

## GENESIS

### Week 13, chapter 13 and Ezekiel 36, 37

While Torah Class is all about studying the first 5 books of the Bible....the Torah....it also is probably the most profitable for us when we can understand the relevance it has for us in our day and age, and apply it to our lives. It's said by many preachers and teachers that we, today, are in a very special time in history; that we are eye witnesses to age-old Bible prophecies coming to pass. And, they're right. But, to put that into perspective, it's good to realize that not every generation has witnessed prophetic events occurring; so, one would think that when a prophesy of God DID come to fruition, God's people would get all excited about it. Yet, The Church....and most of the earth's Jewish population....has for the most part, greeted two of the most important events in all prophetic history....the rebirth of Israel as a Jewish nation, and the return of the control of Jerusalem to the Jewish people....with a disinterested yawn. I think that is primarily because we don't realize that fulfillments of prophecy don't happen every day.

In fact, with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., for all practical purposes the unfolding of Biblically prophesied events went into hibernation for an extended period of time. For better than 18 centuries not a single prophetic event that is outlined in the Bible occurred. Oh, there was much going on in the world in preparation for that day God would once again start the prophetic clock ticking, counting-down to the end of all things as we know them; but for almost 1900 years God's people had nothing from which to gauge just where in Bible history they stood. That is NOT the case for us living today, however....but to look around us, you'd think that nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the next prophesied event that was to occur was **the return** of those who had just been dispersed and exiled .....from what is called the Roman dispersion, or Roman exile. Jewish people, Believers and non-Believers, kept their bags packed and waited expectantly for that return in the first few decades following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, when they were outlawed from living in that city; but it didn't happen. The gentile Church and the Messianic Jews of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. thought certainly Christ would return at any moment; likewise the traditional Jews thought the return to their homeland and rebuilding of their Temple was imminent ....but it didn't happen. Those worshipping the God of Israel and lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century were getting restless and very worried about what was taking so long for God to call His people back to their Holy Land.....but their worries were not put to rest. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century the thoroughly gentile-ized Church of Jesus Christ was still awaiting the return of Christ; and the Jews of every nation to which they had migrated wondered if maybe the time was finally near when they could go back home.....as did those of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, right on up to about the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Christianity took a fateful turn and came to the conclusion that we must have been misreading those prophecies about the return of Israel to their homeland all along.

The Church concluded that in fact, Israel was NOT going to return; at the least, there wasn't going to be a **Jewish** Israel. And, that the Israel the Bible spoke of....both the people and the land....were but symbolic. Symbolic of what? The gentile Church. The new mainstream beliefs that arose and which today dominate the Christian world, began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; and these beliefs centered on the newly held conviction that Israel had been **replaced** by the Church. That Israel had been thoroughly and permanently rejected by Yahweh, because they had rejected His son. That all the promises of land and salvation the Hebrews had received through Abraham and Moses were taken from them and handed over to the gentile Church. That the Church would now get all the blessings promised to Abraham; those promises that we read about in the first few verses of chapter 12; Israel, on the other hand, would get all the curses that would come from disobedience to the laws of Moses.

Let's fast-forward to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Uh-oh: "Houston, we have a problem". Because in 1948 Israel finally DID return to the exact same spot from which they were exiled; the Jewish nation was reborn just as prophesied. And, in 1967, Jerusalem WAS returned to the control of the Jewish people, just as predicted.... and therefore ordained.... by Jesus. And, what has been the Church's reaction to these staggering events? In general, nothing. The same replacement theological positions born from the lack of faith of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Church leaders, positions completely intertwined and imbedded within modern Church doctrine.....is to this day what is still being taught in the overwhelming majority of churches worldwide. It's as though the return of Israel to claim the promises made to Abraham, never happened.

You know, Christians have been taught from early childhood to express disappointment and shake our heads knowingly at those terrible Jews in Jesus day that had the unimaginable privilege of witnessing the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah, but then were blinded to it by their Jewish traditions. So blind that they killed the Son of God for claiming to be who He really was.

Well, today, we of the Church have witnessed that long-awaited day when Israel would be returned from their exile, reclaim their land inheritance, and be reborn as a nation; we watched on TV as the Israeli army defeated an alliance of 5 powerful Arab armies in a matter of only 6 days, and in 1967 reclaimed Jerusalem as their own Holy City for the first time since 70 A.D. The prophecy has happened; the Jews are back, and for the most part, due to our Christian traditions, the Church has been utterly blind to it. Interestingly, it was a little under 1900 years from the time God made His promises to Abraham until Yeshua the Messiah arrived; and was a little under 1900 years from the day God kicked His people out of the land, but promised He would bring them back, until the day that they came back to claim that promise once and for all. Maybe we ought to take notice.

There are many mentions scattered throughout the Bible of these events, but for me, none has the impact of those spoken by that really weird prophet of God, Ezekiel. Ezekiel was one of those Jews taken from his home in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and exiled to Babylon, when the Babylonian Empire conquered Judah 597 B.C.

So, let's detour just a bit.....and at the same time connect the dots between the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 13, and Ezekiel's prophetic utterances of Ezekiel 36 and 37.....and then all that connected to the events of our time..... by reading the prophetic story of the FINAL return of the Jewish people to their homeland. A return that, after an 18-century hiatus of prophetic fulfillments, marks the resumption of the countdown to Armageddon.

### **READ EZEKIEL 36 AND 37**

Wow. I wish George Lucas or Steven Spielberg would make a movie out of just what is contained in those two chapters!

The first point I need to make is that the event talked about in Ezekiel is NOT about the return of the Jews from Babylon. The study of these two chapters of Ezekiel is a couple of weeks in itself; so, let me point out just a couple of important keys to understanding these verses.

First and foremost is the meaning of the phrase "the whole house of Israel", also at times translated as "both houses of Israel", or even just "all Israel". The words of Ezekiel were written over a span of about 25 years, beginning a little after Babylon conquered Judah in 597 BC. The part we're looking at was written in the later years. About 130 years earlier, you need to know that the Hebrews were a divided nation; a 10-tribe confederacy lived in the northern area of the holy lands, and a 2-tribe group lived in the south. In fact, the northern area was a kingdom all its own, separate and apart from the southern area, each area ruled by its own kings. Let me be very clear: the unified kingdom of Israel, ruled over by David and then Solomon, became divided by means of civil war. The northern area went by several names: the Northern Kingdom, the kingdom of Israel, and some documents even refer to it as the kingdom of Joseph. But, for the most part, as was typical for that era, it was called after the name of the tribe that was dominant in that region: the tribe of Ephraim. From about 900 BC to the time of Ezekiel (about 590 BC), that northern region was called the Kingdom of Ephraim.....a name that most are not familiar with.

The southern kingdom, however, is one that we are more aware of: it was called Judah. Now, in Bible-speak, the northern kingdom was also called the "house of Israel", or, more accurately "the house of Ephraim".....and the southern kingdom was called "the house of Judah". These two "houses"....the House of Ephraim and the House of Judah, together made up what the Bible calls the WHOLE house of Israel. Now, almost all Bibles will instead of saying "house of Ephraim", say "house of Israel", which is confusing. Indeed, house of Israel was a term used for a few years immediately following the civil war to denote the northern kingdom, but quickly fell out of use.

The point is that today, only one of the two houses of Israel has returned to their homeland: Judah. Judah is made up of what today we call the Jews. That other house of Israel, the one comprised of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel, has not yet taken part in the return to Israel.

The part of Ezekiel 37 where he is talking about the two sticks.....one for Ephraim and one for Judah.....being put back together, is referring to that time when BOTH houses of Israel will return to the Holy Lands, and be reunited. But, as of today, only ONE house....the house of Judah.....has come back.

The common question is: well, isn't Ezekiel really about the return of the Hebrews from their Babylonian exile? No. Because that exile was ONLY the exile of Judah; the other house of Israel...Ephraim... had been conquered by Assyria, the people deported and scattered throughout the 120 nations that formed the Assyrian Empire; that event happened almost one and a-half centuries earlier than Ezekiel, and basically they had ceased to exist as an identifiable people. In other words, the events spoken of in Ezekiel 36 and 37 were not about the return from Babylon but are yet to happen.

Yet (and soon in a 3 part evening class we'll get deeply into the subject), the return of Ephraim IS beginning to happen. Barely 3 months ago, in March 2005, the Israeli government officially sanctioned the return to the Holy Lands of people who say they are NOT Jews.....but they ARE Israel. That is, these people seeking to migrate to Israel are some of those long lost 10 tribes of Israel.....the 2<sup>nd</sup> house of Israel, Ephraim. Once more: Jews are only of the tribe....or kingdom....of Judah....which basically represents the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. Ephraim represents the other 10 tribes (long assumed to be lost and unidentifiable), and they are NOT Jews.....but they certainly are Israelites.

So, the events that we just read about in Ezekiel 36 and 37 are in process. Scary, huh?

Today, we are in the throes of a rather severe argument over that land that the Jews have returned to, and in which Ephraim is just now starting to come; and that argument will someday throw the world into a final war, which is where the following chapters of Ezekiel would take us....though we won't go there for the time being. Some may want to argue as to the precise boundaries of the land God gave to Abraham for all time; but hear me: at the very *least* it included every inch of the land that the Palestinians now claim as theirs. You see, the area in which Abraham stood at the moment God made him that promise, is right in the heart of what is commonly today called the West Bank..... or, in the most ridiculous possible terms..... the occupied territory.

I cannot begin to tell you the downright sense of dread I have for America every time I hear our President, or our Secretary of State (decent and well-intentioned people, in my opinion), talk about severing the West Bank from the possession of Israel, through tremendous political pressure, and giving that land to the Palestinians as their own sovereign nation; and that in the hope of peace. We even have a large coalition of churches demanding the very same thing out of a doctrine of tolerance, fairness and mercy for the Arabs and the Palestinians. This is precisely the land God gave to Abraham and set aside for his descendants for all time. And, God has warned that those who go

against his descendants (those that curse Abraham), He will come against and judge (they will be cursed).

Every indication, biblically, is that indeed somebody is going to force upon Israel the decision to surrender a portion of that land that is at the center of the Abrahamic covenant. At the moment, sadly, it appears it's going to be the United States government who will force it in order to attain President Bush's Roadmap to Peace. And, the peace that the world longs for in our time will occur.... for a VERY short time. But, the problem is, peace with the world means war with God. You see, God's pattern of dividing, selecting, and electing has never ended; we are living in one of those defining and dividing moments of God. And, part of that dividing and separating process God is using is based around each of our answer to a single question: where do you stand on Israel? And, like it or not, we must choose one side or the other. We can choose to obey God and honor His covenants and have peace with Him, or we can stand with the world and the apostate church. Standing with Israel *is* standing with God. *Not* standing with Israel is standing with the world, against God.

Let's finish up chapter 13, now, by re-reading verses 14 – 18.

### **READ GEN.13: 14 –18**

Now that I have demonstrated to you that the words of these verses are STILL in effect, and will be until the end of all things, I hope you see the importance of them. The land God showed Abraham is to be UNCONDITIONALLY Israel's forever. Now, where exactly WAS Avram when he was to look around....in every compass direction....and all that was to belong to his descendants? The Genesis Apocryphon places him on Ramath-Hazor, which is about 5 miles northeast of Bethel. It is the highest spot in central Israel, with an altitude of almost 3300 feet. From this spot, even today, one can see the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and east, well into the kingdom of Jordan.

Now, verse 17 says that Abraham was to walk the length and breadth of the land, because God gave it to him. What exactly does that mean? Was he literally to stop what he was doing, and visit every area of the land? Or was this just symbolic of something, or a Hebrew idiom or what? The Targum Jonathon (an early Hebrew commentary) says that what was happening was that Abraham was doing *chazakah*. Chazakah was a widespread legal custom of that era, and well before, and used throughout the various tribes and peoples of the Middle East. It was known by the Egyptians as well as the Hittites, and attested to in their ancient documents. And, the concept was that when a piece of property was acquired, the new owner had to walk the perimeter of the entire property, which was symbolic of marking his territory, if you would. Not until the new owner had done this was the transfer complete. Some cultures even required the king or ruler to walk the perimeter of his kingdom, from time-to-time to re-establish his sovereignty over that territory.

Now, WHY would God make Abraham do this? For Abraham's sake, and for the sake of the many who likely asked: "why are you doing Chazakah?" I have no doubt that

Abraham did NOT make friends as a result of this procedure. For, within the outline of the territory he marked were MANY already established kingdom and city-states, and I suspect they were none too pleased by this foreigner's symbolic declaration of his ownership of their land.

But, there is another reason as well: we're going to see all throughout the Torah, the remainder of the O.T. and the entire Bible in general, that where manmade governmental systems exist, God tends to allow the people involved to use the laws, ordinances and customs of their system when transactions between God and men occur. Abraham would have been completely familiar and comfortable with Yahweh telling him to go and walk the land, because that's how things were done, then. In fact, it probably would have been very disquieting, and left much doubt in Abraham, if God had NOT ordered it. It would be as though we went in to buy a car, we filled out all the paperwork, laid a check on the table, and the dealer said, "no need for you or I to sign anything....just take the car and go and we'll just take each others word for it." We would be pretty uncomfortable doing that.....for one reason, it isn't customary. Normally, all parties sign the paperwork to make it legal. Signing the paperwork finishes the process of transferring the ownership of the car from the dealer to you. Same thing here with Abraham; by legal custom of that day, walking the perimeter of the land legally completed the transfer of the property and thereby left both parties fully feeling closure on the transaction.

The chapter ends with Abraham moving to Hebron, and building an altar there. Building an altar was customary to declare one god or another's authority over that territory.