

outside of Ezekiel 38 it denotes the condition of Israel when they are serving God, either during the time of the Law or in the time of the Kingdom; that is, when used of Israel, *betach* exclusively indicates the true security and confidence that comes from serving and trusting in God.

In contrast to this, on the seven times when this word is used of Gentile nations it is exclusively used on occasions when the security is false, and disaster is about to come.

Finally, *betach* is used of individuals on about twelve occasions, and in these instances it is the attitude of the individual to God that determines whether or not the security is genuine or false.

I do not believe that God uses words randomly in Scripture, nor that this clear division between how the word is used of Israel and of the Gentiles is a coincidence, because the inspiration of the Scriptures does not leave room for coincidence. The clarity of the split in the usage of *betach* leads me to believe that the ‘safety’ in which Israel are said to live in Ezekiel 38 (mentioned three times for absolute emphasis) must be the same safety that we find them in on the other twenty-one occasions; that is, the security and confidence that comes from serving and trusting in their God.

I believe that we should also pay more attention to the surrounding context of Ezekiel 38 and 39, because the description of Israel’s condition in 38:8-12 is one that has several clear links back to chapters 34, 36 and 37. For example, the idea of Israel dwelling safely is also used three times in chapter 34 (vv. 25,27,28), all in the context of the security which Israel will eventually enjoy in the Kingdom when “My servant David” is their shepherd (v. 23).

Similarly, the phrases “the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste” in 38:8 and “the desolate places that are now inhabited” in verse 12 find their parallel in chapter 36. In that chapter God comforts the “mountains of Israel” which are desolate, and tells Israel that their “cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded” (vv. 4,10,33). Again, this prophecy finds its complete fulfilment in the final return of Israel to their land and the blessings of the Kingdom—see verses 32-38 especially to confirm this.

And finally, Ezekiel 38 uses the language of a people returned to their land; in verse 8 the land is “gathered out of many people” and in verse 12 the people are “gathered out of the nations”. This language comes straight out of chapter 37, where, after the dry bones vision and the two

sticks joining, God says in verse 21: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen [nations], whither they be gone, and will gather them . . . into their own land”. This verse again comes in a passage which is clearly looking at the final regathering of Israel when Jesus has returned (see verses 21-28).

The phrases used to describe Israel in Ezekiel 38, therefore—their regathering out of the nations, their habitation of the wastes and the desolate cities, their prosperity and safety—come straight out of the preceding chapters in Ezekiel. And in every case, the image in those preceding chapters is one which finds its fulfilment at the return of Christ.

In summary, then, I have looked at how *betach* is used in Scripture and seen a very clear division between how it is used of Israel and how it is used of Gentile nations—surely not a coincidence. I have also considered the other phrases used in Ezekiel 38 to describe Israel, and how they are used in the preceding chapters of Ezekiel. Both these lines of investigation lead me to see Ezekiel 38 as describing an Israel that is truly safe, and enjoying blessings which it will only have when “My servant David” rules over the nation.

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## Jesus Christ and A.D. 70

With reference to Brother Russell Ebbs’s response to my letter ([Oct. 2001, p. 394](#)), I am not arguing against the Lord God’s judgement on unrepentant Israel, but I am opposing the notion that the Lord Jesus returned *invisibly* in A.D. 70 to lead the Roman armies against Jerusalem. May I comment on the scriptures he quotes?

**Daniel 9:25,26.** “. . . from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the *Messiah the Prince* shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks . . . And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of *the prince* that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary”. Our brother assumes that “the prince” of verse 26 refers to “Messiah the Prince” of verse 25, but this may not be so. The ‘anointed one’ is Jesus Christ, who is cut off by his death upon the cross, but, in consequence of the cutting

off, the people of a coming prince will destroy the city and the sanctuary. This prince is probably not Christ, but rather Titus Vespasianus, who "shall come" to destroy Jerusalem and the temple.

**Matthew 22:7.** "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city". Although in the setting of a parable, these words predict the ruin of the Jewish state and the holy city a generation later by the might of imperial Rome, yet nothing here is said of Jesus actually secretly leading the Roman armies against Jerusalem.

**Mark 12:9.** "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others", referring to those in the parable who murdered the heir, Jesus. But look how Jesus himself pleaded for his murderers: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34); to which Peter adds: "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17). Such a wicked deed was not beyond the possibility of repentance, and although, some forty years later, Jerusalem was obliterated, presumably along with the surviving unrepentant perpetrators of such a crime, nonetheless there is no hint that Jesus led the Roman forces against the city.

**Matthew 10:23.** "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come". The fall of Jerusalem is not predicted here. The words are not of terror, but of comfort, so what is the 'coming' to which the Lord refers? I would suggest two alternatives:

1 The coming of Jesus to his disciples immediately after his resurrection, when he appeared to them dispelling all their fears, and commissioned them to go forth and "make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:18-20, RV);

2 After his ascension, the coming of the Lord Jesus in the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

**James 5:8,9.** "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh . . . behold, the judge standeth before the door". Our brother says that, if this refers to a coming 2,000 years later, "then the statement is untrue". This seems an unwarranted assumption. The early brethren and sisters lived in the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus. They expected him to "come quickly" (Rev. 22:20). The early prospect of Christ's return kept them on their spiritual toes. In 2 Peter 3 the apostle addresses the problem, Why the delay in Christ's return? Not because the Lord is "slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (v. 9). According to Peter there has been a deliberate deferring of the Divine purpose, in order to give opportunity for repentance. If the Second Coming of Jesus had not been so delayed we would not have had an opportunity to accept God's saving truth. Finally, there is not a single passage in Holy Writ which specifically states that Jesus came secretly and invisibly in A.D. 70 to assist the Romans in the laying waste of Jerusalem.

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