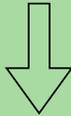


Ezekiel 37

- We're studying the Lord's promises to Israel to restore them to the glory promised to Abraham
 - The promises God gives Israel run through the rest of the book
 - But they can be grouped into four general areas that connect back to the Abrahamic covenant and Davidic covenant
 - God promised Abraham's descendants a king to rule
 - And inheritance in the land
 - Many descendants living in peace and prosperity
 - And their God dwelling among them
 - Those four themes guide our understanding of the prophecies found in the chapters that follow

Ezekiel 33	Commanding prophet and people to obey God	
Ezekiel 34	Promising Israel a Good Shepherd	
Ezekiel 35	Ending competing claims for Israel's land	
Ezekiel 36	Delivering Israel's promised land inheritance	
Ezekiel 37	Resurrecting a united, peaceful, obedient Israel	
Ezekiel 38	Defending Israel's peace from her enemies	
Ezekiel 39	Making God's glory known among the nations	
Ezekiel 40	God's glory dwelling among Israel	
 Ezekiel 48		

- Last week we studied the restoration of Israel's inheritance in the land in Chapters 35-36
 - In Chapter 35 the Lord promised Israel He would invalidate any competing claims for the promised land

- To make His point, the Lord pronounced judgment on the people who had the oldest competing claim to the land – Edom
- Edomites came from Esau, who fought with his brother Jacob over the land inheritance from the beginning
- But the Lord promised that Edom would not have a share in the land and that Israel would receive it as promised to Jacob
- Then in Chapter 36 we studied what Israel's inheritance in the land will be like in that future day, and it was very different than today
 - The Lord will regather Israel into their land so that all Jews on earth are living in the land promised to Abraham
 - Secondly, the nation will be fully committed to obedience to the Lord and will never sin, which tells us they are all glorified
 - The return of Christ will be accompanied by a national salvation of Israel at the end of Tribulation
- Then we studied in Isaiah how life in this Kingdom time will be different from today
 - Death will operate differently
 - Nature would be different and the fruitfulness of life would be unending
 - Those small details alone were enough to explain why the Bible says our life to come will be full of joy
- Tonight we finish Chapter 36 and move into the next major category of restoration: descendants living in the land in peace
 - The final passages of Ezekiel 36 continue to explain how glorious the land inheritance will be for God's people

Ezek. 36:29 “Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you.

Ezek. 36:30 “I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

Ezek. 36:31 “Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.

[Ezek. 36:32](#) "I am not doing this for your sake," declares the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!"

- In this chapter, the Lord promises Israel they will receive their land inheritance and with it comes a very new life
 - Altogether, the Lord gives Israel seven details for how this fulfillment will take place
 - In the section we studied last week, we studied five of these seven
 - First, the Lord said He would regather Israel to the land
 - Secondly He would purify them from sin so that they would not bring their sinful nature into the Kingdom
 - Thirdly, He would give them a new heart and a new spirit to obey Him fully
 - Fourth He would put the Holy Spirit in them so they would know Him intimately
 - Fifth, He would be their God and they would be His people
 - In v.29 we reach the sixth detail
 - The Lord says the land will give the people an abundance of harvest and famine will never occur
 - In contrast to past history, Israel would never again wonder if famine will come or if pestilence would rob them
 - The fields would always produce reliably
 - Notice the pattern the Lord is establishing here...first He cleanses His people of sin, then leads them into righteous living
 - And from righteous living, the people come to enjoy the comforts and privileges of an intimate walk with the Lord
 - At its core, sin is any attempt to obtain the comforts and privileges of God's provision without giving God our obedience
 - The first sin began that way and every sinful intention since has been exactly the same

- Then finally, the seventh detail of the land restoration is found in vs.31-32
 - The Lord says that after the nation has received all these things, they will remember their past history as a nation
 - They will remember how their nation in the past was disobedient, sinful
 - And they will loathe themselves in their own sight for those inequities
 - To loathe yourself “in your own sight” means to see yourself as God saw you during those past moments
 - So while everyone in Israel will marvel at how much better things are now, they will also recall how bad they made life for themselves
 - And that contrast will only serve to bring God more glory
 - And in v.32 the Lord says these promises revealed in Ezekiel’s day would only serve to make Israel ashamed for their sin now
 - The Lord was promising these acts of faithfulness for Israel for His name’s sake
 - They didn’t deserve these things...that’s why they were grace
 - The Lord wants the world to know, even now, that He is a covenant-keeping God
 - Moreover, the Lord’s faithfulness to His covenant only serves to highlight the people’s rebellion to their covenant
 - So upon hearing how much goodness the Lord has planned for His people Israel, they will feel all the more shame for what they’ve done
 - The Lord was speaking of the Israel of Ezekiel’s day that heard these promises and then recognized their God was still on their side
 - And they could then reflect on how sinful they had been to Him and loathe themselves in their own sight
- Then we have a final summary of Israel living in the land one day

[Ezek. 36:33](#) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt.

[Ezek. 36:34](#) "The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.

[Ezek. 36:35](#) "They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.'

[Ezek. 36:36](#) "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it."

[Ezek. 36:37](#) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

[Ezek. 36:38](#) "Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD."'"

- Last week we studied how the changes to nature and life on earth in general were a step-by-step return to the way of life in the Garden
 - Before the fall of Adam, the world operated in ways very similar to what Isaiah and Ezekiel are promising for the Kingdom
 - And here we see the Lord confirming that He will restore life in ways similar to the Garden of Eden
 - And the Lord says the way in which He will make this happen will be so miraculous that it will clearly point to Him
 - Great desolation will turn into great blessing – a transformation that could only be done supernaturally by a caring and purposeful God
 - It will point to the Lord in the sense that He will be seen as the Actor bringing it to pass
 - And it will point to Him by glorifying Him for His faithfulness to bring it to pass for Israel
 - If you step back from our little period of Biblical history to see the whole of it, you can see that great miracles are soon to start again
 - Apart from the Creation moment itself, God has relied on great public displays of supernatural power only three times in human history

- First at the Exodus, He brought Israel out of bondage with great power so that Egypt and all the nations would know His name

Ex. 7:5 “The Egyptians shall **know that I am the LORD**, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”

- Secondly, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, the Lord performed miraculous signs routinely through these prophets
 - They called fire down from heaven, raised dead bodies, and held back the rain
 - The Lord was using these men to demonstrate His power and authority to an apostate Israel
 - Their ministries have parallels to Jesus, and in that way their miraculous work foreshadows Christ’s work
- Finally, miracles were common in Jesus’ day and in the years immediately following as the church was established
 - And once more, the purpose in God acting in such public ways through miraculous displays of His power is to prove Jesus’ claims
 - That men might know the Lord and glorify Him for His word of redemption
 - First through Jesus in Person and secondly through the ministry of His Church
 - So to date the world has seen three periods of regular, public miracles, and we know a fourth is coming
 - In the very last days the Lord will once more bring great signs and wonders to the world, the greatest displays ever
 - And these wonders will once again be targeted at showing the world the true God
 - But as we await the resumption of such displays, consider we are living in a period of history when the Lord has suspended such displays for the most part
 - So having known only this period, these promises will sound strange and almost fairly tale-like

- But that's about to change soon
- We will soon enter into a long period of history when supernatural displays of God's authority will be common
- Beginning with the Tribulation and continuing into the Kingdom
- But as impressive as such things are to us, they are not the preferred way in which God makes Himself known to us
 - Above all, our God is a God of resurrection...He brings dead things back to life
 - And that's the way He prefers to make Himself known
- Notice the final verse of this chapter, when He says that filling dead, desolate land with living people will testify to His name
 - That's a God of resurrection
 - He takes what has been made desolate by sin and brings it back to life to His glory
 - He's doing that in your own life and in nations of people
- With that let's transition to His promises for peaceful inhabitation by a people of Abraham
 - And in Chapter 37 we see another vision to explain a work of God for Israel

Ezek. 37:1 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.

Ezek. 37:2 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.

Ezek. 37:3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."

Ezek. 37:4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'

Ezek. 37:5 "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.

Ezek. 37:6 '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.'"

[Ezek. 37:7](#) 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.

[Ezek. 37:8](#) And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.

[Ezek. 37:9](#) Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, 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.'""

[Ezek. 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.

- This chapter of Ezekiel is fairly well-known by most Bible students, but like most of Ezekiel it's studied in isolation
 - It may also be the most abused section of the book, since the range of interpretations you can find span from misinformed to ridiculous
 - Let's start by explaining the illustration that God gives Ezekiel and then we can look at the interpretation the Lord provides
 - The Lord gives the prophet a vision of a wide valley, scattered with human bones everywhere
 - Notice Ezekiel says "the" valley, not a valley meaning, this is a valley he had seen before
 - The last time Ezekiel mentions a valley in a vision it was in Chapter 3

[Ezek. 3:22](#) The hand of the LORD was on me there, and He said to me, "Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you."

[Ezek. 3:23](#) So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the LORD was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face.

- The word translated "plain" in v.22 is the same Hebrew word as used here for valley
- This is the same place where the Lord's glory had appeared to Ezekiel at the beginning of his prophetic ministry
- The Lord directed Ezekiel to walk around the valley taking in the sight of so many bones

- Ezekiel noticed the bones were very dry, which meant they had died long ago
- So after so long, the Lord asked Ezekiel if these bones could live again
 - Instead of giving a yes or no answer, Ezekiel defers to the Lord
 - Ezekiel was saying this is a question that only the Lord could answer
 - Or another way of expressing it, only the Lord could resurrect the lives of these people
 - Therefore, only the Lord could say if it would happen
- So then the Lord says that Ezekiel must prophesy over these bones to declare what would happen to them
 - In vs.5-6 the Lord says He will bring these bones back to life
 - The description involves the physical life of a human body being restored, as if in a factory
 - One part of the body is repaired at a time until the entire body has been restored
 - After the Lord tells Ezekiel what to say, then he speaks in vs.7-8
 - And as Ezekiel speaks, the bones take life, move and assemble themselves in the valley
 - And then the flesh returns in steps until human bodies are assembled, but without life
 - Finally, the Lord breathes on the bodies giving them life again and they stand up
 - And after coming to life, the bodies are united in a single army
 - They have become part of a larger, single organization ready to serve
- So what does the image reveal to us? Before we look at the next passage, take note of some of the details we've seen
 - The fact that the restoration of these "bodies" happens in such an unrealistic fashion tells us that this an illustration of something

- It's not predicting a literal resurrection of human beings
- This can't describe a human body coming to life, because God doesn't resurrect human bodies in this way
- The resurrection of a person happens in an instant according to 1 Corinthians 15
- We must be careful not to make the details of a metaphor into literal details of the thing pictured
 - Instead, we must "translate" each detail of the picture into the intended reality
 - In this illustration we're seeing stages of restoration of some entity
- Also notice the prominence of the word breath
 - The word appears eight times in this short passage
 - And the number eight stands for new beginnings in Scripture, indicating that the Lord is restarting something
 - And the word for breath in Hebrew is also the word for spirit, which suggests that the Spirit is working to bring about this restoration
- Finally, we have to consider the context of Ezekiel 37
 - We know this chapter fits into a larger narrative of how God restores Israel in the promises of the Abrahamic covenant
 - So that leads us to consider that the dry bones are a picture of the scattering and apparent "death" of the nation
 - Based on how Israel was scattered from her land, the nation appears to have died
 - Not the people themselves, since Jews continued to exist through the time of Israel's dispersion
 - But the nation itself was said to have ceased to exist on the world stage
 - But if the Lord is to fulfill the promise of His people dwelling securely and peacefully, they must have a nation to call their own

- And so this is the Lord's vision to show that one day a people, a nation will be restored
- And that restoration will appear as if Israel has returned from oblivion, a nation coming back to life
- Furthermore, that restoration process will take place in stages rather than all at once
 - And as it happens, it will be evident to anyone watching just as it was evident to Ezekiel that bones were being reassembled
 - And the final step of that restoration will be the Lord breathing life back into the nation by His Spirit
 - We know this to be the national salvation of Israel at the end of Tribulation
- So let's see how that interpretation lines up with what follows in this chapter

Ezek. 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.'

Ezek. 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.

Ezek. 37:13 "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.

Ezek. 37:14 "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."

- In v.11, the Lord confirms our interpretation...the bones represent the whole house of Israel
 - They do not represent members of the house of Israel, as in certain Jews that live at a certain point in time or even across time
 - Rather, all the bones are a collective picture of a single entity: the house of Israel
 - And the term house could also mean the nation or dwelling place of a certain people

- So it's a picture of the restoration of the nation of people of Israel
- Also notice in v.12 that the people of Israel are said to lament the loss of their nation since they have been cut off
 - To be cut off refers to being cut off from access to the land of Israel
 - That phrase speaks to the period of history when Israel is outside her land and unable to return and possess it
 - Israel existed in that state for many years over periods of history beginning with the exile in Ezekiel's day and continuing until about 100 years ago
- At the turn of the last century, Jews finally saw opportunity to begin to return to their land
 - That return has taken place over time, like bones and bodies being reassembled slowly
 - The Lord says in v.12 that this is like the graves opening up and people rising up and reentering the land
- At this point we must be careful not to move out of the illustration and into a literal view
 - We're still in the vision, so the bones coming out of graves is not a literal description of resurrection
 - It's still a way of illustrating the nation coming back to life, as were the bones in the valley
- In v.14 the Lord says the sum effect of His work will be to place the nation back in its land with life and security
 - Which leads to the next illustration

Ezek. 37:15 The word of the LORD came again to me saying,

Ezek. 37:16 "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.'

Ezek. 37:17 "Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.

Ezek. 37:18 "When the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?'

Ezek. 37:19 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.'"

- Another well known moment in Ezekiel, when the prophet writes on two sticks and then lashes them together into one bundle
 - One stick says Judah and the other says Ephraim
 - Judah is a reference to the southern kingdom after Solomon
 - Ephraim is a reference to the northern kingdom
 - These two tribes were representative of the two kingdoms because each was the largest tribe within its kingdom
 - According to the same thinking, the continental United States should be called Texas
 - The Lord interprets the illustration to mean He will bring these two groups back together by His hand
 - Obviously, this illustration works off the earlier one and reinforces our interpretation
 - If the earlier one was speaking about the re-emergence of the nation of Israel on the world stage, then this must also picture a nation
 - Specifically, it pictures the separate histories of these two kingdoms merging into a common history
 - After the kingdoms split, they went separate ways
 - One was destroyed by Assyria, the other was captured by Babylon
 - One never returned to her land, not as a group, while the other did
 - But in the future, these two kingdoms would be reunited into a single kingdom, a single nation again

Ezek. 37:20 "The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.

[Ezek. 37:21](#) "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;

[Ezek. 37:22](#) 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.

[Ezek. 37:23](#) "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.

- This is exactly the interpretation we would expect given the details of the text
- A new nation will form out of the ashes of the former kingdoms
- And it will dwell in the land as one with their God

[Ezek. 37:24](#) "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.

[Ezek. 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.

[Ezek. 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.

[Ezek. 37:27](#) "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

[Ezek. 37:28](#) "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."""

- As we read a few chapters earlier on the topic of leadership, the Lord promises that the nation's greatest king would also return with them
 - That only makes sense, since David is certainly counted among the righteous in Israel
 - And David will return to rule over Israel as king
 - Earlier in Chapter 34 he was called prince, and yet here he is called king

- The reason for the difference stems from the difference in purpose in both chapters
 - In Chapter 34 the subject was leadership, and the Lord's main point was that He would be a Good Shepherd over His people
 - So in that chapter, the Lord acknowledges that David returns to rule as prince
 - But then the Lord quickly follows that statement by adding the Lord would be their God and David would be the Lord's servant
 - The point is that all shepherding in Israel will be under the watch of the Lord to ensure it will be done properly
- Now in this chapter the topic is the restoration of the people as one nation in the land, in peace
 - So to emphasize the oneness of the people, the Lord says they will all have the same human leader, David
 - In that context, the Lord calls David king to reinforce the fact of one nation/one ruler just as it was in David's day
 - Still, the Lord will be over David as we already learned in Chapter 34
 - In fact, notice at the end of v.25 the Lord uses the term prince again to remind us of that fact
- Furthermore, the Lord will make a covenant of peace as we've heard before, and this is an essential detail
 - Remember, the Lord promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...

Gen. 12:2 And I will make you a great nation,
 And I will bless you,
 And make your name great;
 And so you shall be a blessing;

Gen. 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying,
 "To your descendants I have given this land,
 From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

Gen. 22:15 Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,

[Gen. 22:16](#) and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,
[Gen. 22:17](#) indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

[Gen. 28:13](#) And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.

[Gen. 28:14](#) “Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

- These are the promises that the Lord is promising to fulfill in Chapters 37 and 38
 - The Lord promised Abraham a nation, an uncountable number of people living as one nation in the land
 - And He promised this nation would be blessed and would be a blessing
 - And finally, He promised that this nation would possess the gates of its enemies
 - That is a way of saying no enemy of Israel will be able to stand against the nation in the day the Lord places it in the land
- So all these promises imply that Israel will dwell in peace in her land without threat that any enemy could take that peace away
 - And here we see the Lord promising to fulfill that aspect of the Abrahamic covenant with a peace covenant
 - This will be a new covenant established at the outset of the Millennial Kingdom
 - And this covenant will guarantee Israel the peace it was promised long ago and it will last forever
 - Never again will Israel not know peace
- Furthermore, the presence of the Lord will never cease to dwell with Israel

- This too is an important detail, especially since Ezekiel was the prophet to also reveal that the glory of the Lord would depart Israel
 - In earlier chapters we studied the movement of the glory of God out of the temple in Jerusalem
 - And the departure of the glory of God foreshadowed Israel's judgment and destruction by Babylon
- Now the Lord says His glory will never depart, which implies that the nation of Israel will never be conquered or destroyed again
 - This must be the ultimate fulfillment of the peace covenant
 - That God never abandons Israel to her enemies again
- And that's an important distinction...God is not saying Israel will have no enemies in the future Kingdom
 - The Lord isn't promising never to bring His wrath against Israel... that's already assured
 - Israel will be at peace with God forever because they have His Spirit and they will obey Him and He will dwell among them
- This peace covenant is God promising to prevent Israel's enemies from ever taking Israel's peace again
 - In fact, a peace covenant would be a hollow gesture if there was nothing or no one remaining who could take peace away
 - But there will be enemies of Israel in the Kingdom
 - So this peace covenant is directed at protecting Israel from any enemy who might try to take that peace away
- Take note of what Zechariah says will be happening in the Kingdom between Israel and other nations

Zech. 14:9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

Zech. 14:10 All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses.

Zech. 14:11 People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.

- First, we see that Israel will be in the Kingdom, dwelling in security
 - Here again, the promise to dwell securely only matters if there remains some enemy who might threaten that peace
 - And in the Kingdom there will be those who would oppose Israel and Christ the King

Zech. 14:16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:17 And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.

Zech. 14:18 If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zech. 14:19 This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

- Even though the world is ruled by Christ, nevertheless sin remains among some because natural human beings continue to live in the Kingdom
 - And once in a while, a family or a tribe or maybe a nation won't want to honor Israel and Christ
 - So they will disobey the command to come to Israel to celebrate the continuing observance of the Feast of Booths
 - That's the feast in the Jewish calendar that recognizes God dwelling among His people
- When a nation refuses to participate, the Lord will bring that nation drought
 - This is a clear indication that opposition remains alive in the nations
 - Yet that opposition will never take Israel's peace, the Lord promises

- So in Chapter 37 the Lord tells Israel how He will fulfill His promise to Abraham to bring a nation of Abraham's descendants into the land to live securely
 - But as we just learned with the peace covenant, the only way to know that the Lord is fulfilling His promise to keep Israel secure is when something tries to take that security away
 - It's similar to the dilemma of light and dark
 - Without darkness, you couldn't understand the concept of light or even know what it is
 - So unless someone tries to take Israel's peace, the people of God wouldn't know that the Lord is keeping His covenant of peace
 - So the next chapter tells a prophecy of a day when nations will try to take Israel's peace
 - And the Lord will permit that uprising just long enough so that He might respond to it in defense of Israel
 - And by His response He will demonstrate His faithfulness to His peace covenant
 - We will start our study of Chapter 38 tonight...
- This chapter, and the one that follows, begins a well-known section of Ezekiel often called Ezekiel's war
 - Before we dive into the text, it's worth a moment of background about the curious interpretations that circulate these chapters
 - And probably the greatest disagreement in those interpretations concerns when in history this event will take place
 - And we basically have four options, four periods of history when Bible students have said this war takes place
 - I'm going to list those four options now, but I'm not going to try to resolve them yet
 - First, some claim this war never happens – in the sense that it's not literal but merely symbolic, representing God's ultimate victory over Satan and Israel's enemies in general
 - A second view is that the war happens in this age before the start of Tribulation

- A third view says it happens in the time of Tribulation and is part of the destruction of that period
- A fourth view says it happens near the end of the Kingdom period
- As we move through the text, we will come upon details that I believe will rule out all but one of the four options
 - So we will see the final answer in time, as a result of our observations and interpretation
 - Let's look at the actors involved in this war

Ezek. 38:1 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 38:2 "Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him

Ezek. 38:3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.

Ezek. 38:4 "I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;

Ezek. 38:5 Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet;

Ezek. 38:6 Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops – many peoples with you.

Ezek. 38:7 "Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them.

Ezek. 38:8 "After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.

- This is the sixth and last message that Ezekiel received as part of the group of prophecies given to him the day before the exiles from Jerusalem arrived
 - So this message is coming to the exiles one day before they learned that their city was gone and the temple had been destroyed
 - What an interesting pairing of events that must have been

- On the one hand, they hear that their nation has essentially been wiped off the map
- And on the other hand, they have just heard from God that they have a glorious future in the land in a day to come
- Including the prospect that they will never be threatened by an enemy again
- So in the beginning, the Lord tells Ezekiel that the Lord wants him to speak against certain nations and leaders
 - The Lord will use these leaders and nations to engage in an attack against Israel
 - Before we look at the names listed, don't overlook the most important actor in this entire chapter: the Lord
- The Lord says plainly that He will instigate the battle
 - He will put hooks in the jaws of these nations and leaders, leading them to do the Lord's will
 - So whatever else we say about this war, we know it will be caused by the Lord
- And that becomes a fundamental question we have to answer as we arrive at our determination of timing
 - Specifically, whatever time period we select for this battle, we must also arrive at an explanation for why the Lord wanted it to happen then
 - The Lord does nothing except for specific reasons, so we need to understand the reason that this battle needs to happen
 - And that reason will drive us to the proper time period in our interpretation
- Moving to the names of the people, we find a set of strange names and a few more familiar names
 - First, Ezekiel is told to look toward the land of Magog
 - Many of the place names in this list trace back to the names given in the Table of Nations from Genesis Chapter 10

- Noah's son, Japheth, walked off the ark and eventually settled in Eastern Europe starting with present day Turkey
- Among Japheth's sons to settle in that region were Magog, Mechech, and Tubal
- And the land settled by these three sons, plus the land of Rosh, are collectively ruled by a man called Gog, who is also called the prince of Rosh
 - The word Gog is a title, not a specific name, similar to Pharaoh or Caesar
 - So the oracle is spoken against some world leader with the title Gog, who rules a vast land located in the region of present-day Turkey
 - But because these place names are so general, the entire region north of Israel could be involved and under a common leader
 - That includes nations today like Syria, Georgia, Armenia, Russia and perhaps others
- This king will be joined by allies from Persia, Ethiopia and Put
 - Persia is the name for present-day Iran
 - Ethiopia includes the nation of that name now but historically it also includes neighboring Somalia and Eritrea
 - So altogether, this army consists of people from the north, south and east of Israel
 - Since the Mediterranean Sea sits directly to Israel's west, this means that nations are coming against Israel on land only
 - And they are coming from every possible direction surrounding Israel
- Next, notice that the Lord causes these peoples to assemble a great army to come up against Israel – yet the army is equipped in a very rudimentary way
 - First, the army will rely on horses
 - And we know these are not symbolic mentions because later in the description we get more specifics about the use of the horses

- If the army only has horses for transportation, then this would explain why the forces approach by land only and not by sea
- Secondly, the weaponry is very rudimentary by current standards
 - We see helmets and shields mentioned here
 - But in Chapter 39 we learn that they carry into battle wooden clubs, wooden spears, wooden shields, wooden helmets, wooden bows and wooden arrows
 - In fact everything used in the battle will be made of wood, not metal
 - This detail will help us date the prophecy
- In v.7 the Lord directs them to first prepare for battle for some period of time
 - And during this time they are on guard against discovery or someone stopping them
 - But then after many days, the Lord will summon this vast army into action
 - Once again, notice the Lord is the one selecting the timing of this attack so that it happens when He desires to suit His purposes
- And finally, notice that the attack will come against a land that has been restored from the sword
 - The word for restored is the Hebrew word *shuv*, which has many shades of interpretation
 - In this context, the best interpretation would be “turned away from” or “to have put away”
 - In other words, it’s a defenseless land, a land without military weaponry for none was needed
 - And why was none needed? Because v.8 goes on to say that the inhabitants of the land of Israel are living securely
 - They had no need for weaponry because they had no expectation of attack
 - Nothing threatened their security

- Furthermore the inhabitants have been placed in their land from many nations, referring to the regathering of Israel
 - And they are all living on the mountains of Israel, which is an interesting reference we will come back to later
 - And before they returned, the land was a continual waste before it was restored to something great and useful for Israel
- Finally, notice the small phrase at the very end of v.8...“all of them”
 - All of Israel is dwelling in this place, not just some Jews but all Jews
 - Here again, that’s another important clue to the timing of these events
- We come back to this next time...