

# The Middle East & Prophecy #4

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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God only knows what's coming next in the Middle East. I do not mean to be irreverent, but I mean literally, only God knows what is coming next. I guess we can live with that, but what you and I would like to know is, has He given us any hints of what's coming next? Nearly everyone who reads the Bible thinks that God has given us a lot of information about the Middle East and the time of the end. And I suppose He has, but you know, you don't get a lot of agreement about what that information actually means.

I think a lot of the problem is that people are looking at the wrong things. They want to know what's going to happen and when it's going to happen. They want an outline of the events of the future. I can't help you much with that and I don't think the Bible does either

But what I can do is paint in the background so that what you are seeing take place in the news today makes some sense in the light of the Bible. Too many people try to explain the Bible without taking the time to understand the culture, the geography, the history of the land and its people. The key to the future in the Middle East lies in the past.

## **Who Owns the Middle East?**

In the last three articles I have been addressing the question of who owns the Middle East. If this is a fight over real estate then who has a legitimate deed of title? Let me show you what we're up against when we try to understand the future of the Middle East.

## **Introduction to Ezekiel**

First, I have to introduce you to a prophet named Ezekiel. The first time that we hear of him, he is among the Jewish captives in Babylon. He was carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon along about 597 B.C. when he was probably about 23 years old. He was a priest, just coming-of-age at 30, when he had his first recorded vision in the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel's book is a fascinating study from front to back, but if you don't know some things, you're not very likely to understand him correctly. I'm not going to start at the beginning. I'm going to take you to chapter 37, to a prophecy, that you may have heard before and from a very unlikely source.

## A Valley Full of Dry Bones

Ezekiel 37 and verse one, "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and he sat me down in the midst of the valley, which was full of bones, and he caused me to pass by them round about." He made Ezekiel walk all around the valley, "and behold, there were many bones in the open valley, and lo, they were very dry."

Now you must not forget, this is a vision, and lots of times in a vision the things that you are seeing are not real objects, they are icons. They are images and are intended to make us think of other things. But in this case, he sees a valley full of dry bones.

"And the Lord said to him," in verse three, "Son of Man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know." Ezekiel is no fool and he knows better than to guess about this. He had no idea where God was going with this. "God said again to him, 'I want you to prophesy upon these bones.'" Now prophesy, as it is used here, means to stand up in front of the bones and preach to them. So he said "Prophesy upon these bones and say to them, 'O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God to these bones, behold, I will cause breath to enter into you and you shall live. I will lay sinews upon you, and I will bring up flesh upon you, and I will cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'"

Now, I have preached to some dead audiences in my time, but it would have to feel really strange to be called upon to stand before an army of nothing but skeletons and preach to them, but Ezekiel did as he was told.

Verse 7, "So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I preached, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone."

Have you heard it before? The head bone is connected to the neck bone, the neck bone is connected to the shoulder bone, the shoulder bone connected to the back bone, and so on it goes down the body, in that old spiritual song, that nearly everyone has heard.

And so all the bones were connected up. And while Ezekiel watched, sinews began to come upon the bones and then flesh over the sinews, and then the skin covered everything, and he had a valley full of bodies, but there was no breath in them. Verse nine. "Then God said to Ezekiel, "Preach to the wind, Son of man, and say to the wind, "Thus saith the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I preached as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and they stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army of living people."

Awesome to even consider, isn't it? But I don't think the spiritual song explains what it was all about. The imagery of the dry bones connected was riveting enough for the song and the guy who wrote the song was so carried away with that and never went any further.

God then speaks to Ezekiel, and Ezekiel was standing there wondering what is this all about? And God doesn't wait for the question. He says, in verse 11, "Son of Man, these bones are the whole house of Israel, behold, they say, "Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for all of our parts." They thought they were completely once and forever lost from God.

### **All Jews are Israelites But Not All Israelites are Jews**

There is something right here, if you don't know it, will lead you astray. Most people when they hear the word 'Israel' think Jews, but by this time in history, that was no longer true.

Most people know that Jacob whose name was changed to 'Israel', had 12 sons and these 12 sons formed the 12 tribes of Israel. Of these 12, Judah, the father of the Jews, was only one. So in a manner of speaking, the Jews form only 1/12 of the 12 tribes of Israel. In fact, the very first time that the word 'Jews' is used in the Bible (2 Kings 16:6), the Jews were at war with Israel, which kind of turns things inside out, doesn't it?

Briefly, here's what happened. After the death of Solomon, there was a brief rebellion and civil war which divided Israel into two houses: the house of Judah, and the house of Israel. Now that distinction can not possibly have been lost on Ezekiel, because God told him that this valley of dry bones is the 'whole house of Israel', for he himself was a part of the 'house of Judah'. Well, these two tribes continued in conflict on and off for over 220 years until the 'house of Israel', was taken captive by the Assyrians. About 120 years later, the 'house of Judah' was carried into captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. And that brings us to Ezekiel.

At the time that Ezekiel prophesied about Israel, they had been in captivity for a very long time. They never returned, leading to a lot of speculation about the whereabouts of the lost tribes of Israel at the end time.

Ezekiel serves to actually ferment that speculation further.

### **A Resurrection from Dry Bones**

So now Ezekiel has an army of living people in front of him and God tells him, "I want you to go out there and preach to this group of living people and tell them this", in verse 13, "Thus saith the Lord God, 'Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.'"

Now remember before, I spoke of the bones in the valley as being like an icon that symbolize something else. What it symbolized was, opening graves and bringing the people up out of their graves. Did you notice the difference? We started with a valley full of dry bones lying on top of the ground and being brought back to life. The meaning is, the dead bodies are being brought up out of graves and brought back to the land of Israel. There's a very big significant difference in this. Now if you want to try to find some other significance,

you have to go through two layers, you have got to go back through a resurrection and graves and back to the dry bones, and so forth, whereas in fact the most obvious connection is, that the dry bones and the restoration to life of these dry bones is symbolic of a resurrection that God is going to do with the whole house of Israel, a resurrection to physical life, and bring them back into the land of Israel.

As I say, you can find some metaphorical meaning to that, but why is it going back through two stages to a valley of dry bones?

Let's go to verse 13 again, "You shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves."

I dare say that the last thing in life you will remember, is to perhaps having a sword stuck in your middle and the next thing you are aware of is that you are standing in front of the living God. Yes, I would think that would make an impression on you that you were brought up out of your grave and made alive again.

### **I Will Put My Spirit in You**

Then God says something truly astonishing in verse 14, "I will put my Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land and you shall know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it', saith the Lord."

Any Christian reading that and looking back would think, wait a minute, "put his Spirit in them," sounds like some sort of conversion process. Now taken literally, this is talking about a resurrection from the dead, not merely a return from captivity, which some people, I think, think that is what it means but while it is a vision and while it is loaded with imagery and symbolism, it is hard to know what it might mean to the house of Israel, if it doesn't mean a resurrection from the dead, because most of them have long since been dead and gone.

I think a lot of people think that this has to do with the return of Judah from captivity and that there were remnants of the other 12 tribes among Judah and, therefore, that made all that work. But there's two problems here. One is that the prophecy has to do, not with the remnant but with, to use the words of Ezekiel, "the whole house of Israel", and many of them were long since dead.

The other problem is that there are many other prophecies about a return from captivity and they don't approach it this way. You would expect, and Ezekiel himself talks about a return from captivity in terms of, coming back out of captivity. Why are we here going through a resurrection from the dead if that is not what we are talking about?

## **Resurrection from the Dead**

You have to understand that to first century Jews, there was a major division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over the question as to whether there was a resurrection from the dead, but then a resurrection of the dead is a fundamental Christian teaching.

But here is the interesting part. Whichever way we take this passage, it is hard to find any historical fulfillment of it anywhere, which leads to the conclusion, it has to be future, and if its future, it carries a lot of baggage along with it, especially when we consider what God says in the following verses.

### **Write on Two Sticks**

Beginning in Ezekiel 37 and verse 15, "The word of the Lord came to me (Ezekiel) again saying, Son of Man, I want you to take one stick and write upon it for Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions, then take another stick, and write upon it, for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions."

Now with the risk of being a little bit boring, let me remind you, that back at the time at the end of the reign of Solomon, Israel divided into two camps, the 'house of Israel' in the North that was led by Ephraim of Joseph. The 'house of Israel' was composed of Ephraim, and Manasseh and the other tribes of the north, comprising the ten tribes.

In the South was Judah, Levi and Benjamin, and these formed what would normally be called the 'house of Judah'.

Now, he said, "I want you to take two sticks, write Judah on one of them, and Joseph on the other one, and then join them into one stick and they shall become one in your hand."

### **The Two Sticks Become One**

Now I gather he's going to do what would look like a magic trick, but obviously a miracle. He has two sticks, puts them together and all of a sudden what was two are now one.

Now for a very long time, the house of Judah and the house of Israel had been separate entities. When Ezekiel came on the scene, Israel had long since been gone into captivity into Assyria and only Judah had remained in Jerusalem, and now they were over around the River Euphrates in Babylon.

And yet God is apparently not finished with the house of Israel, even though they have long since been gone. Remember, the valley of dry bones was the 'whole house of Israel', not just a remnant.

Then God continues, "When the children of your people shall speak to you, Ezekiel, saying, "Will you tell us what you mean by what you just did?" The Lord God said, "Tell them this,

Behold, I'm going to take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and put them all together with him, and then with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in my hand. The sticks on which you write shall be in your hand one before their eyes." Right in front of their face, you're going to turn it into one stick in front of them.

What does it mean? Any one can figure that out. God is going to heal the old breach that took place after the division of the kingdom, after Solomon, and make them one nation, one people again.

Now I should say, in all fairness, a lot of people believe that this took place at the time the Jews returned from Babylon, because in fact, when Judah went into captivity, there were a lot of Israelite refugees from all of the other ten tribes in Judah. They had fled there when the house of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians. So a lot of Israelites went into captivity with Judah at that time.

Now one belief is, that the return of those people and the Jews back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, constituted the creation of one Israel as opposed to many.

Now listen to what God says further in verse 21, "Say to them, thus saith the Lord God, behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, where they have gone and gather them on every side and bring them to their own land." What's wrong with this picture is that the Israelites who went into captivity with Judah were joined with Judah in the past. They were already one people in a political sense before they ever went into captivity. What went into captivity was the house of Judah, and residing in the house of Judah already were a number of Israelites from different tribes, but that did not constitute the 'whole house of Israel'.

### **A Future Event**

Ezekiel speaks of a future event, at which time the house of Israel, not just the Israelite remnant, would be gathered from all the places they had gone, which was into Assyria, and North. This was not where the Jews had gone.

Now to me as I read through this prophecy, it has the future written all over it. And if so, it has far reaching implications for understanding the prophecies of what's going on right now in the Middle East.

Looking ahead. God says to Ezekiel in verse 22, "I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be a king over them all, and they shall no more be two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms at all. Neither shall they defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions, I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they sinned, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

## **David Shall Be King Over Them**

So far, so good. But wait for this next bulletin. God says, "I'll make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel and one king will be over them, and David my servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd, they shall walk in my judgments, observe my statutes, and do them" (Ezekiel 37:24).

David is dead. How are we going to have David ruling over all these people in Jerusalem this side of a resurrection.

"They shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt, and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children forever, and my servant David shall be their prince forever."

Now perhaps you can see why I look at this as a future prophecy. Israel has not dwelt in this utopian land with David as their king. Especially they haven't done it forever.

There's been a lot of nasty stuff affecting that whole area, ever since then. In fact, when the Romans came through in 70 A.D., everybody had to get out, but Ezekiel is looking down at the last days, which appears that he is, then we have got another problem to solve.

### **Which Return from Captivity is Ezekiel Talking About?**

Now the Jews have had plainly more than one return to the land from captivity, as it were. Our question is going to be which return from captivity is Ezekiel talking about? Or is it possible that he is talking about one in the future that hasn't happened yet?

Listen to what God says in verse 26 to returned Israel, "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." People will think they came back from captivity. They built a temple and that was the fulfillment of it. Well, okay, but what about the forevermore part of this because that Temple is gone.

Then He says also, "My tabernacle shall also be with them, yes, I will be their God, and they shall be my people, and the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them forevermore."

This is clear, what He is talking about is that something is going to go on, not end in 70 A.D. Friends, we are not to this place yet in prophecy.

### **What Should We Be Looking For?**

As we approach the last days, what do you suppose we should be looking for? One thing that we should look for is the 'house of Judah. The expression "the house of" is an important idea, because in Hebrew usage it implies a governing house. In other words, a political entity, a

government that actually exists in a place and governs the people. So we should be looking for that and we can see it in Jerusalem, in the Israelis and the government that they have there now.

Another thing to look for is the 'house of Israel', which is separate from the 'house of Judah'. It is something entirely different. Israel has to be joined with Judah, at some time at the time of the end.

In the time of the last days, these two houses which have been separated for over 2500 years now, since the death of Solomon, will be made one again with the sanctuary and the tabernacle of God in the midst of them.

Now, this is an interesting question. We have to ask where is Ezekiel going with all of this. The context of it is revealing as well.

### **Gog and Magog**

Chapter 38 of Ezekiel is an exception to one of my rules. That rule is that all prophecy has to have its roots in history.

Listen to what Ezekiel says in the beginning of his 38th chapter, "The word of the Lord came to me saying, son the man, set your face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and preach against him, and say, "Thus saith the Lord God" "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will turn you back, and I will put hooks into your jaws, I will bring you forth, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armor, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords."

Who is this and what does it have to do with anything? Well, Gog is apparently a man of the land of Magog, a chief prince of the tribes called Meshech and Tubal. There is no historical reference that we can turn to. There's no time in history when Israel was involved with these people. There's no record of them being attacked by these people and we don't even know who they are. By all accounts, looking at the biblical table of nations, these would be the countries from the northeast of Jerusalem, but that's about all we know.

Now this gets kind of interesting when we look at the allies of these countries because these countries are northeast, but look who's with them?

Verse five, "Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them, all of them with shield and helmet. Gomer, and all his bands, the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands, and many people with him." Togarmah of the north quarters apparently means from the far north.

Now during all the years of the Soviet Union, most of us went blissfully on unawares. We looked at the Soviet Union as one great nation altogether and didn't realize that it was actually a combination, a rather oppressive combination, of a lot of different nations. We

didn't know that the southern provinces of the Soviet Union were mostly Islamic and this is the general region, from which Gog and Magog are going to come from.

Then we add to the mix, Persia, and in case you didn't know this, Persia is what we today refer to generally as Iran, possibly even all the land, leading over to the Euphrates, part of Iraq. These are the Persians.

Now I have a friend who is Iranian, who prefers to call himself, Persian.

Also one of the nations coming in is Ethiopia and Libya, both of which are Islamic, and you put this together and you have a picture that fits roughly the geopolitical situation that is in the Middle East remarkably well right now.

People from Islam are all around Israel, and looking at Israel with covetous eyes.

The prophet continues in verse 11 talking to Gog and Magog, "And you shall say, I'll go up to the land of unwalled villages, I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, I will go to take a spoil and a prey, to turn my hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon all of the people that are gathered out of the nations, (which means the Jews,) which have got cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land."

Israel is back in the land, wealthy and ripe, for the picking.

"Now Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions shall say, 'What are you coming down here for to take the spoil? Have you gathered your company to take a prey? To carry away silver and gold, and take away cattle and goods and great spoil?'"

The images of Turkey and southern Europe and other areas that are not participating are shocked at the Islamic powers that are ready to invade poor little Israel.

Then God speaks to the prophet in verse 14, "Son of Man, prophesy and tell Gog, 'Thus saith the Lord God, In that day when my people Israel dwell safely, shall you not know it? And you are going to come down here, all of you with your great company, invading the land. It shall come to pass', in verse 18, "the same day when Gog comes against the land of Israel," says the Lord God, "that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath, have I spoken, surely in that day there will be a great shaking in the land of Israel."

Wow, when you think about God, finally waking up in great fury and anger, and this says "that even the fish will shake in the sea, everybody, all men, all fowl, all beasts, all will shake in His presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall,"

Well, I guess so.

Verse 21. "God will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, every man's sword shall be against his brother, and I will plead against him with all pestilence and with blood, I will rain upon him and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, and overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord."

When exactly? Well, if God meant us to know that, He would've told us. This is here so that we will understand what is happening, when it happens, not necessarily know when it is going to happen ahead of time.

Jerusalem has been encompassed with armies, many many times, in its history, several times before Ezekiel. One, after Jesus, and there'll be another at the end time.

Until next time, I'm Ronald L. Dart.

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