as much as 1,500 feet from the shore. Within the main harbor was a sheltered inner harbor” (Lindley Vann, 1983 *Biblical Archeological Review*). The harbor, which utilized recently invented Roman concrete, was one of the two or three largest ports in the ancient world, and certainly one of the most advanced.

Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13; Mark 8:27)

Situated 25 miles (40 km) north of the Sea of Galilee and at the base of Mt. Hermon, Caesarea Philippi is the location of one of the largest springs and is an abundant water supply feeding the Jordan River.

Numerous temples were built in this city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

There is no record of Jesus entering the city, but the confession of Peter occurred in the vicinity of the city (Matthew 16:13).

Caesarea Philippi was an impressive city near a huge spring that comes out of a cave and is one of the primary sources of the Jordan River.

It's about 30 miles (48 km) north of the Sea of Galilee and is at the foothills of Mount Hermon.

It was close to a High Place where Jeroboam set up a golden calf for the northern tribes of Israel to worship.

During the time of Christ, there were 6 main areas of worship to false gods that took place here.

Herod the Great built a temple right at the mouth of this huge spring to honor Augustus Caesar.

A courtyard area for the worship of Pan.

A temple dedicated to the false god Zeus.

Court of Nemesis—Goddess of vengeance.

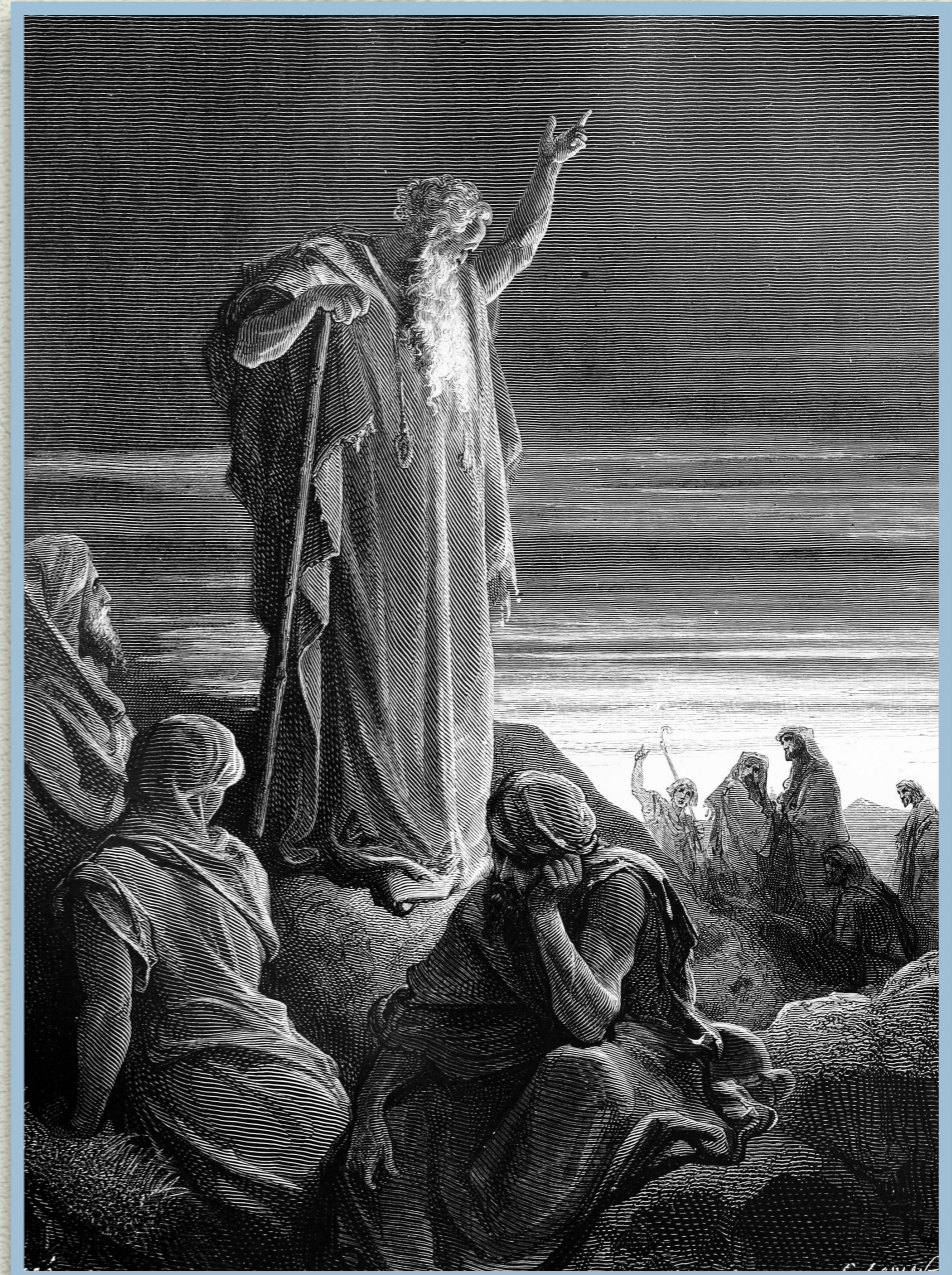
An upper Tomb Temple of the Dancing Goats.

A lower Tomb Temple of the Dancing Goats.



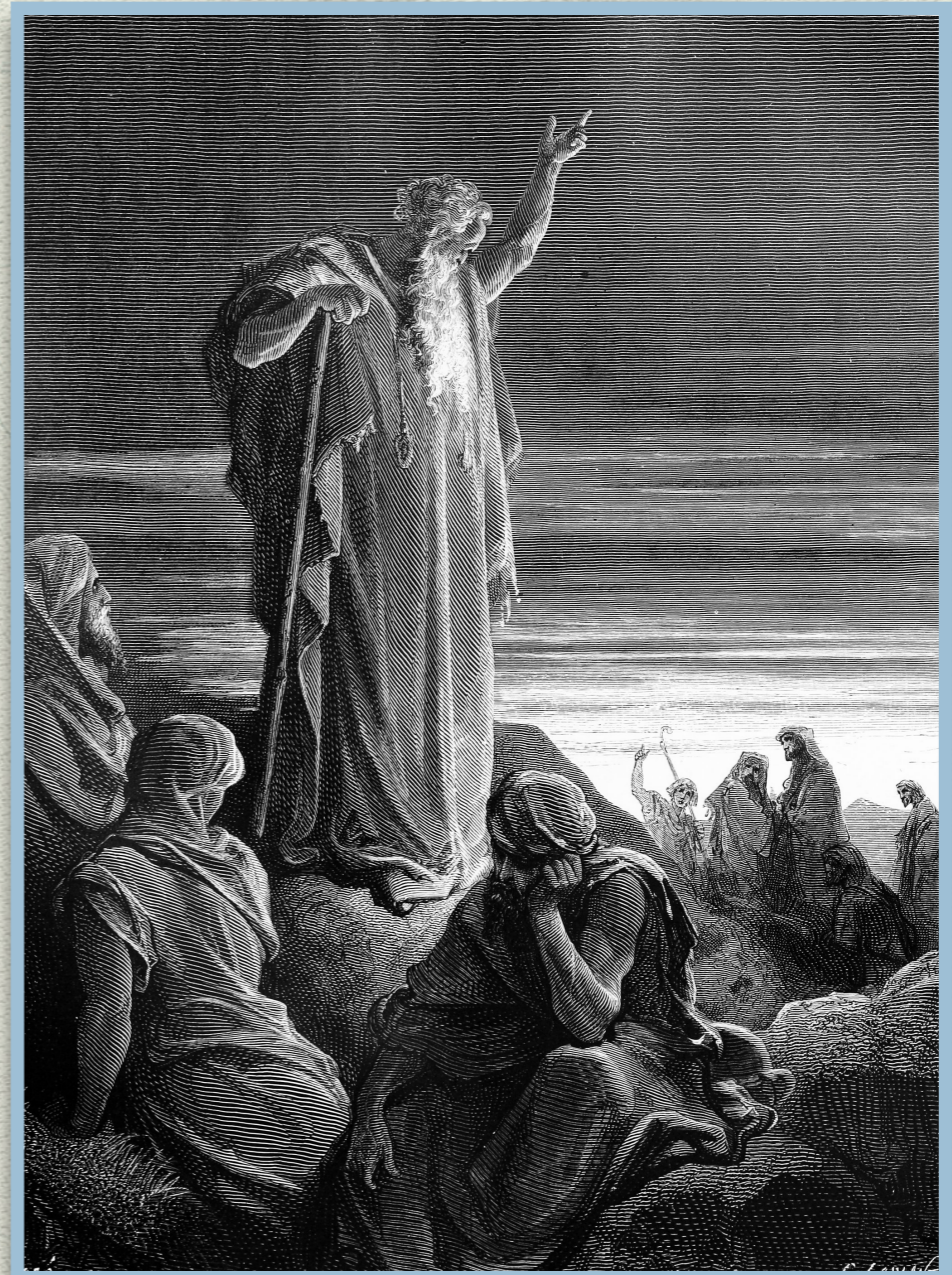
Ezekiel

- ◆ Nothing is known concerning the personal history of the prophet except what we read in the book itself and from the times in which Ezekiel lived. He is not mentioned in any other book of the OT, and his writings are never directly quoted in the New Testament, although there are many allusions to his imagery, especially in the book of Revelation.



Ezekiel

- ◆ Ezekiel calls himself “the priest, the son of Buzi” (ch. 1:3). Of Buzi nothing is known. The fact that Ezekiel was included among “all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour” (2 Kings 24:14) who were taken away in Jehoiachin’s captivity indicates that he was probably a member of Jerusalem’s aristocracy.



Many who speak to others of the need of a new heart do not themselves know what is meant by these words. . . . They look for a special change to take place in their **feelings**. This they term conversion. Over this error thousands have stumbled to ruin, not understanding the expression, “Ye must be born again.” (*MYP* 71.2)

Satan leads people to think that because they have felt a rapture of **feeling** they are converted. But their experience does not change. Their actions are the same as before.

Their lives show no good fruit. They pray often and long, and are constantly referring to the feelings they had at such and such a time.

But they do not live the new life. They are deceived. Their experience goes no deeper than feeling. They build upon the sand, and when adverse winds come their house is swept away. (*MYP 71.3*)

When Jesus speaks of the **new heart**, He means the mind, the life, the whole being. To have a change of heart is to withdraw the affections from the world, and fasten them upon Christ. To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. What is the sign of a new heart? A changed life. There is a daily, hourly dying to selfishness and pride. (*MYP 72.1*)

One of the most earnest prayers recorded in the Word of God is that of David when he pleaded, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." God's response to such a prayer is, A new heart will I give you. This is a work that no finite man can do. Men and women are to begin at the beginning, **seeking God** most earnestly for a true Christian experience. They are to feel the creative power of the Holy Spirit. They are to receive the new heart, that is kept soft and tender by the grace of heaven. The selfish spirit is to be cleansed from the soul. They are to labor earnestly and with humility of heart, each one looking to Jesus for guidance and encouragement. Then the building, fitly framed together, will grow into a holy temple in the Lord (Letter 224, 1907). (4BC 1165.1)

Truth is sacred and divine. It is stronger and more powerful than anything else in the formation of a character after the likeness of Christ. When it is cherished in the heart, the love of Christ is preferred to the love of any human being. This is Christianity. Thus truth—pure, unadulterated truth—occupies the citadel of the being. **This is the life of God** in the soul. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” Ezekiel 36:26. (OHC 208.7)

Jesus came to impart to the human soul the Holy Spirit, by which the love of God is shed abroad in the heart; but it is **impossible** to endow men with the Holy Spirit, who are set in their ideas, whose doctrines are all stereotyped and unchangeable, who are walking after the **traditions** and commandments of men, as were the Jews in the time of Christ. . . . He must find men who were willing to have regeneration of heart. He came to give to men new hearts. He said, "A new heart also will I give you." But the self-righteous of that day and of this day feel no need of having a new heart. Jesus passed by the scribes and the Pharisees, for they felt no need of a Saviour. They were wedded to forms and ceremonies.

The remnant church is called to go through an experience similar to that of the Jews . . . (*1SM* 386.2–387.1)

“A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you.” I believe with all my heart that the Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the world, and **those who have had great light and opportunities and have not improved them, will be the first to be left.** They have grieved away the Spirit of God.

The present activity of Satan in working upon hearts, and upon churches and nations should startle every student of prophecy. The end is near. Let our churches arise. Let the converting power of God be experienced in the heart of the individual members, and then we shall see the deep moving of the Spirit of God. Mere forgiveness of sin is not the sole result of the death of Jesus. He made the infinite sacrifice not only that sin might be removed, but that human nature might be restored, rebeautified, reconstructed from its ruins, and made fit for the presence of God.... (3SM 154.1)

“To be pardoned in the way that Christ pardons, is not only to be forgiven, but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. The Lord says, “A new heart will I give unto thee.” The image of Christ is to be stamped upon the very mind, heart, and soul.

The apostle says, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Without the transforming process which can come alone through divine power, the original propensities to sin are left in the heart in all their strength, to forge new chains, to impose a slavery that can never be broken by human power. But **men can never enter heaven with their old tastes, inclinations, idols, ideas, and theories.** Heaven would be no place of joy to them; for everything would be in collision with their tastes, appetites, and inclinations, and painfully opposed to their natural and cultivated traits of character. (3SM 190.2)

A harsh-spirited man is unrefined, coarse; he is not spiritual; he has not a heart of flesh, but a heart as unimpressible as a stone. His only help is to fall on the Rock, and be broken. The Lord will place **all such in the crucible**, and try them in fire, as gold is tried. **When He can see His own image** reflected in them **He will remove them.** (*SD* 100.4)

The Cross

Justice and mercy stood apart, in opposition to each other, separated by a wide gulf. The Lord our Redeemer clothed His divinity with humanity, and wrought out in behalf of man a character that was without spot or blemish. He planted His cross midway between heaven and earth, and made it the object of attraction which reached both ways, drawing both justice and mercy across the gulf. Justice moved from its exalted throne, and with all the armies of heaven approached the cross. There it saw One equal with God bearing the penalty for all injustice and sin. **With perfect satisfaction justice bowed in reverence at the cross, saying, It is enough.**

(14LtMs, Ms 94, 1899, par. 49)

By the offering made in our behalf we are placed on vantage-ground. The **sinner, drawn** by the power of Christ from the confederacy of sin, approaches the uplifted cross, and prostrates himself before it. Then there is a new creature in Christ Jesus. The sinner is **cleansed and purified. A new heart is given to him.** Holiness finds that it has nothing more to require. (14LtMs, Ms 94, 1899, par. 50)

The work of redemption involved consequences of which it is difficult for man to have any conception. There was to be imparted to the human beings striving for conformity to the divine image, an outlay of heaven's treasures, an excellence of power, which would place him higher than the angels who had not fallen. The battle has been fought, the victory won. The controversy between sin and righteousness exalted the Lord of heaven, and established before the saved human family, before the unfallen worlds, before all the host of evil workers, from the greatest to the least, God's holiness, mercy, goodness, and wisdom. Christ's sacrifice exalted the law, proving that it was from the beginning, and would be through all eternity, from everlasting to everlasting. (14LtMs, Ms 94, 1899, par. 51)

Every time a soul is converted, and learns to love God and keep His commandments, **the promise of God is fulfilled**, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” Ezekiel 36:26. The change in human hearts, the transformation of human characters, is a miracle that reveals an ever-living Saviour, working to rescue souls. A consistent life in Christ is a great miracle. In the preaching of the word of God, the sign that should be manifest now and always is the presence of the Holy Spirit, to make the word a regenerating power to those that hear. This is God’s witness before the world to the divine mission of His Son. (*DA 407.1*)

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah . . . **For this is the covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: (Hebrews 8:8, 10)