

*Betach* is a Hebrew word expressing the concept of trust, confidence, perceived safety and reliance. In Ezekiel 38 it has as a prefix the Hebrew letter *lamed*, which is the Hebrew letter indicating an 'l' sound. The use of this letter as a prefix, according to lexicons such as Davidson's and Gesenius, indicates a meaning represented by the English words 'to', 'unto', 'towards', 'at', 'on', and 'in'. In Ezekiel 38 it simply means 'in'; the word *betach* in Ezekiel 38:8 means Israel is to be 'in *betach*'.

The noun *betach* (*Strong's Concordance* number 0983) is derived from the verb *batach* (*Strong's* 0982). Effectively they are the same word in two different forms. When we carry out a computer search for the Hebrew word *batach* and Israel in the same context we discover a rather different connotation to that stated in Brother Whittaker's letter, which is solely based on the use of *betach*. In the following passages the words translated from the Hebrew *batach* are in italics:

"So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they *trusted* unto the liars in wait which they had set beside Gibeah" (Judg. 20:36);

"He *trusted* in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kgs. 18:5);

"O Israel, *trust* thou in the LORD: He is their help and their shield" (Ps. 115:9);

"Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and *trust* in oppression and perverseness . . ." (Isa. 30:12);

"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and *trust* in chariots, because they are many" (31:1);

"they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou *trustedst*, with the sword" (Jer. 5:17);

"The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh, and all them that *trust* in him" (46:25);

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and *trust* in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" (Amos 6:1).

Thus, when we investigate the use of the Hebrew word *batach* from which *betach* is derived we find that it is *not* exclusively used in a *positive* sense in relation to Israel. In fact, in four out of

the eight examples shown above it is used to show how Israel trusted in the things they should not have done and developed a false sense of security. Isaiah 30:12; 31:1 and Amos 6:1 are examples involving the chastening of Israel by God because of their misplaced trust. Thus Ezekiel 38:8 is saying that Israel will be "in *betach*", that is, placing their trust in the powers of this world and not in God, when Gog comes down on the them.

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I would like to comment as follows on [Brother Mark Whittaker's letter](#). As shown in the table published with Brother Whittaker's letter, the word *betach*, translated 'safely' in Ezekiel 38, is applied in some cases to Israel in anticipation of her obedience to the laws of God (see Leviticus and Deuteronomy references), in others to the time of safety during the reign of Solomon, and there are other references to Israel in the future.

The safety of Israel in the past would have been by God actively bringing about conditions of peace in accordance with His promise, and, if necessary, suppressing the aggression of nations around. I believe that God is still deeply involved in the affairs of the nation of Israel, and that He has made a promise in Ezekiel 38 that Israel will dwell safely. This is not conditional on their obedience, but involves an assessment of their safety which is sufficient to give the confederacy described in verses 2-7 the opportunity to be brought forth to invade the land of Israel. Irrespective of the current actions of surrounding hostile nations, God's promise will be fulfilled as and when God requires.

If we look at one of the passages in which the word *betach* is used, Ezekiel 34, we have the answer to the questions of when safety will come to Israel, and whether in the case of Ezekiel 38 it occurs before or after Christ's return. Ezekiel 34:22,28 speaks of Israel being saved and being "no more . . . a prey", with the Lord making with them "a covenant of peace" so that they "dwell safely" (v. 25).

The peace of chapter 34 is categoric. When the Lord Jesus reigns it will not be possible for Israel to be a prey to the nations. Chapter 34 must refer to the Kingdom age, but, if chapter 38 refers to the same time as chapter 34, then it requires the Lord to break His covenant, for the peace promised in chapter 34 is final.

Israel's dwelling safely prophesied in chapter 38 leads to positive action by the nations against Israel, with Israel being invaded and pillaged and two thirds of them cut off, as stated in Zechariah 13:8-14:1. It can only be that the safety of chapter 38 is a temporary condition provided by God to allow the invasion of a confederacy, otherwise it would mean that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, stands by in Jerusalem without any support for the nation he comes to save, or action against the enemies of Israel. Chapter 34 excludes the idea that chapter 38 occurs after the return of Jesus.

If it is thought that a time of safety in Israel is impossible under present circumstances, we should be ready for the circumstances to change, perhaps suddenly. The events in New York on 11 September brought about immediate and dramatic changes amongst the nations, and continue to influence ongoing international relations, including those to do with Israel and the Middle East in general.

I am reminded of an article published in 1973 which stated: "All present indications are that the political power of the church of Rome is as good as finished. Fantasies about a political union between Rome and communism are ventilated from time to time but these lack even a vestige of Biblical support . . . even if such a monstrosity were to be begotten, the time for its gestation would be far longer than the political scene in the Middle East would allow". Yet at the end of the 1980s organised Communism came to a speedy end, opening up the way for Roman Catholic influence over all Europe to be extended almost overnight.

We should be aware as we watch the signs of the times and observe perhaps slow but steady progress that, when required, the Lord can change things in a moment. The interpretation of prophecy by our pioneering brethren has been visited many times by brethren and sisters for several generations, looking in depth, often through a glass very darkly, but time and time again being satisfied that the basic interpretations stand the test of time and are coming into much sharper focus in recent years.

As fundamentally differing views on prophecy can result in topics not being discussed, or can undermine our preaching activities, I am of the opinion that the only strife which should exist on these matters is that which the apostle Paul expressed in Philippians 1:27, "that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving to-

gether for the faith of the gospel", bearing in mind the exhortation, "be . . . of one mind" (2:2). God's Word is harmonious, and it is impossible for a variety of opposing views all to be right. It certainly is beneficial for us, and all who hear us, to express as much as we possibly can the one mind of the Lord, and it is our pleasure to search it out.

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In "[From the Editor's Postbag](#)" (p. 58) it is pointed out that Brother Thomas appears to have come to the conclusion that the dwelling safely of Ezekiel 38 in fact occurs after Christ's return.—T.B.

### The circumcision at Marah

I was rather taken aback by this bold title in the December 2001 issue of the Testimony (p. 451), and when I read the article was struck by the rapid application of types to what does not seem to be proved, nor perhaps provable.

The law of the Passover required all males to be circumcised before partaking of the Passover meal, and Joshua 5:5 establishes that those coming out of Egypt had been circumcised. After three days the pain from the operation subsides, so a three-day period is required for the operation and recovery. The Israelites were a people toughened by years of hard slavery; their women too were "lively", so minimal healing would be required.

The tenth plague was, of course, the death of the firstborn, and only those who had blood-sprinkled door posts and had faithfully kept Passover would be saved—Exodus 12 is very specific. Moses was able to command the people, including the "mixed multitude" who knew that "Egypt is destroyed" (Ex. 10:7). The first eight plagues had established his authority. He could now give them instructions for circumcision in connection with the last two plagues.

The ninth plague brought darkness over all Egypt, "but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (vv. 21,23). Verse 22 tells us that the darkness persisted for three days. Could this have been a providential plague on Egypt to allow all the men to comply with the Passover law while there was no work for three days?

But what proof have we besides this circumstantial evidence? Perhaps there is a clue in Psalm 105. This psalm gives a brief history of Israel in