

1. My title for this lesson is: "Restoration". An expanded title would be "A restoration of God's people", but you just have to remember "restoration". ☺ The main topic is about the restoration of the nation of Israel. The underlying issue is how God restores relationships with us.
2. Let me open with the question of whether or not the nation of Israel is still God's chosen people?
 - a) God made an unconditional promise to Abraham that his children would inherit the land of Israel. (See Genesis 12:17, and 15:7.) That blessing was passed on only to one specific son of Abraham (Isaac, see Genesis 25:11) and one of Isaac's sons (Jacob, see Genesis 27:29), and from there, all of Jacob's sons were in line for this promise. (Implied in Genesis 48:9).
 - i) Jewish people would correctly say that they are the literal sons of Abraham, his son Isaac and his son Jacob. The Israelites are all descendants of those three.
 - b) Christians correctly claim they are the "spiritual" sons of Abraham. (See Galatians 3:7).
 - i) Does that mean that Jewish people forfeit their association with Abraham? (For many centuries, this was the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.)
 - ii) Even with the modern state of Israel in existence, there are many who still debate whether or not God's promises to Israel still stand, or forfeited to the church.
 - c) It is important to state that during the "church era", Paul says there are no "Jews and non-Jews", just Christians and non-Christians. (See Galatians 3:28.) Therefore, if God is not through with the nation of Israel, it must be a different time era from the "church era".
 - d) At this point, let me quote from Jeremiah 31:33-34: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."
 - i) I highlighted the words "after those days" and "all". There is time period coming "after those days" when "all" of Israel will know God. The question is what are "those days" and when does it end?
 - ii) You could argue that "those days" refer to the 70-year period where the Nation of Israel was in captivity in Babylon. The problem with that view is that Jeremiah's prediction does not fit that time frame. Right after the 70 year captivity, all the Jewish people did not "Know the Lord" as stated in Jeremiah 31.
 - iii) You could say "those days" refers to when Israel became a country again in 1948. The problem is much of modern Israel is still secular, so the rest of Jeremiah's prediction has not happened yet. In Israel today, "all" do not know God.
 - iv) So what does "those days" mean? I will argue it happens after the "end of the church era". This is a future time frame from when the Christian church era ends and the "last" gentile (non-Jewish) person gets saved, whenever that day is.
 - a) This prediction about the Israelites "knowing God" will not happen until the "church era" is over. God is now working through the church. There is coming a day when God will primarily work through Israel again.
3. One can ask, "How do you know God won't allow modern Israel to end and there will be some other day when Israel will be a nation again?" My answer is Isaiah 11:10-11:
 - a) It reads: "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea."

- b) That verse in Isaiah says the second time that God brings together Israel as a single nation is when they be one people under "The Root of Jesse". Isaiah 11:10 mentions Jesse, who is the father of King David. The term "Root of Jesse" is a title for the Messiah to come, as the Messiah will be a direct descendant of King David.
 - c) This leads me back to my main point: In 1948 is the second time when Israel was united again as a nation. One can paraphrase Isaiah 11:11 to say that when my people are gathered from all over the world and in the "land again"...
 - d) Do I believe that the modern state of Israel is exactly what Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel (coming up in this lesson) are predicting? Yes, in the sense that this is the second gathering of Israel as predicted in Isaiah 11:11. No, in the sense that the promised Messiah (Jesus) for Israel is not ruling over that nation at this time.
4. This surprisingly ☺ leads us back to Ezekiel and this lesson.
- a) The focus of this lesson is about Israel being gathered in the land again.
 - b) On "one level" one can read this about Israel being gathered after the 70 years of captivity.
 - c) On "another level" the text of this lesson fits in much better with modern state of Israel.
 - d) Further, some of the text does not apply until the actual appearing of the Messiah.
5. OK John, I already believe that modern Israel is part of God's plan. How do I apply this?
- a) For starters, it is to realize that we are "close" to the Second Coming of Jesus. When I say "close" I mean in the sense that because Israel is back in the land, one of the key requirements is in place for Jesus' return to happen!
 - b) I want to share an old joke here: There is an expression in Israel that goes, "When the Messiah comes, we (Jews) will ask Him, "Is this your first visit or your second?"" ☺
 - i) The point of the joke is some Jews wonder whether or not Jesus is the Messiah.
 - c) Let's get back to applications: One way God motivates us to "keep us on our toes" is to focus our lives with the possibility that Jesus can come back at any moment. With the fact that Israel is a country again, one should even "more" should get us focused on God.
 - d) The other application is to remind us that God keeps His promises. If one can trust God to keep His promises to Israel, then we can trust Him to keep His promises to Christians.
 - e) Another point is about God "disciplining" us. The New Testament teaches that God disciplines those that are His. (See Hebrews 12:5-11). God's discipline does come with restoration. That restoration is not for our sake, but is about Him keeping His word.
 - f) With all of that said, let's get back to what Ezekiel is preaching to Jews in Babylon.
 - i) We last left off from our last lesson in Verse 24 of Chapter 36.
6. Verse 24: "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.
- a) Before I discuss this verse, let me back up a little and discuss a few points from Verses 16 through 23 of Chapter 36. If one reads those verses, the main idea is that the nation of Israel does not deserve the promises of God. The idea is that God is going to restore the nation of Israel not based on any merit the Israelites have earned, but based on God keeping His unconditional promises to the nation of Israel.
 - b) As I work my way through this lesson, I'm going to try to talk about how the verses could apply to right after the Babylonian captivity and how they apply to modern Israel and us.
 - i) If one reads Verse 24 by itself, it can apply to either time frame. However, if you read it in context of the next verse, it is future oriented to both them and us.
7. Verse 25: I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.
- a) There are churches that believe in "sprinkling" baptism as opposed to "dipping" baptism. This verse is used for that argument. With that said and done, let explain this verse. ☺
 - b) This is an Old Testament reference to the fact that when one is spiritually cleaned of a sin or disease, one is sprinkled with water. (See Numbers 19:18-21 as an example.)

- c) What God is saying in this verse is that when the Israelites return to the land, they will be ceremonially clean of impurities and from idols. The water sprinkling is symbolic of that cleansing taking place.
 - i) One can argue it applies to right after the 70 years in that when the Israelites returned after that period, "idolatry" was no longer a significant issue.
 - ii) More likely, it refers to a future time when the Messiah is ruling over Israel.
- 8. Verse 26: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
 - a) There is a concept in the bible that our heart is "incurably wicked". God has to give us a new heart, as the one we are born with is incurably wicked and beyond repair due to sin.
 - b) Think of it this way: Before we gave our life to Christ, how much did we care about pleasing God? How important was it to us to live for Christ prior to that change?
 - i) Does this mean we are perfect? Of course not. It just means we are forgiven and we now care about pleasing God in all that we do.
 - c) This leads us back to the Israelites. God is saying that when they return to the land of Israel, "collectively" they will start caring about God.
 - i) Again, one can read that in a "short-term" fulfillment about no more idolatry.
 - ii) Personally, I see this as a long-term fulfillment as when the Messiah comes, the Israelites who live there will be changed so "all" live for God.
 - iii) Think of it this way: Has God put a "new spirit" in the Israelites since the time of the Babylonian captivity? I would argue no. There have been religious Jews through the centuries who have had a heart for God. However, the problem is they reject Jesus as "God's perfect payment for sins".
- 9. Verse 27: And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
 - a) To me, this verse is the proof that Ezekiel is talking about a future event and not just life after the 70 years of captivity. The verse says, "I will put my Spirit in you" and you will follow my decrees (rules and regulations).
 - i) If this verse were true today, all Jewish people would go around following God's laws and have "His Spirit" guiding them. While there has always been a religious Jewish minority, a majority of Jews today from Jewish backgrounds are not strong in their religion. (The same way a large percentage of people living in Christian cultures don't give their hearts to God.)
 - b) Here is how I see this verse: It is describing a future day when the vast majority of Jewish people will live in Israel. They will accept Jesus is the Messiah and follow God's laws.
 - c) Does this mean once a Jew is saved, they still must keep all of the Old Testament laws? The last 9 chapters of Ezekiel teach about life under the rule of the Messiah and we'll tackle that issue when we get there in beginning in two lessons. These chapters teach of a return to many Jewish rituals.
 - d) As to the law itself, we must separate the "spirit" of the law from the laws themselves.
 - i) Jesus said Himself that all of God's laws key on two principals: The first is to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is to love one's neighbor as much as one loves oneself. (Source: Matthew 22:38-39, et.al.)
 - a) My point is if one learns to practice those two principals, the rest of God's laws just "fall into place" under those categories.
 - ii) Am I saying we as Christians are under the law? The answer is a strong no. Christians are saved by faith alone. At the same time, God does call on us to live for Him. God does call on Christians to love God with all of one's heart soul, mind and strength and to love one's neighbor as one's self. These are principals to be practiced by believers and are the basis of showing our loyalty to God.

10. Verse 28: You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. ³⁰ I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine.
- a) Ezekiel says here the Israelites will be living in the land and honor God as "their God" and no other. This stresses a corporate end of idolatry, which was a big issue of that time.
 - b) In the "long term sense", this section of Ezekiel stresses promises of a future day when the land of Israel will be full of Jewish people and they will have God's spirit in them, just as it is in Christian believers today.
 - c) In the history of Israel, there has always been a devout minority of religious Jews, but most Jews have not given their hearts over to God. This future day is a time when the whole nation of Israel will seek God "as" God.
 - i) At the same time, all of Israel will one day embrace Jesus as the Messiah. We'll get to the "how issue" later in this lesson.
 - d) Notice Verse 29 says God will "save them from their uncleanness". That means that all of Israel will be saved one day. This is taught in the New Testament too. Romans 11:25-26a says, "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved".
 - i) Romans Chapter 11 teaches us that God is working through the church to get people right now. That has been the pattern for about 2,000 years now. There is coming a day when the "full number of Gentiles is completed" (i.e., the last "Gentile" person is saved) and then all of Israel will be saved.
 - ii) Think about it this way: Will heaven have an infinite number of people or a finite number of people? I will argue finite. That means there has to be a last "non-Jew" (or a Gentile, same thing) who accepts Christ and then that is the end of the church era. At that point, God focuses back on Israel again as stated in Romans. That is the point in time where all of this being described in Ezekiel takes place.
 - e) Getting back to the Ezekiel, Verse 29 and 30 teach about the increased productivity of the land of Israel after this spirit lead event happens. The point is once Israel is collectively saved and in the land, there will still be a need to eat food. God is promising that the land of Israel at that time will be fruitful and famines will never happen again.
 - i) Remember that Israel is a dry, desert climate. For God to promise that there will always be plenty of grain and fruit trees means there will either be lots of rain every year, or else somehow God will make sure the land is plentiful at all times.
 - ii) Remember in earlier chapters, God has already dealt with Israel's enemies, so attacks from outsiders (to get their food) will not be an issue anymore.
 - f) What all of this is describing is a time frame when Jesus rules the world from Israel. During such a time, God's spirit will be on the whole country. At the same time there will be plenty of food for the people living there.
11. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. ³² I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!
- a) In summary, just because life during this time is "perfect" does not mean that Israel will forget their past sins. One can read these verses and assume it is about when the Israelites returned from the 70 years of captivity and realized their sins.
 - b) More likely this refers to the time when the Messiah (Jesus) comes and they realize how they have "blown it" in terms of understanding Jesus role and purpose. The common view among Evangelicals is that when Jesus returns, He will make it obvious to the Jewish people how they have "blown it". While God forgives them, He also lets the Jewish people keep their memories of how they have collectively sinned against Him.

12. Verse 33: " `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. ³⁴ The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. ³⁵ They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." ³⁶ Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.'
- a) The key to these four verses is the phrase, "On the day I cleanse you from all your sins".
 - i) We as Christians have been cleansed of all of our sins when we accepted Jesus' payment for our sins. In that sense, a similar event will happen to the Jewish nation one day when God will clean them of all of their sins and as a whole, the Jewish people will also accept Jesus.
 - b) I can just see Jewish people reading this lesson and thinking, "Boy John, are you wrong on this one!" Such people would say these verses apply only to modern Israel and how the land has been rebuilt since the Jewish people became a country again.
 - i) If one travels to Israel today, the land itself has gone through a miraculous change. Before it was a country in the 1940's, most of Israel's land was swampland. The Israelites took "worthless" land and changed it. Major cities have been built. Land that was essentially worthless is now farmland and cities. Israel today is one of the leading exporters of fruits and flowers to Europe.
 - ii) With that said, don't these verses apply to Israel today and not some future day? One can argue it does apply today in the sense that the land of Israel which was essentially wasted for many centuries has become fruitful again. It does not apply in the sense that the spirit of God has come upon the whole country. Even today, a large percentage of Jews living in Israel are not very religious.
 - iii) My only problem with applying these verses to Israel today comes back to Verse 33 where it says, "On the day I cleanse you from all your sins". I would argue that has not happened yet, just as most Jews of the world today give God lip service and don't follow Him with a whole heart.
 - c) Therefore, are you saying that these verses apply to a future day in Israel? Yes I do. It is probably true that God is preparing the land of Israel for His return. With the modern miracle of the recovery of the nation of Israel, God is trying to make it as obvious to the Jewish people as possible that He exists and He is blessing that nation.
 - i) The only thing I know for sure is that Jesus will be the salvation for the Jewish nation one day, just as Jesus is the salvation for all who turn to Him now. How that salvation exactly fits in with the rebirth of the Jewish nation is still a bit of a mystery as Jesus has not returned to rule the world from Israel as of yet.
 - ii) The bible does teach the antichrist leads an attack on Israel in the "end times" so the condition of the land of Israel prior to Jesus coming is still an issue.
 - d) Does this mean we Christians should support every policy decision of modern Israel? No. It does mean we as Christians should respect the Jewish people and realize that there is coming a day where once again, God will work through the Jewish nation after the "church era" has been completed. If modern Israel is part of that preparation, then we as Christians should respect that nation and pray for Jewish people and their salvation.
 - e) I can't leave this section without mentioning one more thing. Verse 35 says that the land of Israel "that was one desolated is now fortified and inhabited."
 - i) The word "fortified" is translated "fenced" in the King James Version.
 - ii) Within the last few years, much of Israel is now being enclosed with a high fence line in order to keep suicide bombers out of the country. There are some of us who wonder if the "fortification" of modern Israel is describing the fence around the country that was just built in the past few years!

13. Verse 37: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep,³⁸ as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD."
 - a) Notice the phrase "once again" in Verse 37. Therefore, God is saying that there is only going to be "one time" when God does this for the nation of Israel. That to me is proof that Ezekiel is not talking about some past event in Israel's history, but some future date from our perspective. God is talking about some future day when He will rule from Israel and put the His Spirit upon all Jewish people of that time.
 - b) The rest of these verses talk about that day as the land of Israel will be filled with believers and they will keep God's laws and His "feast" days.
 - i) Remember that the land of Israel was empty at that time, and God is giving hope to the Jewish exiles that the land will be inhabited with Jews again one day.
 - ii) In other words, we are reading of a double-fulfillment of prophecy. Yes, part of Chapter 36 can be read to apply to the time right after the captivity. There are other parts of Chapter 36 that apply to Israel today and other parts that apply to a future day when the promised Messiah (rules) from Jerusalem.
 - c) Before I move on to Chapter 37, let me share a story of Israel's modern rebirth. Their first prime minister was David Ben-Gurion. He also led the battle that was fought in 1948 for the countries independence. He personally cited the book of Ezekiel as his source that God has fulfilled prophecy through Ezekiel about Israel being an independent country again. Most religious Jews believe modern Israel is a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy.
14. Chapter 37, Verse 1: The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.
 - a) In Chapter 37, we begin a new vision. As we will discover, the topic goes well with Chapter 36 as it is still describing the rebirth of the Nation of Israel.
 - b) In Verse 1, we read that the hand of God was upon Ezekiel and put him in the middle of a valley littered with dead human bones.
 - i) This does not mean that Ezekiel actually walked or traveled to a new location. It means he was somehow transported from point A to point B. We had this back in Chapter 8 when Ezekiel was shown a vision of Jerusalem while in Babylon.
 - ii) In other words, to use a Star Trek term, Ezekiel was "beamed" to a new place. ☺ Whether or not Ezekiel actually moved or if this is just a vision, we don't know.
 - iii) The point is not how Ezekiel got there, but that he was now in a new place.
 - c) It will become obvious that wherever this place is, it is in Israel somewhere.
15. Verse 2: He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.³ He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."
 - a) Ezekiel was lead all over this valley and saw that it was full of dry bones.
 - b) It was as if there was a big slaughter in some past time and no one was buried.
 - c) The idea of "dry bones" is that these bones have been like this a long time. We will discover that the bones refer to the fact that Israel has been a "dead nation" for a long time.
 - d) In Verse 3 God asks Ezekiel, "can these bones live"?
 - i) Whenever God asks you a question that you have no idea how to answer, it is best to turn the question back to God and let Him answer it.
 - ii) Imagine if God asks you, "Can the sun and the moon stop giving their light in the next 5 minutes. The only safe response would be, "Well God, you would know".
 - iii) I'm stating that example, as that is in effect what Ezekiel is saying here. Ezekiel has no idea how to respond to the question of "Can these bones live" so Ezekiel does the smart thing and throw the question back at God.

16. Verse 4: Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!' ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.' "
- a) God tells Ezekiel to prophesying (that is, preach) to these bones themselves. God is saying through Ezekiel that He will put muscles, organs and flesh over these bones so that they will become human again.
 - b) The text also mentions that God will "breathe" on these newly created beings. Know that in the Hebrew language, the word for "spirit" and "breath" and "wind" is the same word. The point is that God will make human life exist again and "His spirit will be upon them". If you recall from the last chapter, Ezekiel predicted a day when the Spirit of God will be upon the Jewish nation again. We are reading more of that prediction here.
17. Verse 7: So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.
- a) In Verse 7 and 8, we actually read of God fulfilling what Ezekiel was told to prophesy.
 - b) The idea is these bones now were connected and they have tendons (i.e., muscles and organs) and skin. At the same time there was no "breath" in them. Again, remember the word for "breath" and "spirit" is the same word.
 - c) The idea is that first God's people would be alive again and back in the land of Israel. It is a prediction of the return of God's chosen people to the land of Israel.
 - d) The idea of "no breath in them" does not mean they were zombies. ☺ It does mean that the Holy Spirit was not yet within these people, although they were alive.
 - i) It is saying they were "born" but not "born again". It is describing people in their natural state before turning their lives over to God.
18. Verse 9: Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army.
- a) Remember that this is a vision by Ezekiel. The location is unspecified other than it was a large valley full of dead bones. Ezekiel is told to prophesy. That means to preach what God told Him to preach. Therefore, it is not Ezekiel bringing things back to life, but God.
 - b) With all that said, Ezekiel is told to "breathe". The idea here is God is breathing life into these old bones. After Ezekiel did what he was told to do (the preaching to the bones), a vast army (of people) stood on their feet.
 - c) What this means is explained in the next set of verses. Therefore, let me move on to the next set of verses and then I will explain the meaning of these verses some more.
 - d) Before I move on, let me comment on an old Christian song called "Dry bones". This is a famous "Negro Spiritual" about this event. My only complaint about that song is the lyrics say it says Ezekiel connecting the bones. In reality, it was God who did it.
19. Verse 11: Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.
- a) In these verses, we start to get the explanation of the vision. God told Ezekiel in Verse 11 that the bones are the "whole house of Israel". It refers to both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. That idea will be stated directly in a few verses.
 - b) A debate exists whether or not it refers to a literal resurrection of dead Jewish bodies or simply the fact that Israel would be a living country again.
 - i) Let me add two more verses, and then I'll talk about both views.

20. Verse 13: Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' "
- a) One view of these verses (11-14) is that God is talking about a literal restoration of the Israelites in that land. In one sense, Ezekiel is predicting that after seventy years of captivity is when this prediction would literally become true.
 - i) In another sense, Ezekiel is talking about the day when Israel became an independent country again which happened in 1948.
 - ii) This prediction is not yet complete in that the text says (in Verse 14) that He (God) would put His Spirit in them and they will know God has spoken. In other words the modern nation of Israel is not a complete prediction of this promise as "His Spirit" is not yet upon the whole nation.
 - b) The second view of these verses is that God is talking about a literal body resurrection of saved Jewish people all through history. The view is it refers to all saved Jewish people prior to the time of Jesus. It also includes those Jews who are living in Israel at the time of Jesus Second Coming who have given their lives to Christ during the "end times".
 - i) This view is when the "dead" Jews who are saved come back to life, will all live together again in their "new bodies" in Israel with the Messiah ruling over them.
 - ii) I've always held the view that our new heavenly bodies exist in more than three dimensions and therefore, lots of people can fit in the same piece of real estate.
 - iii) Does this mean that saved Jewish people don't go to heaven? Of course not. It just means that when Jesus rules the world from Israel, all the "dead" saved Jewish people get to be part of that resurrection and be there when it happens and get to enjoy the event. (Remember this is just a theory and a possible interpretation.)
 - iv) I have a few friends who are devout Orthodox Jewish. One time, one of them told me that Orthodox Jews like to be buried in Israel. He said that Jews who are not buried in Israel would have to "tunnel their way" back to Israel when the resurrection happens! I've always wondered if that view ties to this text here in Ezekiel.
 - v) Again all of this is a theory. These verses in Ezekiel could just be talking about the fact that the people of Israel are back in the land again, or it could be talking about a literal resurrection of Jewish people who were loyal to God.
 - c) This is a good spot to stop and talk about the nation of Israel around the time when Jesus comes back. I've been stating that when Jesus returns, those Israelites living in Israel at that time will realize they blew it and accept Jesus as their Messiah.
 - i) Does that mean that Jews don't have to come to Jesus by faith? No. What I am saying is that God will put His spirit in them and they will come to Jesus by faith.
 - ii) Let's look at Zechariah 12:10. It reads "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."
 - a) First of all, this text in Zechariah says it is a future event. The first part of this verse says, "I will pour out".
 - b) The second term to note is the phrase "house of David". Remember King David ruled over all of Israel before it split into two kingdoms. Therefore that phrase refers to Israel as a single nation under one king.
 - c) The next term to note is the "inhabitants of Jerusalem". In other words, all living in Jerusalem at this time will receive this "spirit of grace".

- d) The text goes on to say that those who receive this "spirit of grace" will look on me (note that word) who they have pierced. Yes it refers to Jesus and the fact He was pierced at the crucifixion. Israel will grieve for Jesus as one grieves for a first-born son.
 - e) The nation of Israel will collectively realize they "blew it" as far as Jesus.
 - f) At the same time, God does not condemn them, but saves them.
 - iii) So are you saying the Israelites will realize Jesus is God solely based on what Zechariah wrote? No. In the Book of Revelation, there are references to 144,000 Jewish "witnesses" for God. (Think of 144,000 "Billy Graham's"). All of them will preach about Jesus. Revelation Chapter 11 also mentions two witnesses who I believe will be (literally or just like) Moses and Elijah. These two guys will preach of Jesus from Jerusalem during the "end times". My point is there are other references to the fact the Israelites will turn to Jesus after the end of the "church era". (References Revelation 7:4, 14:1-3 and 11:3.)
 - iv) My point is in Revelation, there are witnesses for God encouraging conversions.
 - v) The idea here is that during the "end times" when the Messiah comes to rule the world from Jerusalem, God pours out His Spirit on those Jews living there at that time. The idea is lots of Jews who will accept Jesus at that time. The Jews living at that time will realize their mistake about Jesus and accept Him as their Messiah.
 - a) Not all Christians agree upon this view. There are a multitude of Christians who argue that Jesus just "comes back a Second time for the church and that's that". Such Christians don't believe in a literal salvation for the nation of Israel. They spiritualize sections of the bible like this and "spiritually" tie these verses to the Christian church.
 - vi) I don't claim to perfectly understand all the details about the events of when Jesus does return. I simply (like lots of other Evangelical Christians) hold the view that God not only saves the church, but also has a salvation plan for the nation of Israel in order for God to fulfill His unconditional promises to the Jewish people.
 - d) OK, what does all of this mean for you and me today?
 - i) Again, it is a reminder that God is working to restore us when all seems lost.
 - ii) Let's face it, for the Israelites at this time, all appeared to be lost. God is saying to them that all is not lost because I (God) keep my promises and I (God) will work it out not due to your goodness, but due to the fact that I (God) keep my word!
 - iii) Another way to look at this is to say God is in the "restoration" business. God wants His people to flourish for Him. That means He wants us in this life to make a difference for Him. In times when all seems hopeless or lost, know that God is still there, He still cares for us and He is going to work things out for His glory.
 - e) Meanwhile, I believe we are still studying Ezekiel Chapter 37. ☺
21. Verse 15: The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁶ "Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, 'Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.' Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, 'Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.' ¹⁷ Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.
- a) Speaking of "hope", in these verses God is saying that when Israel comes together again as a nation, it will be all the Israelites, not just those from the Southern Kingdom.
 - b) Remember that Israel was divided for centuries into a Northern and Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom of Israel ended almost 150 years prior to the Babylonian invasion. When the Babylonians came in, they only attacked the Southern Kingdom, as the Northern Kingdom was already long dead. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians, who were later conquered by the Babylonians.

- c) With all of that background stated, let me describe what Ezekiel was literally doing in these three verses. Ezekiel was told to take two sticks of wood. On one stick, Ezekiel was to write the name "Judah" to represent the southern kingdom. The Southern Kingdom consisted mainly of the tribe of Judah, although others lived there as well.
 - i) On the other stick of wood, Ezekiel was to write Ephraim. Time for some quick history. Israel was divided into 12 tribes. The twelve tribes were all sons of Jacob. One of those sons was named Joseph. Joseph had two sons named Ephraim and Mannasah. Jacob told his son Joseph that both of his two sons belonged to him (Jacob) in that those two sons would be the founders of two separate tribes.
 - ii) The point as it relates here, is that Ephraim became the largest of the tribes that existed in the northern kingdom. That is why the stick had the name of Ephraim. At the same time God reminds us that Ephraim belonged to Joseph. The idea is this stick is associated with the Northern kingdom.
 - iii) Ezekiel's final task was to take the two sticks and join them together to be one.
 - iv) The obvious implication is that all of Israel will be united as a single country.
- d) There is one more thing that I get out of these verses. One stick had the name of Joseph. Joseph is traditionally associated with "suffering" for the Jewish people based on all the hardships he endured before ruling in Egypt.
 - i) The other stick had the name of Judah. He is associated with the coming Messiah, as the Messiah comes from Judah's tribe.
 - ii) There is "a" view (as opposed to "the") view in orthodox Judaism that there is actually two "Messiah's". One Messiah is to suffer for the sins of Israel and another is to rule and reign. The one who is to suffer is associated with Joseph based on his suffering in his lifetime. His title is translated "Messiah Ben Joseph".
 - iii) The other Messiah figure is to rule and reign forever and is associated with David, who came from the tribe of Judah. His title is translated "Messiah Ben Judah" or sometimes "Messiah Ben David" as he is a descendant of King David.
 - iv) Here in this passage, God told Ezekiel to take the two sticks and unite them as one stick. The implication is that the two Messiah's are one. My point is both Messianic predictions, (one about a suffering Messiah and one about a ruling Messiah) come together here and are united as one.
 - a) Am I positive that is the implication here? No. It's just my theory and it fits in well with the details of this passage.

22. Verse 18: "When your countrymen ask you, 'Won't you tell us what you mean by this?' ¹⁹ say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph--which is in Ephraim's hand--and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah's stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.'
- a) Meanwhile, back to the "true" implication of this vision. It is that the two separate kingdoms will be united again as one kingdom. The idea is that after the 70 years of captivity, the Israelites will be back in the land and it will contain Jewish people from both the former northern and southern kingdoms.
 - b) This had to be a shock to Ezekiel's audience. The Northern Kingdom was long dead by now. They had to wonder, "How could God bring them back as well?"
 - c) Let me explain what happened after the 70 years of captivity. The Babylonians were conquered by another empire called the "Medo-Persian" Empire. One of the orders given by the new Empire was to allow any and all Jews to return to their land. Some choose to go, but most Jews choose to stay where they were. The land of Israel was at this time part of the Medo-Persian Empire, but the land was now occupied with those Jews who choose to return.

- d) Therefore, this prediction of a "united kingdom" was partially fulfilled after 70 years. The prediction was not "completely" fulfilled until Israel became an independent country again in 1948. That is why Israel's first prime minister claimed that the modern state of Israel was a fulfillment of prophecy as stated by Ezekiel.
 - e) The "true fulfillment" of this prophecy is not complete until the "Spirit of God" falls on the whole nation and all of Israel worships God as God.
23. Verse 20: Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on ²¹ and say to them, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.
- a) God's next set of instructions to Ezekiel was that he was to take the two sticks and hold them together to make one stick. Remember that this whole chapter is a vision by Ezekiel. He was somehow transported to a valley of dry bones. Somehow, Ezekiel was to take the two sticks of the vision and show them to the Israelites in Babylon.
 - b) No matter how Ezekiel actually did this, the main point is Ezekiel is preaching of a future day when all of Israel would be united again in the land. There will be no more "two kingdoms". There will be no more idolatry. Everyone will worship God alone. He will be their God and the Israelites will be there people.
 - c) As I stated right before Verse 20, this prediction will not be truly fulfilled until Jesus the Messiah is their leader. Notice in Verse 22 that it says, "There will be one king over them".
 - i) The modern state of Israel is not a kingdom. It is a democracy. It will not change into a kingdom until "the king" (their Messiah) comes back and rules over them.
 - d) If you get nothing else out of this lesson, understand that God still has plans for "His people" Israel. Did they fail to see that Jesus is the Messiah? Yes. At the same time, God still keeps His promises to the Jewish people. That promise was unconditional. Therefore, Jesus will still rule the world from Israel one day. Not because the Jewish people deserve it, but because God keeps His promises. This is why I disagree strongly with Christians who argue that God is done with Israel as a nation.
 - e) The other point of this lesson is that if God is "not done" with Israel, how much more so do you think that God is not through with you or me as Christians? To those who put their trust in God the Father and Jesus as Savior, the day we became "born again is just the beginning of our own journey. If God makes unconditional promises to Israel, how much more can we trust in God's unconditional promises to us!
 - f) I hate to stop when I'm on a roll, but I have four more verses to go. ☺
24. Verse 24: " `My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees.
- a) Most people interpret this verse as being about the "Son of David" (Jesus) being the ruling king over the world from Jerusalem. There is also a second view that this verse is about King David himself, who is resurrected and his job is to rule over Israel, under Jesus.
 - i) The main point not just about who is their ruler, but about the fact that all of Israel will be united one day, in the land, with one king over them.
 - b) This reminds me of a classic Christian joke. If somebody asks you or me the question, "Are you a conservative or a liberal? The proper answer for a Christian is neither. The proper answer is "I want a theocracy"! (That is, to live in a kingdom.) My goal is to live forever in a kingdom with one perfect king ruling over me. That should be the goal of all Christians over every aspect of our lives.

25. Verse 25: They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.
- a) For those Christians who like to argue that the promises to the nation of Israel were forfeited when the Jewish people rejected the Messiah, I give them "Verse 25". Here in this verse it says that the land of Israel will be given to the children of Jacob. Remember that Jacob is the father of all 12 tribes of Israel. It says that the children of Jacob will live there forever. That is another reason why I believe when the text earlier spoke of the resurrection of the "saved" Jewish people, the idea is they all come and live here.
 - b) Let's face it, if you want to obey God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, then you want to live in that kingdom forever. That is why I believe it is the "reward" of faithful Jewish people (prior to Jesus) and those Jews who covert to Christianity after the church age is over, is to spend eternity inheriting the land.
 - i) So what about the eternal fate of Christians? It is not much different. As I stated in the introduction, Paul says that in the church age, there are no "Jews and Non-Jews". There are only believers and nonbelievers. (See Galatians 3:28.) That is why the "church age" is a separate time era from the main focus of this lesson.
 - ii) As to Christians, Revelation speaks of a "New Jerusalem" that comes down from heaven. This new Jerusalem is the home of both gentile (non-Jewish) believers and Jewish believers. There are references to the 12 tribes of Israel and the "12 apostles" as the foundation of this new city. (See Revelation 21:2 and 21: 10-27).
 - iii) My point is "heaven" is all about believers in God united in the fact we live for God, we live under Him and we live to obey Him.
26. Verse 26: I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.²⁷ My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.²⁸ Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever."
- a) The point of these verses is that when all of this is fulfilled, believing Jews will live in the land of Israel forever. God alone, will be their god. (That is, no more idolatry.)
 - b) Here we get one final warning how God will make the enemies of Israel know that He alone is God and the "God of the Israelites" is also the God of the world. Somehow, someway, before those sentenced to hell will be there, they will now that God "is" the God and they will eternally suffer for turning from Him.
 - c) It would seem like these verses would be the perfect ending for the book of Ezekiel. These verses match up with the ending promises given in Revelation. So why are there more chapters in Ezekiel? The answer is to teach us of some great battle prior that occurs in the "end times" (Chapters 38 and 39) and to teach us more about what life will be like with God as our king! (That is Chapters 40 through 48, which wrap up the book.)
27. Let me wrap up this lesson with some final thoughts about "restoration".
- a) This lesson teaches on the restoration of the nation of Israel. Despite their low state at this point in time, God is teaching that He still has future plans for the nation.
 - b) Think a little about why Ezekiel would preach this message to those Israelites living at this time. Remember that collectively they were guilty of idolatry. God is saying to them that it is too late to go back and live in Israel. However, it is not too late to personally repent of one's sins and live for God. He is saying to them in effect, "If you are willing to turn from your sins, you can be part of this resurrection forever!"
 - c) That is the message to Christians as well. Even after we first give our lives to God, part of what God calls us to do is to be aware of what aspects of our lives are not pleasing to Him, to turn from them and live a life for Him. What God wants is a personal relationship with "Him" as God and "Him" ruling over our lives. That relationship will continue in the next life and that too, is an underlying point of this lesson.

28. Let's pray: Father, we thank You for calling us into a relationship forever. Help us to live a life pleasing to You in all that we do. Help us to understand our eternal destiny. Help us to give You all the credit for our lives. Help us to remember that it is up to You to lead us and up to us to follow. Help us to see people as either saved or those needing salvation. Finally, help us to remember during the low times that You are there, and You are working all things out for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name we pray, Amen.