

The last battle

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[0 : 00] Together this evening, we pray that the risen Christ will come among us and that you will demonstrate to us that your word is truth and that if we abide in your word and we will be fruitful and we will be defended against the evil one and we will be defended against the evil one and we will be able to live the Christian life with joy and with victory.

So we ask you to come and be with us this evening. For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen. We look forward to the time when we will see his face and that is what it says in hymn 199. He by himself has sworn, we on his oath depend, we shall on eagles' wings upborne to heaven ascend. There we shall see his face, his power we shall adore and sing the wonders of his grace forevermore.

So let's sing 199, the God of Abraham prays. Let's sing the tune. Let's pray. Let's sing the tune. We thank you, Lord God, mighty God, living God. We thank you that you are the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and this God is our God.

[1 : 36] We thank you that you are the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and we come and praise you in your majesty, in your loftiness, in your glory and wisdom and power.

We praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, ever one God, ever three in one. We praise the Father from whom all things come.

We praise the Son eternally begotten of the Father, the very image of the eternal God. We praise the Holy Spirit, the one who eternally proceeds from the Father, the one abiding upon the Son, the one whom the Son has given us in salvation, that we may be the temples of the living God. And we thank you for these exalted matters. We thank you that you've lifted us to be part of these things. And as we come together this evening, we ask that by the Holy Spirit, our sins would be forgiven and things of heaven would draw near to us.

We pray that we may have a glimpse of eternal things so that we can live here on earth and fight our way through to the eternal city and walk the path of pilgrimage and live the life of Christians and serve you and prevail in this great battle.

[3 : 06] So, please be our help and strength this evening. Help us in our discussing, help us in our reading, help us in our interacting, that we may be enriched as we turn to your scriptures.

For Jesus' sake, Amen. Amen. Well, I'm going to carry on. We were looking at loose ends. We were trying to tie up some loose ends. And I was saying last time that the approach I've been taking, I think, is positive and straightforward and reverent, dealing reverently with the text.

And I'd say that what we've been looking at fits in with the theology of Protestantism, of the Reformation, of a God who saves his people, a God who is sovereign, a God whose son is Jesus Christ, and a God who has achieved the great victory at the cross and in his resurrection. Been aiming to be spiritually helpful. I know it's very tempting to say you're going deep if you're just making people work out conundrums. I'm not sure that's particularly helpful.

But I hope that our look into this part of God's word is actually spiritually helpful. And we came up against some questions that I'd been thinking about anyway.

[4 : 33] Thinking of the last chapters, why do we have so many different images? Why do we have to delve into the Old Testament? There's some other things there that certainly were on my mind a few weeks ago.

And one of the things, what happened to the Antichrist and the rapture and the battle of Armageddon? So that's the one I'd like to look at this evening, this battle of Armageddon. Yeah. And last time we looked at these other ways of approaching Scripture, which I think are sort of rabbit holes in a way.

But pre-mill, post-mill, A-mill, pre-trib, mid-trib, A-trib, and the place of Israel in God's plan. So we tried to look at that last time.

That has or will go up on the web. And I don't want to keep on going over that. But we did have a pretty good go at that last time, didn't we? So, Battle of Armageddon, that's what I'd like us to look at this evening.

[5 : 42] The standard introduction that the book of Revelation is a book in the Bible for our edification, for our survival and progress as Christians. It is in the nature of an unveiling.

So as we go into the pages of Scripture, you might be tempted to think, where's the real world? And the answer is that the world that we live in, the world of Rachel Reeves' tax and budget, the world of remembering to put out the recycling, the world of trying to return things to Amazon if they don't fit, all that stuff, that's not the real world.

What's in the Bible is the real world. And we're going to take, however long, three quarters or an hour or so, to be in the real world as we dwell in the Scriptures and we see the things that the Bible says are important and significant and true, deeply true.

We always say it's in the form of a letter, so it must have relevance to the hearers. And I don't want to miss the opportunity to see if you're awake.

How many churches is it written to? Well done. It's in the form of a prophecy, so it does have a forward look to it. Prophecy looks forward on one horizon or another, sometimes on multiple horizons.

[7 : 10] The horizon of this, he does say, I'll tell you what's shortly going to happen, but he has a big picture and the prophets, I think this would be a true statement, they tell you how to live now on the basis of where you are in this big picture.

And the horizon is from the time of writing to the end of the world. I've tried to make a thing about listening to his accent, the way he expresses things, using signs, symbols, images, symbolic names, numbers, times, places, and they are theological.

So there's a theological pattern to the original reference which he picks over, and we need to work out what the theological pattern is if we're not to mistake what his meaning is when he quotes it. Here's another observation further on in the book is not further on in time, which we'll see in a minute. He's prepared to give us apparent contradictions.

For example, the things he sees sometimes contradict the things he hears, and the example of that is the lion and the lamb. He hears, it's a lion, but he turns and looks and sees a lamb.

[8 : 25] And he uses these collages, that's many perspectives, on one subject. They're not meant to sort of neatly fit, but they're like a collage.

The red arrows aren't supposed to appear until the words, but it obviously isn't going to happen, is it? This is what we've seen so far. The lamb upon the throne, the seven seals of world history, and the arrow is meant to say that it goes from the time of writing up to the end, hence the arrow and the line at the end of it.

So it takes us all the way through history, from beginning to end, as it were. The seven trumpets for repentance take us through this period of history, from the time of writing to the very end.

The war between the dragon and the woman, and so on, takes us from the time of writing up to the end. The seven bowls of wrath take us from the time of writing up to the end.

The prostitute Babylon, gloriously defeated. Yeah, that's, I guess that takes us up to the end, but I'd be willing to be agnostic about that.

[9 : 33] The triumph of the rider on the white horse, that takes us from the beginning to the end. So I'm trying to say that you don't, when you read the book of Revelation, you don't put it on as a chronological sequence, it goes round, it hits the rewind button.

I hope I'm convincing you of that, because if we're not convinced of that, we're getting a real old tangle. Last time we saw these different frameworks, pre, post, mid, trip, etc.

So I'm not going to try and go over that again, although what we will say this evening, I would like to try and persuade you that this approach makes sense. It would not be the approach that a dispensationalist would take, but let's hope it commends itself to you.

Yeah, I think this is the amillennial. Yeah, amillennial doesn't mean there's no such thing as a millennium, so it's a bit of a misnomer. It's really saying it is the present time.

Does that make sense? Yeah. Yeah. Oh, well, it's possible, but I might have fallen asleep, and then that would be another explanation.

[10:56] Oh, I better not stand too close to that. So this is essentially an amillennial position. There's the start off, there's the end, and the time in between is variously expressed as three and a half years or 1,240 days or 1,000 years.

And that's the beginning is Christ's cross, resurrection and enthronement in heaven in which Satan is cast down. In the intervening time, the accuser is thrown down, the believers receive favorable judgment, so there's a verdict hanging over us justified.

You know, the accuser's claim, what does it say in the song, is done away. We are, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, so we're not under condemnation.

The accuser is kicked out. This simultaneously is a time of trouble and oppression, as the believers to whom he was writing well knew.

The word for that is thlipsis, and sometimes translated tribulation. But I think it's a word that expresses the condition through the whole of that period. It's also a time of witness to the gospel and protection or nurture of the church.

[12:22] It's a time when the gospel goes to the nations. So I think all those different things are going on at once in this intervening time. So the end result, the end there, various things happen which I've put pictorially.

That's the last day when Christ comes, so that arrow from heaven. The church meets him in the air, the day of judgment and all things made new.

So if you're attuned to these things, that's what people might call the rapture, where we're taken to meet the Lord in the air. But I'm saying it's not separated from his coming.

It's not sort of separated by a period of some certain number of years. It all happens at once. It's just one glorious event like that. Okay, is that okay?

Is that good enough for amillennialism? That's really what we've been saying. The people who might not agree with that might say, to take scripture seriously, you have to take it literally.

[13:28] And I gave three answers to this last time. Yeah, there are times when, clearly you have to take it literally, like when water into wine, that is literally the case. But it's also the case that God uses human language.

Presumably his word came in Hebrew, and Aramaic, and Greek, which are all human languages, and not the language that God speaks to himself.

Who knows what that language is? But this is the language that God speaks when he wants us to hear. He uses language the way humans use it. Yeah, the way that humans use it.

So I'll eat my hat if we always use language literally, because we don't, do we? That's a little joke.

So when Jesus says, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, he didn't expect his disciples to take him literally, because he says, I'm not talking about making bread, I'm talking about the doctrine, the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

And it says of the snake, you will eat dust all the days of your life, which I take it not to be a statement about the nutritional habits of snakes, but something about the humiliation that the snake would have.

[14:49] The trees of the field shall clap their hands is poetic. So the third answer was that the Old Testament looks forward to the New Testament and the world to come, using Old Testament categories and vocabulary, stretching it almost to breaking point.

And that's what I'd like us to look at this evening. So what I'd like us to do, we're chasing down Armageddon, but let's look at where this comes from, which is in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. And I would like us, if you're up for it, to do a very, very whistle-stop tour of the book of Ezekiel, which will get us to this battle.

And then when we've understood how it's used in its original setting, then we'll be set up to see what it means as John uses it in Revelation.

You okay for that? So we're going to do a really quick look through Ezekiel. There's a book by theologian Richard Borkham called Revelation, The Climax of Prophecy.

[16:14] And I think that's a good title because he's saying that all the visions of the Old Testament prophets are gathered together in the book of Revelation.

Perhaps they're sort of refocused and used in a certain way, but they all focus there. And this is the climax of prophecy.

And I would like to try and persuade you that there are two major themes from Ezekiel which climax in the book of Revelation. And the two themes are the battle one, the defeat of all spiritually

motivated powers against the Lord and his anointed.

So a massive, catastrophic defeat for the spiritually motivated powers which oppose the Lord and his anointed.

And let's say, so you might have one finger in Ezekiel, but let's just look at Revelation. And there are actually two references that I think we could take as being to this battle.

[17:27] Chapter 16. Do we have the roving microphone? Could we have the roving microphone, please?

Chapter 16 is the seven bowls of wrath. And from verse 12, this is the bit about the battle.

I'll read it while the microphone's on its way. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates and its water was dried up to prepare the way for kings from the east. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs.

They came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, out of the mouth of the false prophet. These are demonic spirits that perform signs. They go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty.

Quote here. Look, I come like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed. That's blessing number three, incidentally.

[18:36] Then they gathered the kings together to a place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. So there's the reference to Armageddon. Armageddon is two words, Ha and Megiddo.

Ha means hill. Megiddo is a place. So it is the place of the hill of Megiddo. So that's what it, that's how the word is put together.

And I think there's a little bit of a mystery to this because actually Megiddo is a plain. So there's something there. I'll make a mental note. Just check that. Seems a little bit strange, the hill of Megiddo, but I think Megiddo is a plain.

There's a reference to it in 2 Kings 23, 29. I don't think the reference will help us very much. Then if we go to 27 to 10.

Right. Could somebody read this for us? Anybody prepared to read? This is Revelation 27 to 10.

[19:52] When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle.

In number they're like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves.

But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown.

They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Thank you very much. It doesn't say Armageddon there, but it mentions Gog and Magog, which we'll find in a minute.

So I think it's the same thing. So we have this great battle. It doesn't, it's not an extensive battle. In fact, it almost isn't a battle at all.

[20:53] They sort of gather together, the threat is there, and then it just evaporates because the threat is immediately countered. Bang.

And there is total defeat despite that threat. So one thing we're going to get from Ezekiel is this battle, Armageddon, Gog and Magog.

And the second thing we're going to get from Ezekiel, which I thought we would get time to look at this evening, but I think no way we're going to get time to look at this, is the idea of a temple.

Both very, very vivid images as we come to read them. Both very important themes. The theme of a battle and the theme of a glorious temple.

And I think what Ezekiel is doing in that temple is telling us the new, the nature of the new covenant and the new creation. And I think in both these, he is using the language that Old Testament people would understand and sort of straining it to the limit to say something even greater than this is going to be happening up in the new covenant and in the world to come.

[22:10] So that's my interpretative principle. Ezekiel is using Old Testament vocabulary and stretching it to the full in order to express truths about the new covenant and the world to come.

See if you agree with me. Or you might say, no, he's talking in a different way. But anyway, let's see whether we can see what we get to. Describing something new in terms of something already known.

So you get the idea of this. So before people had come across giraffes, the first person to see a giraffe, that's a very Eurocentric way of putting it, isn't it?

The first person from Europe who saw a giraffe came back to Europe and tried to explain what they'd seen. What have you seen? Well, it was like a horse with a very long neck. That's the way you explain things, isn't it? You explain things with things people already know, but you try and put it together to explain the new thing. Does that make sense? [23 : 12] Yeah. So before we just plunge into that, I step back and say a sort of overview. What is the Bible about?

It's the story of God's presence with his people who are holy. That's what it's all about. God having his people, his holy people with him, in a place, in his place, under his blessing, under his word, and there's a book about this by Vaughan Roberts called God's Big Story.

Is it? God's Big Story? God's Big Picture. And this is a very helpful book, actually. He says, this is what we have in Eden. God's people, just the two of them, in God's place, under God's word. The word being, don't eat that fruit. Or you can eat the rest of it, but not that. That's the word that sort of governed their lives. And God's presence, because the presence of God was walking in the garden in the cool of the evening.

That's that picture there. Of course, that all went pear-shaped. The Abrahamic covenant is looking for God's people in God's place under his blessing and under his word.

[24 : 39] And it's looking for a holy people. It's not an unconditional covenant. It's looking for a holy people to fulfill that. The temple is a sort of fulfillment of that.

The Mosaic covenant with the land and the law and God's presence in the middle of it is that. And heaven is that. That's what we're aiming for.

God's presence with his holy people in a tangible place with his blessing. Okay. So that's one big theme of scripture.

Are you agreeable to that? And here's a second big theme of scripture, the battle against the adversary. The Bible says it's a reality now.

We're in a battle. And the final outcome is that the adversary will be thoroughly defeated. So here's a couple of quotes. So here's Paul talking to the Ephesian church.

[25 : 36] He says, you have to understand this. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.

He says, don't be taken in. That's what we're up against, actually. You know, it's a spiritual battle. And here's another summary.

Why did Jesus come? The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil. It's put in terms of this cosmic conflict.

Don't often think of it that way, do we? But that is the sort of big, big picture of the Bible. So, turn to Ezekiel. We need a little bit of geography first.

Where is the presence of God in the time of Ezekiel? I've got a few little bits of geography and history.

[26 : 40] This is the Mediterranean, Cyprus, there's Israel, and Egypt, and around here, at some point, Assyria, and at some point, Babylon.

Israel is sort of almost deliberately in this hot spot in the middle. So, it's desired and contested by Egypt, by Assyria, by Babylon.

And it's sandwiched between these two forces, essentially, from the south, like Egypt, king of the south, and the king or kings that attack from the north, like Assyria and Babylon, and it's sandwiched in the middle.

And there's the place of God's presence right in the middle of that. And around and about, there are other kingdoms which take sides as we go through the history of Israel. Israel. And at some point, Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken into exile where?

In Babylon. Yeah, taken to exile in Babylon. Okay. Let's bear that in mind because when we come to Ezekiel, he is, that should say, Ezekiel 1, 1 to 3, in my 30th year, in the fourth month of the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the river Kibar, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

[28 : 16] On the fifth month, fifth of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Joachim, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, by the river Kibar in the land of the Babylonians.

There the hand of the Lord was upon him. So he says 30, that's probably his age and the age when if you were going to be a priest, you could start your work.

Why is he not going to be a priest? He's in Babylon, yeah. Yeah, he's in no access to the temple. Where is he? What is he?

Well, he's a priest and he's in Babylon. So that sort of sets things up a little bit, doesn't he? He's in Babylon as an exile. So, yeah, he's in Babylon.

He would be a priest except he can't be because he's in exile. He's away from God's presence and away from the temple. Verses 4 to 28. I looked and I saw a violent storm coming out of the north, an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light.

[29 : 27] The center of the fire looked like glowing metal and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human but each of them had four faces and four wings.

Their legs were straight. Their feet were like those of a calf. They gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings they had four sides. They had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings and the wings of one touched the wings of another and each one went straight ahead and they did not turn as they moved and their faces looked like this.

Each of the four had the face of a human being. On the right side each had the face of a lion. On the left the face of an ox. Each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces.

They each had two wings spreading upwards. Each wing touching that of the creature on either side. Each had two other wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead wherever the spirit would go they would go without turning as they went.

The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches and fire moved back and forth among the creatures. It was bright and lightning flashed out of it and the creatures spread back and forth like flashes of lightning and I looked at the living creatures and I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with the four faces and this was the appearance and structure of the wheels.

[30 : 50] They sparkled like topaz and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel and as they moved they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced.

The wheels did not change direction as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome and all four rims were full of eyes all around and when the living creatures moved the wheels moved beside them.

When the living creatures rose from the ground the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go they would go. The wheels would rise along with them because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

When the creatures moved they also moved. When the creatures stood still they also stood still.

When the creatures rose from the ground the wheels rose along with them because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like a vault sparkling like crystal and awesome under the vault their wings were stretched out towards one another each had two wings covering its body when the creatures moved i heard the sound of their wings like like the roar of rushing waters like the voice of the almighty like the tumult of an army and when they stood still they lowered their wings and there came a voice from above the vault above their heads as they stood with lowered wings above the vault of their heads was what looked like a throne of labis lazuli high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man and i saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal as if full of fire and that from from there down he looked like fire and the brilliant light surrounded him like like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day such was the radiance around him this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the lord and when i saw it i fell face down and heard the voice of one speaking so what what is he seeing you could say seeing jesus is uh somebody seeing it's the the likeness of a man is a sort of seems to appear a christophany is it like anything else that's been in in the bible before pardon it could you could say it's a vision of heaven or you could say it's a vision of heaven come down to earth because he's still in babylon there's another bit in the bible where you get creatures their wings stretch out and touch each other the ark of the covenant and what are the creatures cherubim well these are sort of hyper cherubim and this ark is different um because it's not stuck in the tabernacle the the new thing is the it's got all these wheels and it moves and he's in babylon and

you would expect the ark of the covenant to be over in the temple and here's the great sort of theological step forward god isn't stuck in the temple god's presence can be there in babylon and that's what he sees that's just a remarkable thing and you you get a sense of how he's struggling to express the glory and magnificence and power and grandeur of this vision of the living god and he says i i didn't see the glory of the lord he says in verse uh 28 i saw and i didn't even see the likeness of the glory of the lord what i saw was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the lord so it was a sort of approximation to an approximation but the approximation to the approximation was absolutely stupendous do you get something of that i mean it's worth coming just to read that scripture isn't it and so this is god's throne and the thing is it's mobile uh and sorry oh well that's an interesting thought yes all right where did it say oh yes out of the north yeah that's all thank you very much yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah um there's a sort of essentially new testament insight here isn't there

[35 : 39] which is that we don't have to go to a temple to pray we can pray to the living god and approach his throne while we're on the bus or while we're in the shower or when we're kneeling beside our bed or wherever that same theology is is true isn't it god isn't limited to a certain place so that's that's a thing let me move on to ezekiel 6 so that we're still thinking of the issues to do with exile why are god's people in exile you know what what what what has happened here so has somebody got the microphone and could read us 11 to 14 chapter 6 11 to 14 this is what the sovereign lord says strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out alas because of all the wicked wicked and detestable practices of the people of israel for they will fall by the sword famine and plague one who is far away will die of the plague and one who is near will fall by the sword and any one who survives and is spared will die of famine so will i pour out my wrath on them and they will know that i am the lord and when their when their people lie slain among their idols around their altars on every high hill and on all the mountain tops under every spreading tree and every leafy oak places where they offered fragrant incense to all their idols and i will stretch out my hand against them and make the land a desolate waste from the desert of dibla wherever they live then they will know that i am the lord thank you very much uh i hadn't realized this until this week but it's a refrain then they will know that i am the lord uh it's actually 84 either 82 or 84 times in the book of ezekiel god's saying there is something distinctively me about what i'm doing you must understand that this is because i am who i am so why are god's people in babylon does it show that god is a failure or that his plans have failed or that his enemies are too strong for him and out of his control just ask your next door neighbor what they think why from that passage are god's people in babylon is it because the babylonians outwitted god or was strong too strong for him and the answer is because of their idolatry yep and anything else any phrases strike you yeah evil abominations wicked detestable practices so it wasn't an accident this is what god actually said in deuteronomy that i do want holy people in my place and if you're not holy people then i'm very patient but at the end of the day you have no place in my land so this is god's sovereign

act when this happened as it says they will know that i am the lord i don't mess about if i want holy people i do want holy people and you know that that that's what it is i am the lord you'll know that i am the lord and it's a it is a function of god's sovereignty he can rule the nations he can be patient but when his patience is uh is exhausted he can send the babylonians and even the babylonians will do his will reminds us that he works all things according to the counsel of his own will i think that is a very helpful thing for us to know in the grand scheme of things the nations are in god's hands and in the small things uh it's all in his hands so the folk who are praying about visas that's in god's hands those of us who might be worried about our health issues that's in god's hands and those of us who are worried about wars and famines that's in god's hands as as was this babylonian invasion so chapter 7 verses 1 to 5 could somebody else read this for us and the question is will judgment really fall on jerusalem or is it just a bit of a bluff uh somebody read thank you 7 1 to 5 the word of the lord came to me son of man this is what the sovereign lord says to the land of israel the end the end has come upon the four corners of the land the end is now upon you and i will unleash my anger against you i will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices i will not look on you with pity i will not spare you i will surely repay you for your conduct and for the detestable practices among you then you will know that i am the lord okay thank you very much so will judgment really fall on jerusalem yes in the end god deals with sin wherever it's found and the people of israel had no sort of get out of free get out of jail free card god does want holiness in his people holiness without which no one will see the lord and it says i think it

says this in peter doesn't it's time for judgment to bring to begin at the household of god god god wants us to be holy that is his aim that is his purpose and that is what he will achieve but that is what he wants so when uh paul said you your gospel is so full of grace that the logic is god is glorified by my being forgiven so i don't know i commit more sin so that i can be forgiven more and god be seem even more glorious and gracious and paul says what utter nonsense that's not what the gospel is about at all it's not let us sin that grace may abound it's because we've received grace let's be holy people now then so these nations and particularly the babylonians are attacking attacking attacking israel and if you turn to chapter 25 you will see if you have headings in your bible you have in the niv that there are specific nations against which god speaks depending on the role that they've taken in this there's a prophecy prophecy against amon against moab against edom against philistia against tyer and so on so the nations are themselves under god's judgment and there's a really wonderful implication of his sovereignty that god sent the babylonians but that doesn't excuse them for their cruelty and their malice so they will be judged for their cruelty even though they did that under god's sovereign direction as it were the nations are under god's judgment but also god has a plan for the nations to bring the gentiles into his kingdom so the old testament has this sort of double two attitudes to the nations they're the villains that god will catch up with but they're also the people to whom god will show grace and the old testament sort of never quite resolves that it's in the new testament where paul says this is the mystery that the gentiles together are heirs with with israel of god's promises and this is just fantastic that's in ephesians 3 is it let's go now to ezekiel 36 and my question now is if god is showing judgment against israel what happens to those promises that he will have a holy people in his place so what will has that promise bitten the dust is that right bitten the dust bit the dust bitten the dust so this is another wonderful thing in the way that the the bible unfolds because god says look i promised it i am going to do it even though israel is such a perverse group of people i'm still i'm determined that heaven won't be empty i'm determined to have my people there and this is the promise in ezekiel 36 24 to 32 please listen carefully to what it says right here we go 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 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 i will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you and i will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and i will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws then you will live in the land i gave your ancestors you will be my people and i will be your god i will save you from all your uncleanness i will call you for the corn and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you 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 your famine then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices 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 people of israel thank you very much so here's promises and there are promises that god will have his people in his place and they will be holy people and i invite you to ponder so one claim is that this was fulfilled in 1948 when the ethnic people of israel came back into a geographical area that was marked out for them

do you think if you look at this that you could honestly say that fulfills what it says here and if not why not what is what is said here um that actually goes far further than that any thoughts why do you say why do you say it's spiritual jack have you used the microphone then julie will be able to hear i think it's really talking about a spiritual change in the people changing their hearts yep um which verse um 25 is it no sorry 26 i will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you yeah i will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh would you not agree that's a spiritual promise and i i i would say that's fulfilled in the new testament that's fulfilled in the lord jesus who said you must be born again uh not born that which is of the flesh that which is born of the flesh is flesh but that which is born of the spirit is spirit and and he says to nicodemus surely you realize that that was what was meant by these prophecies you were a teacher of israel you didn't realize that you must be born again that's what the bible's always said and that's what the promise of the new testament is and that's so he's using old testament vocabulary and and just sort of trying to fill it as far as possible but it's spiritual isn't it do you have i persuaded you of that or are you not too sure um i will give you a heart of flesh i will put my spirit in you that's the new that's the promise of the new covenant isn't it that's what a christian is is somebody in whom the spirit lives yes yes somewhere it says if you were the children of abraham you do what abraham did isn't it something

like that um i suppose some um christian views will be you can't avoid the sort of the early verses which talk about going back to your own land yeah um and they talk about israel being saved yeah um but at the moment israel appears just to be concerned about the physical aspects yeah um well that's what comes across from their leaders yeah yeah there's no sense i mean for for in today's new covenant situation like like we were reading this morning obedience is believing in jesus that's where we're at uh that's what god's will is that we believe on his son and if people are just hanging on to ethnicity and um kosherness and observance that's uh what did it say um elementary spirits or something old world principles or something like that yeah oh yeah no that's right yeah i'm not trying let's be clear the view i'm putting forward is that people who are jewish are in just the same position um before the lord of needing salvation as people who are welsh and people who are romanian and all in the same boat we all need the lord jesus uh paul would say what advantage is there in being a jew well you've got loads of advantages you've got the the book to read i mean that should be a huge help but in terms of the promise for the future so what i what i'm the line i'm going down is when it says land it means a place it's using that idea of land but it's actually meaning something way beyond that so in in romans it says um abraham is the inheritor of the world so it's looking forward to a sort of exploded view of what is put in terms of land in the old testament in the this prophecy that's right yes he was looking for a city with foundations yeah that's right thank you thank you and i'm just going to stop on here again um i better not stop too long in verse 30 about the increase of the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field he's saying that the ecosystem will be part of this and i would say that's fulfilled when all things are made new i better not stop on that so it's gathering the people removal of sin new hearts the gift of the spirit by which people internally keep god's law let's flip over to 37 this is the valley of dry bones and um let's just do do this very quickly in chapter 37 verses 1 to 10 let's read that jack could you read that since you've got the microphone the hand of the lord was on 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 he led me to and fro among them and i saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley bones that were very dry he asked me son of man can these bones live i said sovereign lord you alone no then he said to me prophesy to these bones and say to them dry bones hear the word of the lord this is what the sovereign lord says to these bones i will make breath enter you and you will come to life 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 so i prophesied and i was commanded and i was prophesying there was a noise a rattling sound and the bones came together bone to bone i looked and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them but there was no breath in them then he said to me prophesy to the breath prophesy son of man and say to it this is what the sovereign lord says come breath from the four winds and breathe into these slain that they may live so i prophesied as he commanded me and breath entered them they came to life and stood up on their feet a vast army amen yeah it's very vivid isn't it these dead bodies and they're all bones and the question [55 : 45] can these bones live it's almost like a question of revival isn't it can dead people come to life spiritually speaking and the answer is only god knows the answer to that you sovereign lord you alone know you know we can't predict spiritual life but there is the word of the lord prophesy to the bones and there is the breath of the lord verse 9 prophesy to the breath and when the word and the spirit are at work these dry bones come to life it's sort of a little illustration of of regeneration it's not about geography is it it's the new covenant that he's talking about i better not stop so i've done the word and the breath and the dead come to life now then let's uh at least touch on the the bit that i said we were going to do which is the these enemy nations now chapter 38 the word of the lord came to me son of man set your face against gog of the land of magog the chief prince of meshach and tubal prophesy against him this is what the sovereign lord says i'm against you god chief prince of meshach and tubal i will turn you around put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army and your horses your horsemen fully armed and a great horde with large and small shields etc and if you go down to verse 10 this is what the sovereign lord says on that day thoughts will come into your mind you will devise an evil scheme you will say i will invade a land of unwalled villages i will attack and peaceful and unsuspecting people all of them living without walls and without gates and bars i will plunder them etc and it talks about the gathering of this army and in verse 17 it says this is what the sovereign lord says you are the one i spoke of in former days by my servants the prophets of israel they prophesied for years that i would bring you against them this is what will happen in that day when gog attacks the land of israel my hot anger will be aroused declares the sovereign lord in my zeal and fiery wrath i declare that at that time there will be a great

earthquake in the land of israel so there's an earthquake in verse 20 the mountains will be overturned in verse 21 i will summon a sword against gog verse 22 i will execute judgment on him with plague and bloodshed verse 23 and so i will show my greatness and my holiness i will make myself known in the sight of many nations then they will know that i am the lord and um it's a little bit short of time to read all this aren't we but um in chapter 39 verse 4 on the mountains of israel you will fall you and all your troops and nations with you i will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds to the wild animals you will fall in the open field for i have spoken declares the sovereign lord i will send fire on magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands and they will know that i am the lord that ring a bell for revelation that's that's what it is isn't it and in verse 17 son of man this is what the sovereign lord says call out to every kind of bird and wild animals assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice i am preparing for you the great sacrifice on the mountains of israel there you will eat flesh

and drink blood you will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams lambs goats and bulls all of them fattened animals from bashan at the sacrifice i am preparing for you you will eat fat till you are glutted and drink blood till you are drunk at my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders mighty men and soldiers of every kind declares the sovereign lord so this is a this is a great battle in its original form here in in ezekiel and there's uh two whole chapters of it up to uh chapter 38 and 39 do you get the idea of it i've read it quite quickly that it's worth worth sort of reading the whole thing when you get home but it's got uh so it's these enemies um gog prince of meshach and tubal where have we come across gog before in ezekiel the answer is nowhere and whereabouts on the map is gog and magog there's nowhere it's interesting these people seem to be beyond the normal realm of enemies they're sort of what i put completely out of the realm of normal enemies i don't know quite how to describe it i mean maybe you've got some ideas of this but it's not the normal ones it's not egypt it's not assyria it's not babylon they're sort of out of this world enemies almost yeah well that's what i put out of this world enemies and the battle is a sort of out of this world battle isn't it it's so colossal it's so um catastrophic it's so all embracing and the victory well i i wonder whether what ezekiel is really getting at is a sort of cosmic battle against all the outer beyond this world in this world and beyond this world enemies like um the the demon said to jesus what do you want with us jesus of nazareth have you come to destroy us which of course is what jesus did come to do i wonder if that's what ezekiel is aiming at it's not uh uh like the defeat of the babylonians battle it's it's a bigger thing than that it's an out of this world it's a cosmic battle and the the people are at peace with god in their unwallled villages they have no defense apart from the lord yet the this colossal out of this world enemy hates them and is determined to squash them for no reason they don't deserve it and the lord says i'm not going to have that and he comes and completely smashes the enemy and the completeness of it is um is there in verse 39 there's a there's how long it takes to dispose of the relinquished weapons in verse 9 to verse 10 they're going to burn them and it will take seven years is it seven years to burn all the all the weapons and then the dead bodies will be so uh there'll be so many dead bodies um that it'll block up all the roads and the clean up operation will be total um and the corpses the destroyed army will be like a feast

for these animals i think there's perhaps something here to think about this is god's punishment on sin on cosmic sin he uses the word sacrifice he says that in this punishment there is flesh that is to be eaten and blood to be drunk when you eat the flesh and drink the blood of a slain person you're benefiting from their death you drink the blood you're saying yeah this is um this will do me good i benefit from this and here's a thought human sin is either dealt with on that great final conflict that enormous conflict where the foul animals eat the flesh and drink the blood or it's dealt with on the cross where equally god's wrath falls and we can as we did this morning in memory of that in a memory sort of way eat the flesh and drink the blood and say in our benign way he did that for me i benefit from that i'm prepared to say let that benefit me do you remember when david um a couple of sort of heroic men said we'll go down to uh the enemy well and draw back some get bring back some water for king david to drink do you remember that that and and king david said i'm not going to drink that stupid men that's so risky because i shall i drink that it's like drinking their blood i'm not going to do that and he said i'm not going to benefit from that i've had no agreement with that that was something i really don't approve of but when we do eat the bread and drink the wine we're saying that's something i totally approve of if christ hadn't done that for me i'd be here in ezekiel 38 as it were my sin would be this catastrophic catastrophic well catastrophe for me somewhat in the

way it is described there a blood sacrifice that satisfies god wrath a feast with flesh to eat and blood to drink and yeah and when we get to the end of 39 we get to chapter 40 and here's a thought maybe we can't get to chapter 40 until we've been through chapter 38 and 39 because chapter 40 is all about the amazing way that god will fulfill all those thoughts of a place and a people and a presence it's all about the temple we'll leave that for another time let's sing something would anybody like to suggest something to sing ah okay 971 971 i realized that was quite a chase through scripture i hope it didn't i hope it i hope you felt they would take along with it and had something to benefit from it it's a i asked a couple of people whether they were familiar with it ezekiel they said they weren't really so i think it's worth going through that it's a it's quite a journey to take and we go through this sort of colossal explosion of god's wrath against cosmic evil and we land in jerusalem the heavenly city where all god's promises are brought to pass could ray pray for us when we've sung this please a a Amen. Amen. [70 : 10] Amen.