

CONCERNING THE WAY

March 19, 2009

LESSON 52: PROPHECY SERIES — THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL



Chapter 37

This chapter illustrates the contents of chapter 36, and contains two visions. The first one is the vision of the valley of the dry bones, in verse 1-14. The second is the vision of the two sticks, verses 15-28.

In verses 1-14 God proclaims the future resurrection of the nation Israel. This includes both the restoration of the national entity as well as a spiritual revival or restoration, which the Lord also predicted in the previous chapter.

In verses 15-28 God predicts the future union of the two kingdoms under one head, David, by the symbolic act of using two sticks.

To give you a little historical background, at the time of Ezekiel in this section of the book, the nation of Israel is in exile in Babylon. Jerusalem has been conquered, and the temple has been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. This was 586 BC.

538 B.C. – The Jews return to the land after the decree of Cyrus the Persian

515 B.C. – The 2nd temple is completed

444 B.C. – The walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt

330 B.C. – Alexander the Great captures Jerusalem, but does not harm the temple.

165 B.C. – The Jews gain their freedom from Antiochus Epiphanes in the Maccabean Revolt.

63 B.C. – The Roman Empire conquers Jerusalem, starting a period of domination by foreign nations that would last until 1948.

30 A.D. – Jesus is hailed as the Son of David as He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. He predicts the destruction of the 2nd temple, then He is crucified, stopping the Daniel's prophetic clock at 69 weeks. Jesus then miraculously rises from the grave on the 3rd day after His crucifixion.

70 A.D. – Titus and his Roman army laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the 2nd temple, slaughtering over one million people and scattering the rest of the Jewish population throughout the Roman Empire, most as slaves. This became known as the "Diaspora". The Jews would remain scattered and separate from the land until the 20th century.

132-135 A.D. – a 2nd revolt against the Roman Empire was led by Bar Kochba. The revolt failed, and much of Jerusalem was razed. Jews were then barred from Jerusalem.

638 – Caliph Omar Ben Hataf captures Jerusalem, placing it under Arab Muslim rule. The Temple Mount is at this time buried under tons of debris.

688-691 – The "Dome of the Rock" (mosque of Omar) is built by Abd-al-Malik over the site on the Temple Mount where Muslims believe Mohammed was raptured up into heaven.

1099 – The Crusaders capture Jerusalem and the holy sites. The Dome of the Rock is turned into a church. The Al-Aqsa mosque is turned into the headquarters for the Knights Templar.

1187 Led by Saladin, the Muslims recapture Jerusalem from the Crusaders.

1229 – Emperor Frederick II of the Holy Roman Empire leads the 6th crusade and is able to win back Jerusalem purely by show of force

1244 – The Muslims seize Jerusalem from the crusaders for the last time; every Crusade that follows will fail at trying to capture Jerusalem

1517 – Turkish Sultan Selim conquers Jerusalem for the Ottoman Empire

1814 – Presbyterian pastor John MacDonald in Albany, NY, began to preach on Bible prophecy and Israel's restoration, sparking an interest in the literalist interpretation of Old Testament prophecies about Israel.

1831 – Jerusalem is conquered by Egypt

1840 – Jerusalem again comes under Turkish control.

1878 – W. E. Blackstone's book "Jesus is Coming" was published, predicting and encouraging the return of Jews in fulfillment of the prophecy.

1881-1900 – The First Aliya (meaning ascent) occurred and consisted of some 30,000 Jews under persecution in Russia moving to Palestine.

1897 – The first Zionist Congress, convened in Basel, Switzerland, adopted Zionism as a program, and stated, "The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine by public law."

1904-1914 – The 2nd Aliya resulted in 32,000 persecuted Russian Jews moving to Palestine.

1917 – With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the British gain control of Palestine. The Balfour Declaration, read in part, "His majesty's government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for Jewish people." At this time both Jews and Arabs lived in the land, but not very many of either. Many nations at that time even encouraged Jews from around the world to go back and resettle the land and create a national Jewish home.

1920 – Due to Arab claims and complaints, the land of Palestine was partitioned. The Jews received roughly one fourth of the territory that had been set aside for them in the British Mandate, and the Arabs received the other three fourths. The Jewish portion was called Palestine, and the Arab portion was called Transjordan. The Jews were told that Palestine would be their national homeland. They were also told that Transjordan would be an Arab homeland and it would be closed to Jewish settlement (even though Palestine wasn't closed to Arab settlements). Under this agreement, both Jerusalem and the West Bank were in Jewish territory.

1924-1939 – The 3rd Aliya, when 78,000 Polish Jews moved to Palestine.

1933-1939 – The 4th Aliya, when 230,000 Jews fled from persecution in Germany and central Europe.

1940-1948 – The 5th Aliya, when 95,000 Jews escaped from central Europe. Many Jews remained in Europe, and more than six million were killed during the Holocaust led by Hitler and Nazi Germany.

1947 – The United Nations voted to end British control of Palestine and divide the country into a Jewish and Arab state.

1948 – The Jewish Agency in what would become the new nation of Israel proclaimed nation status. On May 14, 1948, U.S. President Harry Truman’s administration made this announcement: “The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de-facto authority of the New State of Israel.” On the very next day, May 15, Israel is invaded by five Arab states.

1948-1949 – The War for Independence is fought by the Jews, and they win an armistice after defeating armies from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. However, the United Nations carved out the West Bank (including Jerusalem) from Israel and put it under Jordanian rule. Now the Arabs had close to 90 per cent of the area promised to the Jews by the British Mandate.

1967 – The Six Day War, begun by an Arab invasion, results in Israel capturing Jerusalem and the West Bank. This is the first time Jews have been in control of Jerusalem for over 2000 years.

1973 – Another attack by Arabs was repulsed with Israeli victories.

To make a long story short, Arab claims to the land never end. There have been numerous treaties, accords, and peace agreements, but none of them have brought peace, and all of them result in the Arabs asking for more land. As we saw in the last chapter, though, God has decreed that all of this land belongs to the Jews and He will eventually put an end to all Arab claims to the covenant land.

What no one wants to admit is that Satan is behind all of this. If Satan can get the Jews off the land or at least keep them from part of it, then he has succeeded in nullifying God’s covenants, proving the Bible wrong, and preventing the 2nd coming of Jesus to establish His Kingdom in the land. Well, we know that this won’t happen.

All of these events are proof that prophecy is being fulfilled and the world is rapidly moving towards the Tribulation period. Everyone should pay attention! God wants to be known and understood. He does not want to be misrepresented and He will protect His Holy name. Restoring Israel to the land is something He must do. It will cause people to take notice and repent.

And remember from our last lesson that God isn’t restoring Israel because she is good. He is regathering Israel because He is good. He promised to do it and He will, to fulfill the covenants He made with Israel.

Ezekiel 37:1-2 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. (2) He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.

Remember that this is a vision, you may not be able to find this place on a map. It could have been a real place, however, this happened to him once before in chapter 8 when he was transported to Jerusalem in the spirit before it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

We are told later that these bones are Israel. You could say that this state of the scattered dry bones represent Israel in their dispersion from 70 AD until the beginning of the 20th century.

Ezekiel 37:3-4 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." (4) Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'

Catch the humor here. Ezekiel is shown this valley full of bones, not even skeletons, just individual bones

everywhere. And he doesn't know how to answer God. He's saying, "You're asking me?" Then God tells him to speak to the bones! Ezekiel probably thought, you want me to do what? God definitely has a sense of humor.

Pastor J. Vernon McGee used to joke about someday starting a sermon by greeting his congregation, "Good morning, all you dry bones!" Basically, Ezekiel is saying to these dry bones, this dead nation of Israel, "Pay attention, I want you to hear what God has to say!"

Ezekiel 37:5-6 "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. (6) 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.' (7) So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. (8) And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.

That would have been something to see, all these bones rattling together! So the bones are coming together to form skeletons, muscles and skin are growing on them, but they weren't alive yet, there was no breath in them yet. The sinews connected to the bones could represent the regathering of Jews to the land before 1948. The flesh and skin could represent their present status as a nation in the land, but in unbelief. The Jews are back in the land but they are unregenerate. They are dead still, corpses, like in this vision. They are materialistic and intellectual, but spiritually dead. They have bodies but no real life. They do not recognize Jesus as their Messiah, and most don't even acknowledge God at all.

Ezekiel 37:9 Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'"

The breath of life is breathed from the four winds of heaven (Jeremiah 49:36). This is a symbol of the universal life-giving spirit of God (Genesis 1:2).

Ezekiel 37:10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Notice that this does not happen instantly. It was a process, in three-steps.

1. They were scattered (the valley of dry bones)
2. They came together, with flesh and skin (but still dead)
3. They came to life

Ezekiel sees these dry bones begin to come back together and form a human skeleton. They develop muscles and skin so they become persons. Then he sees breath entering these bodies, and they begin to fully function. The bones coming together and the body coming together represent the nation coming back to the land. The breath entering the body represents the spiritual restoration of the nation, the born again experience. Notice the order. First comes the physical restoration of the nation, and then comes the spiritual restoration of the nation. That's significant because it refutes the ideas that the nation of Israel today, which has been regathered from around the world and established in their homeland, is not part of God's program. People will say that it's immaterial, irrelevant, even though it's happened exactly as Ezekiel has predicted.

Why do they say that? Because the nation of Israel today is in unbelief, they reject Christ. They say, "How

can a nation that rejects Christ be part of God's plan? But that ignores this prophecy of the three-step restoration process. The physical restoration is happening, it has happened before our eyes since the 1940's. The spiritual regeneration has yet to happen, and it won't happen until the end of the Tribulation period. It will take the events of the Tribulation to bring her to where she is willing to trust in Christ.

We don't have to interpret this ourselves; God does it for us in the next few verses. Reformed theologians and churches try to interpret this chapter as speaking of the church. They have a real big problem here:

Ezekiel 37:11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'

OK, so the first thing we know is these bones represent Israel. This is NOT the church! Many of today's theologians try to interpret this as being the church. There is no way you can do that. God is making it very clear here. And it's about the whole house of Israel, both Israel (Northern kingdom) and Judah (Southern kingdom). Ezekiel then quotes what the people were saying, which he often does (11:13, 12:22,27, 16:4, 18:2, 20:49, 36:20).

Does it say "these bones are the whole house of the church?" No, it is the whole house of Israel. And "whole house" is making sure you understand that this is the united Israel, all the tribes, not just Judah. You know, it has got to be weird being a Reformed or Covenant theologian. All the way through Ezekiel, the name Israel means Israel. Then all of a sudden in chapter 37 Israel means the Church. How do they do that? There's no way you can. I hope I have established in all of my Bible study lessons how important it is that you keep a consistent interpretive approach to the Bible. Israel means Israel; it does not change its meaning in the Bible. But many Christian denominations and theologians try to make it mean something else.

The immediate subject of this verse was the Jewish exiles after Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The false prophets had been telling the people over and over that they would return to Jerusalem soon, they had a false hope. After it was destroyed, the people went completely in the other direction; they lost all hope of ever returning. Ezekiel is writing these chapters to give them hope that they would be restored.

Even after many centuries, the saying among godly Jews was "next year in Jerusalem". They always had the hope that someday they would return. Some think that this verse represents the state of the surviving Jews after the Holocaust. Remember the term "cut off" means "killed" or "destroyed". Many Jews did lose their hope in the Holocaust; they thought God had completely abandoned them.

The Nazis were attempting a complete genocide of the Jews, which of course was powered by Satan. In recent years diaries of certain Nazi leaders, including Hitler, have been found and translated. These documents make it clear that World War II was all about the Jews. It was a crusade on the part of the Germans to destroy the Jewish race. If not for the defeat of the Nazis by the allied forces, Satan may have succeeded in his plan to destroy the Jews and make God out to be a liar. God had to intervene to save the Jewish race, and He used the Allied forces to do so. If you're a history buff and have read the details of World War II, you know that there were many seemingly miraculous events that turned the tide in the Allies favor. God wasn't just on "our side" because He was so pleased with America. He was using us to deliver a remnant of His chosen people and protect His holy name.

Ezekiel 37:12 "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will

bring you into the land of Israel.

This is not speaking of a physical resurrection of individual people, which we'll see in verse 21 coming up. It is speaking of the fact that the nation of Israel was buried among the nations of the world, and God is going to bring them up out of their graves. This usage of "graves" also could be referring to the Holocaust and other pogroms perpetuated against the Jews in history.

Sympathy for the Jews because of the attempted genocide led the United Nations to give the Jews a national homeland. God used the Holocaust to bring them back to the land.

Ezekiel 37:13-14 "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. (14) "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD."

There are two regatherings here. The first regathering they are restored to part of the land, and it is a return in unbelief. The second regathering they are restored to all of the land, and it is a return in faith. They are restored to the land and the Lord.

The first regathering sets the stage for the Tribulation period, and sets the stage for discipline. The 2nd regathering sets the stage for the Millennium, it will occur at the end of the Tribulation, and sets the stage for blessing. Just because God has not seen fit yet to bring the nation of Israel to Christ does not mean we should jump to the conclusion that what is happening right now in the Middle East has nothing to do with the program of God. Don't you believe that God was working in your life before you became a Christian? Of course He was. He was working in your life, preparing you, drawing you, bringing the right people into your life, the right circumstances. This is what's going on with the nation of Israel today.

"The 'wandering Jews' were without a national home for "many days" (Hosea 3:4-5), and it seemed impossible that such prophecies as these could ever be fulfilled. Even many Bible-believing Christians thought for centuries that God was through with Israel and that all the Old Testament promises to Israel should be spiritualized and applied to the church. But now, with the return of the Jews and the re-establishment of their nation, it is evident in a unique way that God's Word means exactly what it says."
Henry M. Morris

And that's the end of the bones vision, now Ezekiel gets new instructions:

Ezekiel 37:15-16 The word of the LORD came again to me saying, (16) "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.'

These two sticks represent the two kingdoms of Israel, one represented by the tribe of Judah, which included the tribe of Benjamin, Simeon, and Levi (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). The other stick represents Joseph and the tribe of Ephraim, his son, and the remnants of the 8 other tribes. The Hebrew word for "stick" could mean wood, tree, staff, even a wooden tablet of some sort.

Remember when Solomon died there was civil war in Israel, and the kingdom was split into two in 930 BC. The Northern kingdom (Israel) was led by King Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:43 – 12:33), and the Southern kingdom (Judah) was led by Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Israel remained split all throughout the era of the kings right up until they were conquered by foreign nations – first Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and then Judah by the Babylonians.

When Jeroboam turned the Northern kingdom to idolatry, the tribe of Levi, and anyone else that wanted to remain faithful to the true temple and the true God, migrated south to join Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). Jeroboam did this out of political correctness. He didn't want his people to go south to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, so he set up a temple in the north for people to worship at. Two problems with that – you could only worship the true God at the temple in Jerusalem, and Jeroboam didn't set up a temple to worship the true God, but set up idols, including a golden calf. It was a pagan religion.

All of the kings in the north were evil kings, continuing in idolatry. But some of the kings in the south were godly. For, example, when Asa came to the throne in the south, there was another migration from the northern kingdom to Judah (2 Chronicles 15:9). Although we think of the two kingdoms including specific tribes, actually all 12 tribes were represented in the southern kingdom of Judah, which makes sense. Anyone who wanted to live in the kingdom where you could worship God in the true temple would have migrated south, no matter which tribe you belonged to.

A reference to the “tribe of Judah” is always used for a description of the southern kingdom. When you run across tribal designations in the Bible it's important to distinguish between the territories allocated to those tribes and the people of the tribes themselves. For example, I'm a Kansan, but that doesn't tell you where I'm originally from or about my family, it's just where I live.

When the Northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians under Shalmaneser V, they took 27,290 people captive, and placed an Assyrian ruler in the capital city of Samaria. Assyria's policy was to intermix their conquered peoples, so it would be less easy for them to organize a revolt. Israelite captives were mixed with Persians, and people from far off lands were brought in to settle in Israel. The resulting mix of different races with the Jews were called “Samaritans” (John 4:20-22). They were basically half-Jews and were mostly despised by the pure-blooded Jews.

So by the time the northern kingdom was conquered, all twelve tribes were represented in the southern kingdom of Judah. There were no “lost tribes”. When the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians, all twelve tribes were involved. From this time on, the term “Jew” and “Israelite” are used interchangeably.

Ezra calls the returning remnant “Jews” 8 times and “Israel” 40 times, and speaks of “all Israel” (Ezra 2:70, 3:11, 8:35, 10:25). Nehemiah calls them “Jews” 11 times and “Israel” 22 times, and speaks of “all Israel” being back in the land (Nehemiah 12:47). The remnant that returned from Babylon is represented as the nation (Malachi 1:1). **It is important to understand that Israel retained their ethnic identity and members of all twelve tribes.**

There is New Testament evidence for this, as well. Jesus in Matthew 10:5-6, 15:24, references “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. He was offering Himself to them, so obviously they were not lost physically, but lost spiritually. Other tribes than Judah are mentioned specifically in the New Testament (Matthew 4:13, 15, Luke 2:36, Acts 4:36, Philemon 3:5). The “Twelve Tribes” are mentioned in Acts 26:7, and the book of James is written to the “12 tribes”. Anna, in Luke 2:30, knew her tribal identity (Asher). Paul knew he was of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1)

The New Testament uses the term “Israel” 75 times, and the term “Jew” 174 times. I make note of these things because often distinctions are made between these terms to cast aspersions against the current state of Israel. (He's a Jew, but not an Israelite, or an Israelite, but not a Jew, that kind of silliness). A Jew is an Israelite, and vice-versa. They are the same – always have been, always will be, even to the end. Here's some references to future events that speak specifically of the tribes of Israel:

- There will be 12,000 people sealed from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (Revelation 7)
- The 12 apostles are to rule over the 12 tribes (Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30)
- The 12 tribes each have specific divisions of land in the Millennial kingdom (Ezekiel 48)

There are twelve tribes, none of them are lost, and God knows which Jew belongs to which tribe.

Ezekiel 37:17-21 "Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. (18) "When the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?' (19) say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.'" (20) "The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. (21) "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

Mormons will try to tell you that one of these sticks is named Joseph, and so this stick is Joseph Smith, a prophet that God has raised up. Joseph had prophecies that occur in North America; supposedly Jesus Christ was here in North America in the 1800's. The Mormons get a lot of this from this passage in Ezekiel. This will tell you a lot about cults. A person who converts to a cult is a person who believes the Bible is true, but they don't know the Bible very well. They don't know enough about it to discern whether they're being told the truth or not. Whenever you go to a large evangelistic event, like a Billy Graham crusade, you will find in the parking lot a bunch of people handing out pamphlets to the new converts coming out of the event. Why do they do this? Because they know that these new converts now believe the Bible is true, but they don't know much about it yet.

Ezekiel is predicting that when God restores Israel, there will no longer be a division; it will be a unified Israel. In the next verses you will see five benefits that would result from unification:

1. The people would be brought back home (v. 21,22)
2. They would be purified from idolatry (v. 23, 36:25)
3. David would be installed as king over them (v. 24,25)
4. A covenant of peace will be established (v. 26, 34:25)
5. God will dwell in their midst (v. 26-28)

Ezekiel 37:22-24 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. (23) "They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. (24) "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.

Here again, as in chapter 34, God says He will place David as king over Israel. The "one shepherd", though, must be Jesus Christ. We don't have to be dogmatic here, you can believe both references are Jesus if you want, but I think God says what He means and means what He says. I believe the historical David will be resurrected and rule over Israel as co-regent with Christ.

Ezekiel 37:25 "They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever;

and David My servant will be their prince forever.

It doesn't get much clearer than that, I don't have to interpret it, it's very plain. Forever means forever. How is this possible? I don't know, but we have to take God at His Word. The Jews will live on THE LAND, the original land of the Abrahamic Covenant, forever.

Ezekiel 37:26 "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.

There's never been a temple like this before. This looks forward to chapter 40, where Ezekiel describes in great detail the Millennial temple.

Ezekiel 37:27-28 "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. (28) "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.""

This is confirming that there will be a temple, not only in the Millennium, but in the eternal state, here on earth. This temple will be the major focus of Ezekiel in chapters 40-48.

God will live with His people here on earth. Revelation 21:2-3 says it in a similar way:

Revelation 21:2-3 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

Well, there is no doubt that Israel is the subject of Ezekiel, but we can make a personal application of it in our own lives. The world that we live in today is a death valley, full of dry bones, full of "dead people walking". John Gill says this about the dry bones:

"these are a fit emblem of men in a state of nature and unregeneracy, who have no spiritual life, but are dead in trespasses and sins; have no sense of sin or danger; no strength to redeem and regenerate themselves, or do anything that is spiritually good; have no spiritual motion; no inward desires after God, or affection to him; no lifting up of the heart to him, or going out of the soul in faith and love to Christ; but in themselves entirely lifeless, helpless, and hopeless"

People think they're alive, and they're very busily going about their lives, trying to be successful, enjoying the best the world has to offer, but they're really dead in their sins. They have no spiritual life. This is why they have to fill up their lives with something, because they don't have the "breath" of God in them. 1 John makes it very clear:

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

And John 3:36:

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

There are two kinds of people in the world: live people and dead people. That may sound funny, but it's true. If you don't have the Son, you're dead. Period. How do we believe in and obey the Son? By accepting the fact that I am a sinner and trusting that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, to take the place I deserve. This is the only way to have life.

We'll close this chapter with some comments by the great Bible scholar William Kelly, written in 1876. This was a theologian who was ahead of his time. The vast majority of the Bible scholars in his day considered prophecies like the ones in Ezekiel allegorical. They did not believe that God would literally bring the Jews back to the land. Even the imminently more respected Bible teacher Charles Spurgeon criticized Kelly for his eschatological convictions. Kelly, however, believed what God had said:

The revival of Israel as a people is not all that the prophet here learns and communicates. This was given in the first half of the chapter, not their quickening individually, however true it may be, but their national resuscitation under the operation of the Spirit, not of man's will or the world's politics, as becomes the people chosen and now finally to be blessed of Jehovah. There was a distinct fresh blessing to be conferred on them, the disappearance of an old reproach which had long dishonoured Israel from the days of Rehoboam as long as it had subsisted in the land. When God sets to His hand for their restoration in the latter day, He will re-unite them as they were of old under David and Solomon, never to have their unity broken or even threatened again; This is reserved for the true Beloved when He reigns as the Prince of peace.

It is indeed no obscure proof of human perverseness that words like these should ever have been mistaken. Yet they have been and are, not among the despised Jews who cleave to their future hopes, but in contempt of their present responsibility by Christians under the gospel of God's indiscriminate grace in the dead and risen Christ to every soul that believes, be he Jew or Gentile. Thus it is then that Satan deceives all. The Jews are right in maintaining that Israel are yet to be blessed in their land under Messiah and the new covenant, and this, not vaguely nor partially, but after apostasy as well as divine judgments shall have thinned them down, all Israel that shall then be saved, gathered and united, Judah and Joseph as one whole. They are utterly, fatally, wrong now in not seeing their Messiah, the Saviour, in Jesus of Nazareth, and consequently perish because they obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Satan deceives Christendom in this that, while they rightly confess the Crucified One to be the Son of God, they not only mix up the law with the gospel and so lose all the comfort and power and

certainty of God's salvation in Christ, but yearn after the predicted glories of Israel on earth as if they were descriptive of their own privileges to the almost total ignoring of their heavenly standing as well as to the denial of God's faithfulness and future mercy to Israel.

It is as vain to wrest such language to the remnant of Jews that returned from Babylon as to the church at Pentecost. There is not even analogy. It is a union of the two long-divided houses of Israel, and nothing else. Not even a shadow of its accomplishment has appeared yet. Words cannot be conceived more explicit. Every sense but the future ingathering and union of all Israel as a single nation under one king is excluded. Never more shall they be divided, never more defiled. Nay more, they shall be Jehovah's people, and He their God. As the Jew cannot say that this has yet been, so it is absurd for any Gentile to say it of or for them. Still more absurd is it for the Gentile to claim it for himself. In no case is it applicable to the christian body. A remnant of Jews returned from Babylon to be defiled not merely with transgressions, but with a more detestable thing than their old idolatry, even the rejection and crucifying of their Messiah: was this a fulfilment of Ezekiel's glowing words?

The prophet Ezekiel completely destroys all these chimerical opinions. The true Israelites, he says, will be redeemed — the real seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not the Gentiles. He does not say that the land which they will re-possess will be the church or heaven, but that same land which they had inhabited before they were scattered, and wherein they will dwell for ever.

"Can the Gentiles who have embraced the christian faith believe that they are the Israelites to whom the prophet alludes? Are the nations ever termed Judah and Ephraim? Or have they been divided into two kingdoms? Neither reason nor plain sense is the foundation of the persuasion that the land of which the prophet speaks is spiritual; that it is the church signified when he assures the people of Israel of their return to their own land — to that happy country which they had before possessed in the land of Canaan, that which the Lord had given to their ancestors. Can the mountains where the people were to assemble be spiritual? Fiction never went so far in metamorphosis."

Next week, we'll study the Gog-Magog invasion of Chapter 38!