

NOVEMBER 18

Ezekiel 37-38

Resurrection at any level is actually creation. When you look at the raising of Lazarus or Jesus, after days of death, their bodies were not "livable" in any respect. Their bodies had to be re-created before their spirits could return to them. Dead tissue is no longer tissue. Dead blood is no longer blood. You get the picture, right? God is, after all, God, and He can do that stuff in a milli-second. But what about bringing to life an entire nation? Israel, north and south, were both scattered among the nations. For most nations, when this happened, they ceased to be a people ever again. Since we've read Ezra and Nehemiah, we know that God brought Judah back. In Daniel we'll see how He did it. Here, Ezekiel is given a vision and a message that the nation of Israel will not only rise again, but that they will be a nation before God forever.

Again, keep observing and underlining stuff.

Ezekiel 37

Vs. 1-14 I can't imagine what this vision looked like. I'll bet it was graphic and powerful for Ezekiel. And, what an amazing promise for the nation.

Vs. 1-6 Here is the set-up and the question to Ezekiel. Could God bring life again? Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord so He gave a wise answer.

Vs. 7-10 They became an army full of life. Ready for a mission? This will certainly be Israel at the beginning of the Tribulation, preaching the gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. See Matthew 24:14.

Vs. 11-14 Twice God says here that they will know that He is the Lord. In a way, I don't think this is referring to the resurrection of the OT believers, but rather to the raising up of a believing nation. Those who are with Christ awaiting resurrection already know the Lord. They don't need to be convinced. At the beginning of the Tribulation, Israel will not only be convinced and know the Lord, but they will be willing to give their lives so that mankind can hear the gospel and be saved.

Vs. 15-23 Israel had been a divided nation since the death of Solomon about 400 years earlier. Once God "raised" the nation, He would unify them. Here is where it pays to remember Genesis. Remember that Jacob gave the firstborn blessing to Joseph, signified in blessing Ephraim. But God, for some reasons we can understand, blessed Judah and gave his descendants the kingship of the nation, which came to David and then to Jesus. When Israel divided as a nation, Judah and Benjamin stayed together, symbolized by Judah; and the other ten tribes joined together, symbolized by Ephraim. When Judah was taken into captivity, there were people of all 12 tribes living in the southern kingdom. They came to Judah because the true worship of God was in the temple and most of the kings of Judah still respected that. The kings of the northern tribes never worshiped Yahweh. When you see the register of who returned to Israel from the Babylonian captivity (exiles from Judah) in 1 Chronicles and Ezra, all the tribes are represented.

V. 22 Just for interest, notice the mention of *the mountains of Israel*. We've seen these mountains mentioned before and we'll see them again. And by the way, who will that king be?

Vs. 24-27 This is a very cool section. Notice the three things God will do here. The people won't be resurrected believers because they can have children. This prophecy of David has to be literal and will obviously be for the Millennial Kingdom. He is the first resurrected person we know of who will have a job.

Notice here the mentions of the *sanctuary*. We'll be getting the blueprints soon. This is a big deal.

Ezekiel 38

Men have written books about this nation. Some people suggest it is Russia or parts of Russia and its allies, because of the references to *the uttermost parts of the north*. If you look far above Israel on the map, guess who's there. You'll notice that Iran is also part of this group. But as you make your observations on this chapter, here are some guiding thoughts.

Vs. 1-6 God has just spoken of giving peace to Israel. This foe will represent the greatest future threat to the nation of Israel. God is going to use this nation to show who He is and to show that Israel is His own possession. In principle, this is the same thing God did with Egypt in the Exodus.

Vs. 7-9 The best time for this battle is during the Tribulation. And the best time during the Tribulation is in the first 3.5 years, possibly near the end of that time. Israel will be at peace and will dwell securely (v. 14, also). These nations will come in to loot and destroy Israel. It is possible that this is at the instigation of the antichrist and this defeat might be what tips him over the edge. Their staging area will be the mountains.

Vs. 10-13 During the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation, much of the earth will be destroyed by natural events, and up to two thirds of the world's population will be gone. It will not be a world we recognize, and our dependence on high tech will paralyze the world. Transportation and communication will be reduced drastically. Things like running water and electricity will be gone or very limited. Governments and nations will be in disarray. I don't know if cell phones or the internet will work. I don't think there will be smart bombs or the money and factories to make them, and there may be very little ammunition. I think Einstein is credited with saying, "The third world war will be fought with atomic weapons. The fourth world war will be fought with clubs." It could look pretty primitive, and materials of any kind will be scarce. So the idea of looting Israel might be very accurate, particularly if Israel misses some of the destruction like Goshen did before the Exodus.

Also, the antichrist will not be followed by all nations. Sure, he'll have a very powerful, dark, spiritual backing; but humans are notorious at being rebellious to all spiritual authority, light or darkness. The line I like in C.S Lewis' The Last Battle is "The dwarfs are for the dwarfs." And so we are. The battle of Armageddon, at the end of the Tribulation, can only happen if forces are coming against the antichrist. In the case of the battle talked about here, this battle will probably happen just before the antichrist walks into the temple and declares himself to be god.

Vs. 14-16 God makes a point of calling on the arrogance of these nations to come down to Israel and be broken. God will vindicate Israel and show the world that He is God. This will be a very important event for several reasons. It will be a testimony to the earth about Israel. As a result, there will be the kind of faith that will cause people around the world to protect the believers of Jesus. There will be godly, spiritual understanding. Those who believe and help the followers of Jesus with just a cup of water will enter the Millennial Kingdom. That will make the antichrist and Satan really mad. And, this army that comes to loot and destroy will bring so many supplies with them that Israel will be able to live off of those supplies for 3.5 years of hiding in the mountains and in the wilderness.

Vs. 17-23 This seems to indicate that this nation will symbolically represent all nations that Satan has used to oppose Israel, Israel being the nation that was to have proclaimed God's redemption to the world. Israel will fulfill this mission during and after the Tribulation. Israel's greatest enemies always came from the north. This will be the ultimate northern enemy.

Vs. 19-23 If you look at what God does here, as seen also in the result stated in v. 23, there will be something about the way God saves Israel that will cause the antichrist to snap. After this, the antichrist will himself attack Jerusalem, kill the two witnesses in Jerusalem, desecrate the temple and begin to exterminate Israel. The people will flee to the mountains, and thankfully, there will

be lots of resources of the fallen army so they can hold out in the hills. Remember back to the large armies King Asa and King Jehoshaphat went up against. When God overthrew those armies, the people lived off of the supplies of those armies for years.

Again, when we see how difficult warfare is in a mountainous place like Afghanistan, even with smart bombs and drones, imagine how the antichrist will fare with few weapons and little gasoline. And, the people God is saving, who are scattered in the mountains, will have God supplying resources for them.

James 1:19-2:17

So, just for chuckles, imagine that there is a fairly consistent theme in James. One of the old "criticisms" against James was the seemingly random presentation of topics. Actually, compared to Proverbs, James is a tight formula. So, just for fun, let's think of these people being written to as encountering very hard circumstances because of their faith (kind of like in Hebrews). Stress has a way of breaking us down. Personally we fall apart, and our attitudes, disciplines and routines get shabby. Our relationships start looking messy and our marriages and families begin to unravel. And, of course, it doesn't do church any good either. You'll hear James taught many different ways, so for this time, try to think of those introductory words in 1:2-4, as presenting the general atmosphere or framework for the different situations mentioned in instructing these believers.

James 1:19-27

Vs. 19-21 When life seems out of control, it is easy to react and lose your temper. Anger never works.

Notice the call to meekness. This sounds a little like Peter saying in 1 Peter 5:6, *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* Meekness in trials, accepting the working of God, holding tightly to the Word of God, seems to be the recipe throughout all of Scripture. We definitely have seen this in David in The Psalms.

Vs. 22-25 And in these trials, what God shows you in the Word about yourself, you need to respond to. Obviously this is a wonderful general principle seen throughout all of Jesus' teaching (*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*); but particularly in times of trial, we see something different, sometimes ugly, sometimes rebellious and unfaithful, coming out of us. As we spend time in the Word, in meekness, we need to submit to God and act on what He shows us.

Vs. 26-27 What are you like when events squeeze you? Do you complain and criticize? Or do you huddle closer to God and show compassion to others? Remember in Hebrews, at the end, how the author told the people to go and visit (show mercy) to those in prison? It is the same thought. A true relationship with God gives us a reserve of peace that helps control our tongues and moves us to show compassion. Otherwise, we are just stuck in our own worlds. That doesn't show we belong to Christ.

James 2:1-17

Vs. 1-7 Verses 6-7 return to the difficult situation these believers were facing. It puts the entire situation in perspective. We would normally have a problem with showing partiality, but in times of stress, the situation is intensified.

Vs. 8-13 This sounds very much like what Paul says in Romans 13:8-14, also a chapter about Christians in stress with the Roman government. As disciples in the harvest, we carry our death following our Lord. It is no news to us that we are to face death and danger in the harvest. So, showing His love and compassion and mercy to the lost and to brothers and sisters in Christ is our duty. To allow our love to grow cold because of hard times shows that we are too anchored to this earth and our treasure is down here. See Matthew 24:12.

Vs. 14-17 In good times, you could understand what James is saying. Now, add to this the threat that in showing mercy to others, you yourself could be punished for it, or if you are under stress because of trials and someone shows up at your door. In stress, the temptation is to withdraw into ourselves and to let our hearts shrink. That may be natural, but it is not the supernatural life of Christ in us. We can say we believe, but where is the power and the evidence thereof? Paul told Timothy to suffer *by the power of God*, and that Timothy had not received a spirit of fear, *but of power and love and self control*. (2 Tim. 1)

Looking at the book of James like this makes it a discipleship guide for times of stress. Sometimes suffering for Christ in the power of God is not only God's perfect will for us, but it is the most powerful witness. Just think, two men came to faith in Christ as Jesus hung on the cross. One was the criminal hanging on Jesus' right and the other was a Roman centurion. Jesus never uttered a word. He just suffered. His enemies did all the talking.

Psalm 117

This is a very simple psalm, so I would imagine that as they sang it, there was some repetition and the music must have framed the song well. Notice the *steadfast love* and *faithfulness of the Lord*. This is David's and God's favorite combination.

Also, wouldn't you know it, v. 1 is quoted in the New Testament as the result of Christ's work on the cross and as showing that in God's eternal plan and unfathomable wisdom, He was always planning to save the Gentiles. *And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."* (Rom. 15:11)

I'm kind of humbled and amazed at how well Paul knew The Psalms and how often The Psalms are quoted regarding Jesus.

Proverbs 28:1

I wonder if this is because the righteous know that God is present, or as Paul says in Philippians 4:5, *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand*. If you think about it, this might also be what James is saying to the persecuted believers to whom he is writing.