

ISRAEL IN THE LAND, PART 1

Is the fact of the Jewish people's presence as a nation back in the ancestral homeland Israel a significant prophetic event? Many people, including some dispensationalists, say it is not. For replacement theologians, Israel's reestablishment as a nation is nothing more than an unfortunate accident of history and a stumbling block to world peace. Other people claim there is no prophetic fulfillment going on today including Israel's presence as a nation in the world and they believe Israel could be removed from the land without violating any Scriptural revelation. They believe world events are simply setting the stage for the resumption of end times prophetic fulfillment. While that is largely true, my position is this: Israel's presence in the land in a state of unbelief is, in fact, prophecy being fulfilled at this time in preparation for the judgment that is about to fall on the world and on Israel that will culminate in the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

In Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, God promised blessings to Israel for obedience and curses for disobedience. It is interesting to note in Deuteronomy 28, there are fourteen verses concerning obedience and fifty-four verses concerning curses for disobedience and in Leviticus 26, there are thirteen verses concerning obedience and twenty-six verses concerning curses for disobedience. In Deuteronomy 28, verses 64-68 are the important verses for purposes of this study because they proclaim the curse of worldwide dispersion from the

land. This curse is still operative as millions of Jews are not in the land, however, we will see that a regathering in unbelief is well underway at this time and has been for nearly 150 years. Even before the Zionist movement got underway at the end of the nineteenth century, Russian Jews had been fleeing to Israel to escape the persecution there.

The current worldwide dispersion resulted from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and was completed in 136 A.D. when the Bar Kochba revolt was put down by the Romans. This is not to say there have not always been Jews in the land because they have always had some people living there, but during this worldwide disciplinary dispersion, the territorial land of Israel has been under foreign control from the first century until the establishment of the state of Israel in May, 1948. During this dispersion, the Jewish people have and are suffering intense persecution some periods of time worse than others. We are going to see that the Covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will not be forgotten nor will it be abrogated. The biblical covenants are absolutely foundational to properly understanding God's program for history as He has had it revealed in the Word of God. God is faithful and He will fulfill the covenant promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants.

In Leviticus 26:1-13 and in Deuteronomy 28:1-14, God promised blessings to Israel for obedience, and in Leviticus 26:14-39 and in Deuteronomy 28:15-68, God promised curses for disobedience including removal from the land. The fi-

nal disciplinary measure God would impose on Israel was and still is worldwide dispersion.

Deuteronomy 28:64–68 ⁶⁴“Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known. ⁶⁵“Among those nations you shall find no rest, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul. ⁶⁶“So your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you will be in dread night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life. ⁶⁷“In the morning you shall say, ‘Would that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Would that it were morning!’ because of the dread of your heart which you dread, and for the sight of your eyes which you will see. ⁶⁸“The LORD will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the way about which I spoke to you, ‘You will never see it again!’ And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.”

Leviticus 26:33, 38-39 ³³You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.... ³⁸But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies’ land will consume you. ³⁹So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies; and also because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away with them.

Replacement theologians are very good at claiming Israel was forever banished from the land in 70 A.D. and thereby forever forfeited all rights to the land, but right after God promised to disperse them worldwide as a curse for disobedience in Deuteronomy 28, He promised, through an amplification of the Abrahamic Covenant we call the Land Covenant, to restore them to the land AFTER these curses have been invoked and Israel has been punished for her sins (the Land Covenant, Dt. 30:1-10). In Leviticus 26:40-45, God promised Israel she would not be permanently rejected because He would be faithful to fulfill the promises He made to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We can only conclude that to suggest Israel no longer has any rights to the land is a denial of the Abrahamic Covenant God made with Abraham and with his descendants. God, who cannot lie and who cannot be unfaithful, gave His Word that Abraham and His seed would inherit the land and the same God will be faithful to keep His promise. It is true that He is looking for a faithful generation of Jewish people with whom the Covenant will finally be fulfilled, but that is far different from saying that God has abrogated the Covenant due to the unfaithfulness and unbelief of the Jews in past and present generations. God is faithful even when we are faithless and He will keep His promises. The Abrahamic Covenant has never been abrogated and one day it will be completely fulfilled.

God promised that Israel will endure forever.

There are numerous Scriptures that proclaim Israel's continued existence.

Following are four powerful, representative examples.

Jeremiah 31:35–37 ³⁵Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: ³⁶“If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.” ³⁷Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 33:19–26 ¹⁹The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, ²⁰“Thus says the LORD, ‘If you can break My covenant for the day and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, ²¹then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant so that he will not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers. ²²‘As the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister

to Me.'”²³ And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, ²⁴“Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, ‘The two families which the LORD chose, He has rejected them’? Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight. ²⁵“Thus says the LORD, ‘If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, ²⁶then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.’”

Isaiah 66:22 ²²“For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me,” declares the LORD, “So your offspring and your name will endure.

Joel 3:20 ²⁰But Judah will be inhabited forever And Jerusalem for all generations.

This is why literal hermeneutics are so important. These Scriptures make it very clear God is not and never will be through with Israel and He cannot abandon her. The sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, and day and night all perform their God-given tasks and as long as that happens, Israel will exist in one way or another. No one reading these Scriptures, at least reading them according to literal hermeneutics, can possibly say Israel is no more and the church is now Israel. Israel and the Jewish people are a major component of God's plan for history; they always have been and they always will be. Interpreting these verses as though they are referring to the church destroys any semblance of meaning in the message being presented. God is telling us in no uncertain terms that the Jews are not finished as a people and Israel is not finished as a nation. God is still dealing with them and God will continue to deal with them as history continues to unfold.

The theology of Dr. Chafer concerning Israel in the land is important because he was so instrumental in promulgating dispensational theology in the

twentieth century which is the only system that completely understands and accounts for God's plan for Israel in world history, but Dr. Chafer and the other early dispensational theologians did not understand the doctrine of two worldwide dispersions from the land and two subsequent worldwide restorations back into the land [for complete information see Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, volume 7, pages 123-127]. We do well to recognize that Chafer was born in 1871 and didn't embrace dispensational theology until the first decade of the twentieth century under the tutelage of C. I. Scofield, and Chafer died only four years after Israel became a nation. Chafer's understanding was that the current gathering of people into Israel would culminate in the reestablishment of the people in the land in belief at the Second Coming of Christ. When dispensational theology began to be developed in the nineteenth century, the Zionist movement had yet to begin and certainly Israel was not yet reestablished as a national entity. The Zionist movement began during Chafer's lifetime, but long after his birth, and he didn't really grasp all the Bible taught concerning the dispersions and the regatherings back into the land.

Dr. Chafer identified three periods of dispersion and three regatherings into the land. The first was the sojourn into Egypt and the Exodus that followed culminating in the Israelite's entrance into and possession of the Promised Land, or at least part of it. The second dispersion/regathering cycle resulted from the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests and the return from Babylon seventy years after Judah was conquered and Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans.

The third dispersion began in 70 A.D. and continues to this day throughout the world even in the midst of repopulating the land via the modern state of Israel, and the final regathering will be in belief at the Second Coming.

There are a number of problems with Dr. Chafer's analysis:

He failed to recognize there will be only two dispersions and two regatherings and both would be from the four corners of the earth. The dispersions into Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon were not worldwide and the people were not returned to the land from all over the world. They were dispersed into specific geographic areas or countries in the Middle East and they were recovered from those specific locations back into Israel. Chafer did not consider the regathering of the Jewish people at this time to be one of the restorations spoken of in the Bible. He relegates that to the regathering at the Second Coming. That is not correct. The regathering taking place at this time is the first worldwide regathering of the Jewish people God predicted would take place. This is the regathering in unbelief for the purpose of judgment and discipline of the Jewish people to prepare them for the final restoration which will take place at the Second Coming.

The prophet Isaiah specifically predicted only two regatherings of the Jews from all over the world. This is the key, definitive Scripture for understanding this doctrine. The context in Isaiah 11 is the prophet is referring to the final establishment of Israel in belief. This prophecy is referring to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

Isaiah 11:11–12 ¹¹Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover the second time with His hand The remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea. ¹²And He will lift up a standard for the nations And assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.

Isaiah's prophecy of this regathering in belief for the establishment of the Kingdom is called the "second" one logically meaning there was only one restoration prior to it. Since the regathering in belief is final and Israel will never again rebel against the Lord there are only two possible worldwide dispersion and restoration, recovery cycles.

Dr. Chafer also failed to recognize the regathering in unbelief and the subsequent dispersion during the Tribulation. He simply viewed the current establishment of the nation as a prelude to the Second Coming. He failed to understand the worldwide dispersion that occurs at the midpoint of the Tribulation. It is only at the end of the Tribulation that the second worldwide recovery from the Tribulation dispersion occurs immediately prior to the Second Coming and culminates in the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

The regathering in unbelief.

Isaiah 11:11-12 is a prophecy concerning the restoration of Israel for entry into the Kingdom, but because of the way it is worded it proves there are only two worldwide dispersions and recoveries. Isaiah 11 is referring to the final, permanent establishment of Israel in their ancestral land of Israel.

This regathering of Israel into the land in unbelief is a recovery from all over the world. It is not a recovery of the Jewish people from a single country or from a small geographical area of the Middle East. This is a recovery of the Jewish people from every nation on earth. It is a regathering out of wrath and a gathering for wrath. They were gathered out of the wrath of all the persecutions of the diaspora, but they have been particularly gathered out of the wrath of the holocaust following World War II. World War I prepared the land for Israel when Great Britain issued the Balfour Declaration declaring their intent to establish a land for the Jewish people. This was possible because Turkey, which occupied Israel during the Ottoman Empire, was an ally of Germany and their empire was lost when they were defeated and England was granted control of the Israel/Jordan area. The plans for the establishment of the nation and the land it would occupy were made and what is now Jordan was supposed to be part of Israel, but Arab Muslim opposition caused the land area awarded to Israel to be drastically reduced. Great Britain turned on Israel and reneged on their promises to the Jewish people. The holocaust of World War II prepared the Jewish people for Israel because many of them realized their only hope for freedom from persecution was to have their own country. It hasn't quite worked out that way with the Muslim situation going on in their area, but they are much better off in Israel than they were in most other nations of the world. So-called "civilized" and "cultured" Europe has hated the Jews and persecuted them for centuries. The horror of the holocaust also created the conditions for the world to allow Israel to be-

come a recognized state. People around the world were horrified at what happened to the Jewish people in Europe. That mindset hasn't lasted very long, but it lasted long enough to gather the impetus to get Israel reestablished as a modern nation. That could not happen today; the UN and most of the nations of the world have completely turned against Israel. Nevertheless, it did happen at that time and the nation was established on May 14, 1948, when the United Nations granted statehood to Israel. The current regathering is being accomplished with a view towards the time when with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out God will discipline Israel and judge the nations. The context of judgment with mighty hand and an outstretched arm, identifies a condition of unbelief. This will manifest itself in the Tribulation. God's goal is Messianic Kingship, but it will be accomplished through wrath and judgment. All the persecution Israel has experienced throughout the diaspora and up to this point in time is not a part of this wrath. Instead, it is a continuation of the curses promised in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. After the final period of wrath and judgment, which we know as the Tribulation, those Jews who believe will be brought into the land subject to the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34); that will be the second and final regathering in belief Isaiah predicted and those believers will be placed in the land to enjoy the fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises to them. [For further study see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, pages 97-104.]

Daniel clearly articulated the purpose for regathering the people in unbelief in Daniel 12:7. It is only after God uses the judgment of the Tribulation to break the power of the holy people, which we can interpret as the stubborn will of the Jewish people, that they will be ready to accept their Messiah. Only then will national regeneration take place. Only then will the leadership of Israel's Jewish people lead them to cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:39) and they will be saved to be gathered into the land in belief at the end of the Tribulation and they will be the nation producing the fruit of the Kingdom of God the Jewish leadership was unwilling to do at the First Advent (Mt. 21:43).

Daniel 12:7 ⁷¹I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.

Ezekiel testified to the regathering in unbelief for the purpose of disciplining the people and to prepare them for entry into the Kingdom. The prophet identified the method God will use to bring about Israel's national regeneration.

Ezekiel 20:33–38 ³³"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. ³⁴"I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; ³⁵and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. ³⁶"As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord GOD. ³⁷"I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; ³⁸and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of

the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.

Through Ezekiel, God is comparing this judgment with the judgments of the Exodus. God judged Egypt with powerful, miraculous acts of judgment that destroyed Egypt to the extent it has been a poor and relatively powerless nation since that time. In the same way, God is going to judge the Gentile world during the Tribulation, but He is also going to discipline Israel at the same time. "Having regathered His people from the corners of the earth, God will bring them into the wilderness of the peoples for the purpose of judging them.... The judgment under consideration will be face to face without any intervening parties. So that Ezekiel's contemporaries would have a point of comparison, he likened the coming judgment to God's dealings with their rebellious ancestors in the wilderness of the land of Egypt. Even the method of procedure is outlined in broad sketches. As a shepherd's staff is employed to count the sheep, so the Lord will bring the entire flock under the rod, this time with the purpose of separating the godly from the wicked. The godly will be purged out; those who have transgressed against the Lord will be brought out of the land of their sojourn but denied admission to the land of promise.... This is an exclusive judgment on Israel which will take place during the time of Jacob's trouble..." [Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, pp. 114-115].

Ezekiel 22:17–22 ¹⁷And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ¹⁸"Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver. ¹⁹"Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am

going to gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. ²⁰'As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it in order to melt it, so I will gather you in My anger and in My wrath and I will lay you there and melt you. ²¹'I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. ²²'As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.'"

In this Scripture, Ezekiel was predicting the destruction of Israel at the hands of the Babylonians. However, it is applicable to the end times judgment as a description of that time as well. Fruchtenbaum believes it to be a description of the regathering in unbelief. "Again, Ezekiel describes a regathering, this time focusing upon the City of Jerusalem. Jerusalem becomes the furnace of affliction, a common figure pointing to Israel's need for refining. Furthermore, it is also a regathering in unbelief because they are filled with the impurities of *brass and iron and lead and tin*. They are also regathered for a future time of wrath, when the wrath of God will be poured upon them for the purpose of melting them and to purify them. As a purified, believing nation, they will then turn to the Lord. Here again he speaks of worldwide regathering in unbelief in preparation for a specific future judgment, but the purpose of the judgment is to bring them to national repentance. Only then will they experience the final worldwide restoration in faith." [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, pp. 101-102]. The allegory that Israel was like an impure metal that needed to be refined in the furnace so the impurities could be removed was a common comparison the Lord made with Israel. It was a comparison that included the end times. Zechariah tells us only one third of

the Jews living at the time will survive to enter the Messianic Kingdom. Replacement theologians such as Hank Hanegraaff accuse dispensationalists of preaching genocide when this predictive revelation is taught.

Isaiah 1:22, 25²²Your silver has become dross, Your drink diluted with water....²⁵I will also turn My hand against you, And will smelt away your dross as with lye And will remove all your alloy.

Zechariah 13:9⁹“And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ And they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

Malachi 3:2–3²“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.³“He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

In the same way that God compared Israel to impure metals that needed purification prior to the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, Israel needs to undergo the purifying fire once again. This time, when the people are refined in the crucible of God’s judgment, they will emerge from the process a faithful, believing nation.

Ezekiel 36:22–24²²“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.²³“I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.²⁴“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

God makes it clear this really isn't about Israel at all; it's about Him and it's about His holy name. It is about vindicating His holiness which Israel continually profaned in the midst of the nations. Israel didn't do what God created them to do. "In unmistakable language Ezekiel made it clear that the basis of all God's dealings in grace are never predicated on man's merit, but rather on His holy character and name.... One's name stands for all that an individual is or does. God's name is both great and holy. For that reason He could not allow His wonderful name to be profaned in any sense among the nations because of Israel's sin and punishment, which did not properly reflect the blessed character of their God. In place of the former profanation of His name the Lord will see to it that His glorious name is sanctified. God is said to be sanctified when His character is made evident to the world, especially in and through those who are in covenant relationship to Him." [Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, pp. 208-209].

Through the prophet Isaiah, God told the nation He would refine them in the furnace of affliction for His own sake. God is acting for His glory, not for Israel's sake. Israel's destiny is connected to God's promises to them which reflects on His character and He will in the end be glorified throughout the earth.

Isaiah 48:10–11 ¹⁰"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹"For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

Zephaniah makes it clear the regathering in unbelief for judgment must take place before the Day of the Lord begins. Israel MUST be in the land before

the Tribulation can begin. No Israel in the land; no Tribulation; no Messianic Kingdom. That's why Satan is so invested in destroying the Jewish people.

Zephaniah 2:1-2 ¹Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame, ²Before the decree takes effect—The day passes like the chaff—Before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD'S anger comes upon you.

God is going to cause Israel to experience His wrath for the purpose of establishing Himself as King over them. He is going to bring them out of all the lands to which He has scattered them. This will be God's judgment on them for all their rebellion and they will be paid double for their sins. They will pass under the rod of judgment and be disciplined in order to be brought into the Covenants. The rebellious ones are going to be purged from among the people; only believers will enter the Kingdom. The metallurgy metaphor identifies the purging of impurities from among the Israelites. God is going to run them through the furnace of judgment in order to remove the dross, the impurities, from among them. It is not for Israel's sake that God is doing this; it is for vindicating His holy name. He is not through with Israel because He made covenantal promises to them and He will fulfill them. He created Israel for a purpose and He will see to it that purpose is fulfilled.

Ezekiel 37 is a key prophecy concerning the regathering of Israel in unbelief; it begins with the prophet's vision of the valley of dry bones. However, Replacement theologians totally miss the truth of this Scripture; they must relate it to the church in some way in order to maintain their theology even though Ezekiel clearly identifies the bones as "the whole house of Israel" (Ezek. 37:11). One

way they do this is to claim that Israel means the church. Replacement theologian Michael Horton says the vision of the valley of the dry bones is “a new Israel ... raised in the last days from death to life.” [Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way*, p. 590]. For Horton, this refers to the church. Most expositors claim this vision is a metaphor for understanding resurrection; however, this is not about individual bodily resurrection; it is about bringing Israel as a nation into a believing relationship with God. That involves a physical and a spiritual restoration of Israel and that’s a process; it is not an event. One resurrection view states, “Verses 1–14 portray a symbolic vision of exile and restoration as the national death and resurrection of Israel. However, the image proved too powerful to be restricted to that single, historical interpretation. Indeed, the resurrection of the dead becomes the dominant mode for understanding life beyond this life in Judaism and Christianity.” [Steven Tuell, “Ezekiel” in *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*, p. 253]. This theologian also errs in believing the restoration of the dry bones refers to the restoration from the Babylonian captivity, but it does not; it refers to the end. Others believe this is only about the return of Israel into the land from the Babylonian captivity apart from any reference to resurrection. “This passage does not therefore teach a doctrine of resurrection from the dead, either general, national or individual. Nor does it even imply a belief in resurrection on the part of Ezekiel or his hearers. All that can be said of it is that Ezekiel uses the language of resurrection to illustrate the promise of Israel’s return to a new life in her own land from the deathlike ex-

istence of the Babylonian exile.” [John B. Taylor, “Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary” in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, p. 229]. Replacement theologian Shedd calls Ezekiel 37:1-14 a parable. “The parable of a spiritual resurrection implies a bodily resurrection.” [William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed., p. 869]. The point is, the real meaning of Ezekiel 37 has been lost in most of the contemporary church because most of the contemporary church does not believe God still has a Kingdom program that includes Israel.

The vision God gave Ezekiel revealed that God will bring Israel back to life as a nation in a physical sense, but at some point in the future, He will also see to it that Israel is spiritually restored based on their belief. Immediately prior to this vision, Ezekiel reiterated part of the New Covenant that was revealed through the prophet Jeremiah. None of what God is doing with Israel should surprise anyone and it should not be casually disregarded because it doesn’t happen to fit neatly into some modern concept of what Israel is supposed to be today. The New Covenant is connected with the vision.

Ezekiel 36:24–28 ²⁴“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. ²⁵“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. ²⁸“You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

The important fact I want noted here is the Bible clearly and explicitly relates this vision to Israel; it is not about the church. It is about Israel coming back

to life first in unbelief and then in belief and being restored to the land promised them in the covenants.

Ezekiel 37:11 ¹¹Then 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.'

The next issue Ezekiel 37 addresses is the reunification of Judah and Israel. This cannot be referring to the return to the land and to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity because that return involved only Judah. Ezekiel symbolized this reunification by using two sticks; one represented Judah and one represented Israel. By making them one stick, Ezekiel symbolized the two becoming one nation again.

Ezekiel 37:19–22 ¹⁹say 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; ²²and 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.

The final prophecy of Ezekiel 37 concerns the Kingdom. David will be king over Israel and they will be living in the land with God's sanctuary located there. The New Covenant will be in effect; Ezekiel called it an "everlasting covenant." The Jews will not sin nor will they ever again rebel against God while living under the King's rule in the Messianic Kingdom.

Ezekiel 37:24–28²⁴“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. 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. 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. ²⁷“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.””

The fact of the Kingdom is clearly predicted by God through the prophet. For those who use literal hermeneutics, the only question here is whether or not the David identified here is the Messiah or whether he is the resurrected King David. Constable believes it refers to Messiah. “They would live in the Promised Land forever, and the Lord’s servant David would be their appointed ruler forever. In view of God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, this must refer to the Son of David, Messiah.” [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constables Notes on the Bible*, 4:486]. Dyer believes it refers to the resurrected King David and that is the position I tend hold as well. “However, nothing in Ezekiel 34:23 [and in 37:24-28] demands that Ezekiel was not referring to the literal King David who will be resurrected to serve as Israel’s righteous prince. David is referred to by name elsewhere in passages that look to the future restoration of Israel. Also Ezekiel indicated that David will be the prince of the restored people (Ezek. 34:24; 37:25). This same ‘prince’ will then offer sin offerings for himself during the millennial period (45:22; 46:4). Such actions would hardly be appropriate for the sinless Son of God, but they would be for David. So it seems this is a literal reference to a resur-

rected David." [Charles H. Dyer, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1295]. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah seemed to indicate a distinction between God and David the servant prince.

Ezekiel 34:23–24 ²³"Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. ²⁴"And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken.

Ezekiel 45:22 ²²"On that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering. [see also Ezek. 46:4]

Jeremiah 30:9 ⁹"But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.

Hosea 3:5 ⁵Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.