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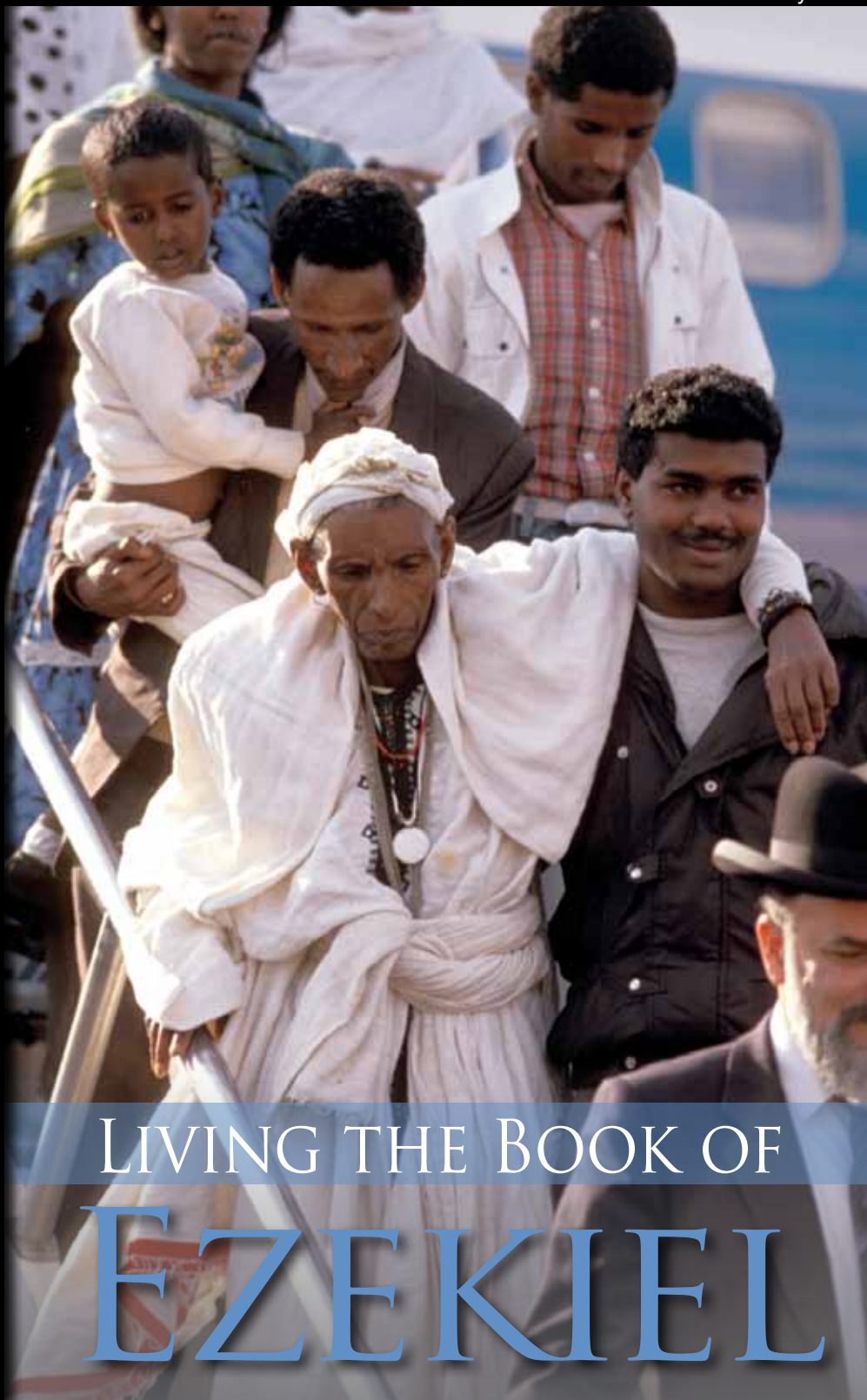
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# BRIDGES FOR PEACE

## *Israel Teaching Letter*

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LIVING THE BOOK OF  
**EZEKIEL**





# LIVING THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

**A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO**, I was invited to address a class that was studying the book of Ezekiel. I opened my talk by telling them that they were studying the book of Ezekiel, but in Israel, I was “living” the book of Ezekiel. How true this is for all of us living in these days! We are experiencing the events that Ezekiel prophesied over 2,500 years ago!

In a residential area in Jerusalem, is an institution named after one of Israel’s early presidents. Although the exhibit is not generally open to the public, I have been privileged to view the Ezekiel stones housed in a back room of the institution. These amazing stone tablets inscribed with the book of Ezekiel were reportedly found in the tomb of Ezekiel in modern-day Iraq. They may be an original copy of the book of Ezekiel. Scholars are studying them. How interesting that they would come to light in a day when Ezekiel is proving to be a prophet whose prophecies are being fulfilled in front of our eyes.

One of our friends in Israel is Ya’akov Kirschen, the creator of the “Dry Bones” political cartoons. Many years ago, he told my father, Dr. David Allen Lewis, that he was an atheist. Later, he updated it to agnostic. My father told him, “At least you are moving in the right direction!” I will never forget the day he was speaking to a Bridges for Peace group. He talked of current events, all the while drawing cartoons to illustrate his points. He told us that he had been reading the book of Ezekiel, and it was like reading the newspaper! Then he said, “I am having a crisis of unbelief.” Ya’akov Kirschen was so impacted by the book of Ezekiel that he created a whole cartoon book about its prophecies.

It is indeed astonishing to see how men of God in times past could so literally predict events that we see happening in modern times. Oh, that the world would recognize the fact that God is actively fulfilling His promises. Oh that the world would have a “crisis of unbelief”! In truth, I find it difficult to understand how anyone could consider the events in Israel today and not recognize the greatness of God and His faithfulness to fulfill His promises!



# Dry Bones “LISTENING TO EZEKIEL”



From Ya'akov Kirschen's graphic novel on the book of Ezekiel

If I were to pick a theme for the book of Ezekiel, it would be the phrase, “that they shall know that I am the LORD,” which is found 65 times in this book.

I often have the honor of speaking to tour groups visiting Israel. On occasion, someone will say to me, “Wouldn’t it have been wonderful to be here in Bible times and see God at work?” I chuckle and tell them, “Oh, but you *are* here in Bible times. These are times when Bible prophecy is being fulfilled. We are the chosen ones—chosen to be alive in the days of fulfillment.” I am not satisfied to simply read about Bible prophecy or even to sit in awe of God’s actions. I want to know how I should cooperate with Him. The book of James says, “Faith without works is dead” (2:26). My father always talked about the importance of righteous action accompanying our faith. He paraphrased this Scripture saying, “Belief without action is deception.”

Let’s look at a few examples of fulfilled and yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies in the book of Ezekiel. May we see that God is keeping His Word and ask Him how He wants us to partner with Him.

## Restoration of the Land

Ezekiel told of a day when the land of Israel would be restored. “And you son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord!...Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains, the hills, the rivers, the valleys, the desolate wastes, and the cities that have been forsaken, which became plunder and mockery to the rest of the nations all around’...Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains, the hills, the rivers and the valleys, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and My fury, because you have borne the shame of the nations...But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come” ’” (36:1, 4, 6, 8).

In the days before Israel became a state, many visitors wrote of their impressions:

**Nachmanides**, a Jewish scholar of the *Talmud* (rabbinic commentary on Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Scriptures), visited in 1267 and described Jerusalem as “deserted and laid waste and that Judea was more destitute than Galilee.”

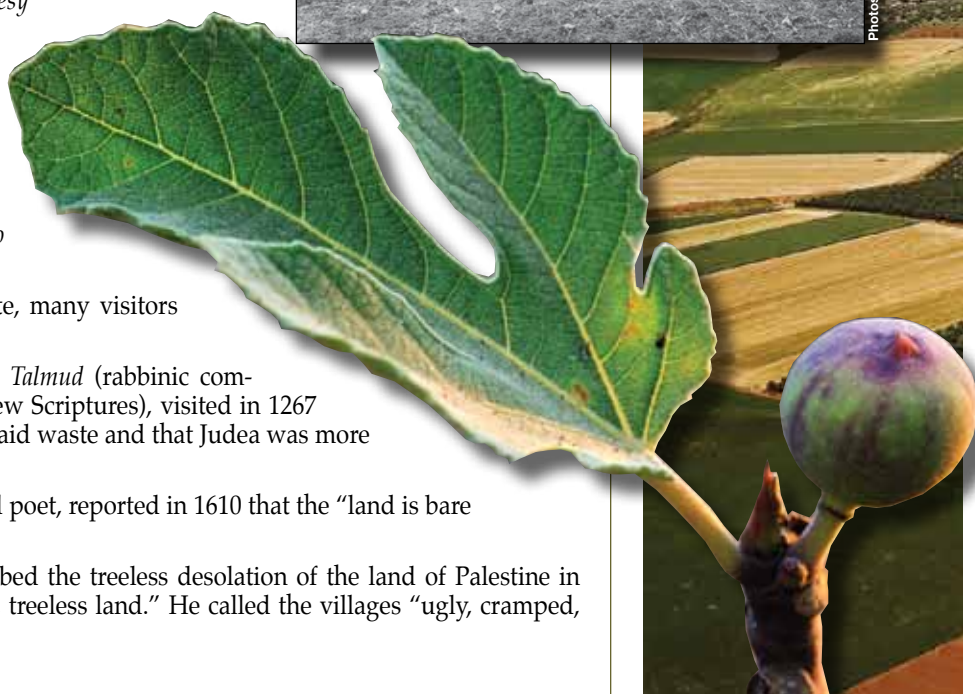
**George Sandys**, an English traveler and poet, reported in 1610 that the “land is bare of trees. The country is a vast empty ruin.”

**Mark Twain** in *Innocents Abroad* described the treeless desolation of the land of Palestine in the 1800s. He called it a “blistering, naked, treeless land.” He called the villages “ugly, cramped, squalid, uncomfortable and filthy.”

New settlers till the soil of Israel (circa 1920).



Photos by www.israelimages.com



“I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given to them,’ says the LORD your God.”

Amos 9:15



Early Soviet immigrants



Immigrant ship at Tel Aviv coast, 1939



Jews from North America

Colonel C. R. Condor wrote in 1877 that "Palestine is empty. The population is not large enough to till the land."

The Turks were absentee landlords for more than 400 years over what was then known as the region of Palestine. It seems they were more interested in taxes than in maintaining a fruitful land. One of the ways they raised taxes was to tax the trees. The peasant subsistence farmers who lived here and paid rents to the Turks simply cut down the trees to avoid paying the taxes. This resulted in the erosion of topsoil. Truly the land was desolate. When the Jewish people began returning to Israel in the late 1800s, they returned to an inhospitable land with malaria-filled swamps in the North and deserts in the South. They returned to a land that had almost no trees and very few inhabitants. But over the last 100 years, the land is being restored to its former beauty as prophesied.

It has been noted that there is a special connection between the fruitfulness of the land of Israel and the Jewish people. It seems that the land flourishes when the Jewish people live here and falls into desolation when they are gone. I believe that this land/people connection is a direct result of the special covenant that God made with the Jewish people to give the land to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as an everlasting inheritance. *"I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given to them," says the LORD your God*" (Amos 9:15).

I recently learned that some rabbis say that the land going into such decline was a blessing from God, because if it had continued to flourish, it wouldn't have been virtually empty when the Jewish people began to come home. Ezekiel says that Israel will become like the Garden of Eden (36:34-36). Today when you travel around Israel, you will see millions of trees, rather than the previously reported 1,000 trees.

## The Return of the Jewish People from Exile

*"And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, 'when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land'"* (Ezekiel 36:23-24).

In the late 1800s, it began to happen. Ezekiel's words were coming to life. The Jewish people began to come back to their ancient homeland. They came determined to reclaim the deserts, drain the swamps, and reestablish their state. Jewish philanthropists paid exorbitant sums of money to Turkish land holders for land that was often worthless. They reclaimed the land with much difficulty. Many died of malaria. But, gradually, their efforts paid off. As the land prospered, many Arab people came from surrounding countries as well, attracted to the growing job opportunities the Jews were creating.

On May 14, 1948, the dreams of the Jewish people for a homeland came true. It had seemed like an impossible dream, but the world was to see that when God is involved, the impossible becomes possible. David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, once said, "In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles."

While living in Israel for 22 years with my husband Tom, we have witnessed the return of more than a million Jewish people from the former Soviet Union as well as thousands from other countries. Every year, Jewish people answer the call to come to Israel. It seems like God put a homing device in the hearts of many Jews. They don't know all the reasons why they have come, but we all recognize that Israel's prophets saw this day. Ezekiel also talks about the desire of God to bring them home. *"When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer"* (39:27-28). It is God's heart that all His people come home.

In Ezekiel 36:20ff, God makes it very clear that it is not because the Jewish people have earned through their actions the reward of their land; rather, it is for the sake of God's name. In Hebrew thinking, this means that God is doing it for the sake of His character, for the integrity of His name. He is proving that He is a covenant-keeping faithful God who does not lie but always keeps His Word.



## The Battle of Gog and Magog

Many in Israel today are speaking about Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38–39). As we watch the turmoil in the surrounding nations, consider the fact that often the only uniting element in the Middle East is hatred of Israel, and observe continued military cooperation between Arab states and Russia, it becomes plausible that Gog and Magog could be around the corner.

I will not set any dates or be dogmatic about details that are not 100% clear in the Scriptures. For instance, although experts debate the identity of Gog, Magog, and some of the countries listed, it is clear in Scripture that there will be a confederation of nations which will come against Israel with great force and huge numbers, and that they will be defeated by God Almighty who will use forces of nature to overcome the enemy. It is not clear how long the conflict will last, how many Israelis will lose their lives, or when this conflict will take place.

I have been quite surprised to hear many Israelis bring up the subject and especially surprised that they feel it is coming soon. In 1982, right after the first Lebanon War with Israel, my father visited Lebanon in the aftermath of that conflict and wrote about his findings in a book called *Magog 1982 Canceled*. As I prepared to write this teaching, I picked up his book and was surprised to read this: “Venerable orthodox rabbis in Israel have been reported as predicting a Russian invasion, based on dreams and visions given to them. They have prophesied of Russia coming like a storm into Israel and being defeated by the intervention of the Almighty.” So, both the Jewish and Christian communities are talking about this prophecy.

Who is Magog? Most Christian theologians believe it to be modern-day Russia (and possibly additional areas of the former Soviet Union). This interpretation is not a modern invention. In my father’s book, he says, “The interpretation of Gog of the land of Magog being Russia and her final ruler is a very old idea. The lexicography of Gesenius published in 1812, identified Magog as Russia long before Russia became a significant world power. Flavius Josephus wrote of Sythian tribes who in ancient times settled north of the Caucasus Mountains (in present day Russia). He said they were tribes of Magog or the Magogites.”

According to Grant Jeffrey in his book, *Armageddon – Appointment with Destiny*, “Jewish commentaries such as Kesses HaSofer, identify ‘Magog’ with the Russians and state that the word Mongol for the Siberian-Russian peoples is in fact derived from ‘Magog’...Arab writers confirm that in the Arabic language their name for the Great Wall of China is ‘the wall of Al Magog’ because the Great Wall was built to keep out the invading armies from Magog (Russia).”

“Venerable orthodox rabbis in Israel have been reported as predicting a Russian invasion, based on dreams and visions given to them.”

Dr. David Allen Lewis



Currently we see Russia rearming herself in the largest rearmament program since the fall of the Soviet Union to the tune of US \$650 billion.

Interestingly, the Koran mentions Gog and Magog in two chapters or *surahs*. Islam views the release and rampage of Gog and Magog as one of several major signs of the Last Hour (*al-Sa'ah*) before the coming Day of Resurrection, the ultimate Day of Judgment of humanity by Allah. Walid Shoebat, a former Muslim terrorist from Bethlehem who is now a Christian, in his book, *God's War on Terror*, believes that Magog is a region north of Israel, which today includes the nations of Turkey, Northern Iraq and Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

Ezekiel lists the nations that will invade Israel with Magog: "*Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you*" (38:5). Everyone agrees Persia is modern-day Iran. Many of the regions mentioned today are Islamic nations (or predominantly Islamic). They include areas in North Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. It is interesting that neither Egypt nor Edom (Jordan) are listed with these nations. Is this an indication that they will have a peace treaty with Israel, as is true today?

Currently, we see Russia rearming herself in the largest rearmament program since the fall of the Soviet Union to the tune of US \$650 billion. Are they preparing for future conflict? Iran recently sent warships through the Suez Canal en route to Syria, where they plan to build a permanent naval base, and Iranian President Ahmadinejad constantly threatens Israel with annihilation.

The Islamic nations of the region are in turmoil. The West hopes that these protests are an indication of a desire for democracy. However, most who understand Islam doubt this will be the outcome. Even if new rulers are democratically voted into office, the likelihood is that they will not be moderate. Radical Islamic groups—such as Islamic Brotherhood, Hamas, Al Chayda, and Hizbullah—seem to be growing in strength militarily, with their arms buildup often funded by Iran. For those of us who live in this eye of the storm, the prospect of these fierce winds blowing is nearly overwhelming.

This invasion will come upon Israel when they are living in "unwalled" villages (Ezekiel 38:11). Until modern times, nearly everyone in Israel lived in walled towns. Jerusalem was a walled city up until 1860 when Sir Moses Montefiore built the first dwellings outside the walls. No one wanted to live there, considering it too dangerous. In fact, he paid the first inhabitants to live there. Today, nearly everyone lives in unwalled towns and cities.

This alliance will come with the intention of taking a spoil—to plunder. Other nations will ask the invaders, "Why are you doing this? Is it to take a spoil?" (Ezekiel 38:12–13). Until recently, scholars wondered what they would desire to take from Israel. Last year that changed. With Israel's



Russian paratroopers

en.wikipedia.org





Oil discovery in Israel



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad



Iranian artillery

*"I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land."*

Ezekiel 37:14

discovery of huge off-shore gas fields with the promise of oil, suddenly we see a reason. Most think that the main customer for Israel's fuel will be Europe. Currently, Europe gets most of its natural gas from Russia!

I love the fact that God comes to Israel's rescue, although the method sounds frightening. After seeing the devastation caused by a great earthquake in Japan, the prospect of a massive earthquake in Israel is enough to make anyone anxious. This will be followed by pestilence, bloodshed, hail, fire, and brimstone (Ezekiel 38:19–22). The result of all this will be that the LORD will be known in the eyes of many nations (v. 23). Ezekiel goes on to say that these events will not only cause the nations to recognize God, but also cause Israel to know that God has worked a miracle for them: *"So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day forward"* (39:22).

## The Redemption of Israel

It is God's plan that the people of Israel know Him, love Him, and put their trust in Him. We see this theme throughout the Scripture. Ezekiel talks about it in several passages. *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them"* (36:26–27). *"I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD* (37:14).

## What Should We Do?

God is clearly at work. We have watched as He has fulfilled the prophecies concerning the restoration of the land, the return of the Jewish people to their home, the reestablishment of the State of Israel. We have been privileged to partner with God in this great restoration and return. The prophecy of the war of Gog and Magog is still to come. The redemption of the Jewish people is in process. God's great plan for the nations and the Jewish people to recognize Him is happening now.

We don't know when all these events will happen, but surely we see the signs all around. Jews in Israel are watching the events and talking about the prophecies of Ezekiel. Bible-believing Christians watch too. I believe that we must all seek to cooperate with God as He works. He didn't give us these prophecies to plunge us into despair or fear. Rather, He wanted us to be prepared and to give us hope of His deliverance.

Since there are many questions not answered by the scriptural prophecies, I believe that we can pray into the events and perhaps even change the effect they have on us and the people of Israel. I am praying and asking the Lord to protect the people of Israel when these horrific events transpire. O that God would protect them like He did in the past when the firstborn sons of the Egyptians were killed and the Children of Israel were protected; like He





Remember the  
theme of Ezekiel:  
“that they shall  
know that I am the  
LORD.”

did when He saved Noah and his family from annihilation. Israel is not prepared for a major earthquake. Only buildings constructed since 1980 have been built to withstand an earthquake. So we are praying for God’s mercy and protective hand.

We also are preparing for times of crisis. Bridges for Peace has 500 tons of food stored for such a time. Most of all, remember the theme of Ezekiel, **that the name of the LORD God will be known when people and nations see these actions**. Pray that the eyes of the world would be opened to see the greatness of the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

By Rev. Rebecca J. Brimmer  
International President and CEO



Bridges for Peace food stored for times of crisis

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.