Did Israel Fulfill Ezekiel's Dry Bones Prophecy in 1948?

Ezekiel 36–37 and the Regathering of Israel

Chris White
Independent Researcher | Chris White Ministries
Biblical Theology Research Series
Version 1.0 | November 27, 2026 | ORCID: 0009-0004-5050-4263

Abstract

Many Christians believe that the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 fulfilled the first half of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. On this reading, popularized by Hal Lindsey in 1970, the bones covered with flesh are the Jewish people restored as a nation, and the breath that enters the bodies is Israel's future conversion. I write as a premillennialist who expects God to restore Israel under the Messiah. Ezekiel 36–37 promises that God will cleanse the people he gathers, give them his Spirit, set a Davidic king over them, settle them in lasting peace, and place his sanctuary among them. None of this happened in 1948. Advocates answer that the restoration comes in two stages, with a return to the land first and a spiritual renewal later. Ezekiel rules this out. He says that the cities will be rebuilt on the day God cleanses Israel (36:33). When God explains the vision, he promises the land and his Spirit together, and he never mentions a time when Israel has the land without the Spirit (37:11–14). The people he gathers in 37:21–24 are ruled by David. Ezekiel gives strong reasons to expect a future restoration of Israel, and I find no good reason in these chapters to date its beginning to 1948.

Keywords: Ezekiel 36; Ezekiel 37; dry bones; Israel; 1948; regathering in unbelief; Hal Lindsey; premillennialism

1. How 1948 became a date in Bible prophecy

The State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948. In 1970 Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson published *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and ten million copies were in circulation by the end of the 1970s.[1] In a 2017 survey of Americans with evangelical beliefs, eighty percent said that the rebirth of Israel in 1948 and the regathering of the Jewish people fulfilled Bible prophecy.[2]

Lindsey read Ezekiel 36 and 37 as a prophecy in two steps. First God brings the Jewish people back from a worldwide dispersion and makes them a nation in their own land. Later he gives that nation a new heart and his Spirit. Lindsey found the same two steps in the vision of the bones. Ezekiel saw scattered bones come together and take on sinews, flesh, and skin, and he noticed that the bodies had no breath in them (Ezek. 37:8). Afterward breath entered them.

1 Erin A. Smith, "*The Late Great Planet Earth* Made the Apocalypse a Popular Concern," *Humanities* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2017).

2 LifeWay Research, *Evangelical Attitudes Toward Israel* (2017), 5, 7 (table 2). The survey of 2,002 adults offered two statements and named no biblical passage.

Lindsey took the assembled bodies to be the Jewish people restored as a nation in 1948, and the breath to be Israel's future spiritual rebirth.[3] He was still teaching this in 2019.[4]

I am a premillennialist. I believe that Jesus will return and reign on the earth, and I take Ezekiel's promises about the land, the people, and their king as promises to Israel that God will keep. My question is whether Ezekiel gives a reason to identify the events of 1948 with any part of what he promised.

2. What Ezekiel said would happen to Israel

Ezekiel prophesied among the Judeans deported to Babylon. They had lost their city, their temple, and their king. In the vision God sets Ezekiel in a valley of dry bones and tells him to prophesy to them. The bones come together and are covered with sinews, flesh, and skin, "but there was no breath in them" (37:8).[5] At a second command breath comes from the four winds, and the bodies live and stand on their feet (37:9–10). God then explains the vision:

> Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. (Ezek. 37:11)

The bones are Israel, and their dryness is the hopelessness the exiles were expressing. God promises to open their graves, bring them into the land of Israel, and put his Spirit in them (37:12–14).

In the next oracle God says that he will gather the people of Israel from among the nations, make them one nation in the land, and set one king over them (37:21–22). Chapter 36 makes the same promises without the pictures. God will gather Israel from all countries, sprinkle clean water on them, give them a new heart, and put his Spirit within them (36:24–27).

One part of this resembles modern history. God says, "I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land" (36:24; compare 37:21). Jewish people have come to the land from Europe, the Arab world, Ethiopia, and the former Soviet Union. Ezekiel also says that the desolate land will be tilled and its cities inhabited (36:8–11, 34–35), and visitors to Israel often quote those verses.

Ezekiel attaches four further promises to the gathering, and none of them was fulfilled in 1948.

God cleanses the people and gives them his Spirit. Israel was scattered for defiling the land with bloodshed and idols (36:17–19). God promises to cleanse the people from all their uncleanness, replace the heart of stone with a heart of flesh, and put his Spirit in them so that they keep his statutes (36:25–27). As a Christian I understand this to include Israel's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah (Rom. 11:26). Many Jewish people have believed in Jesus since the first century. The nation as a whole has not, which is why Lindsey placed the breath in the future.

---

3 Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 60–62. Page numbers follow the November 1980 printing.

4 Hal Lindsey, "A Miracle Most Astounding," *The Hal Lindsey Report*, July 31, 2019.

5 Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

David reigns. "And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd" (37:24). David had been dead for four centuries when Ezekiel wrote. The promise is of a ruler from David's line, and Thomas Constable and I both identify him as the Messiah.[6] The angel told Mary that her son would receive the throne of David and reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32–33). For a premillennialist that reign is a future public event. No son of David took the throne in 1948.

Families live in the land in lasting peace. The people will live in the land, "even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever," under an everlasting covenant of peace (37:25–26). They will dwell safely, "and none shall make them afraid" (34:28). The state proclaimed in 1948 was invaded at its birth and has fought wars in every generation since.

God's sanctuary stands among them. God says, "my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore" (37:28). Ezekiel had watched the glory of God leave the temple (10:18–19; 11:22–23), and this promise reverses that departure. No such sanctuary stands in Jerusalem today. Lindsey assigned this promise to the Messiah's kingdom.[7]

3. The case for a return in unbelief

Everyone in this discussion knows that the Messiah is not reigning in Jerusalem, so teachers who find 1948 in Ezekiel speak of stages. God brings Israel back to the land first, in unbelief, and brings the nation to faith later. Michael Rydelnik gives a careful defense of this view. By unbelief he means that the Jewish people as a whole have not yet put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah.[8]

The case rests on the order of events in the text. In chapter 36 God gathers the people in verse 24 and cleanses them in verse 25, which the King James Version begins with "Then." In the vision the bones receive flesh at the first command and breath at the second.[9] On this reading the modern return is the flesh, and the breath is still to come.

4. Why the two-stage reading fails

The order is correct, and it proves much less than the two-stage reading needs. Ezekiel names the gathering before the cleansing and sees bodies before he sees them breathe. A father who says that he will bring his children home and then wash them for dinner has named two acts in order, and no one expects years to pass between them. The modern reading needs the passage to show that the time between flesh and breath is a period of history, and to show which period. The passage shows neither, and three texts in these chapters contradict the two-stage reading.

4.1 The cities are rebuilt in the day of cleansing

Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. (Ezek. 36:33)

---

6 Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Ezekiel*, 2026 ed., comments on 37:24–28.

7 Lindsey and Carlson, *Late Great Planet Earth*, 60–62, quoting Ezek. 37:26.

8 Michael Rydelnik, "Is the Modern State of Israel a Fulfillment of Prophecy?" (paper presented at the Borough Park Symposium, 2014), 2.

9 Rydelnik, "Modern State of Israel," 5–8.

The rebuilt cities and farms of modern Israel are the evidence most often quoted for fulfillment. This verse places the resettled cities and rebuilt ruins in the day when God cleanses Israel from all its iniquities, and the comparison of the land to Eden follows in the same paragraph (36:34–36). The two-stage reading puts the rebuilt cities in the first stage and the cleansing in the second. Ezekiel puts them on the same day. The cities of modern Israel were rebuilt by a people who have not yet been cleansed, as both sides agree, so they are not the rebuilt cities of this passage.

Constable, who expects a literal fulfillment for Israel, says that the cleansing, the return, and the land's fruitfulness occur at the same time, and he denies that the regathering that began in 1948 fulfills these prophecies.[10]

4.2 God's explanation joins the Spirit and the land

God interprets the vision himself. He explains the bones, the graves, the life, and the land:

> Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. (Ezek. 37:12)

> And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD. (Ezek. 37:14)

The explanation never mentions bodies that have flesh and lack breath. Verse 12 promises the land, and verse 14 promises the Spirit, life, and the land together. If the order of clauses fixed the order of historical periods, verse 14 would give Israel the Spirit before the land, the reverse of what the two-stage reading needs.

The pause in verse 8 has a purpose in the vision. The Hebrew word *ruach* is the breath of verse 10, the winds of verse 9, and God's Spirit in verse 14.[11] God formed Adam from the dust and then breathed life into him (Gen. 2:7). In the same way Israel is shown as a body that cannot live until God gives it his Spirit.

Christopher Cone, a dispensational theologian, considered the suggestion that 1948 fulfills the first part of the vision and called it "a tough connection to make." His reason was that Israel's physical and spiritual restoration go together in the fulfillment of the new covenant.[12]

4.3 The gathered people have David as their king

Ezekiel 37:21 is the verse in chapter 37 most like the modern return. God gathers the children of Israel from among the nations and brings them into their own land. The sentence continues into the next three verses. The gathered people become one nation under one king (v. 22), God cleanses them (v. 23), and David is king over them (v. 24). The gathering in 37:21 is the gathering that brings Israel under the Messiah's reign. The two-stage reading needs Ezekiel to describe a gathered Israel that is uncleansed and without its king, and he never does.

---

10 Constable, *Notes on Ezekiel*, comments on 36:33–34 and on 36:33–38.

11 The King James Version translates the same word as "breath" in 37:5–10, "winds" and "wind" in 37:9, and "spirit" in 37:14.

12 Christopher Cone, "An Interview on the State of Contemporary Dispensationalism," interview by Adrian Isaacs, posted October 8, 2014.

4.4 How a fulfillment is recognized

The return from Babylon under Cyrus was a real, partial fulfillment of the restoration promises, and Scripture identifies it as one. The LORD stirred up Cyrus "that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled" (Ezra 1:1). No scripture identifies 1948 in that way, so the identification rests on Ezekiel's description. Jewish people have lived in the land under Persian, Greek, Roman, Ottoman, and British rule. Ezekiel's restoration differs from those periods by the cleansing, the Spirit, the reign of David, lasting peace, and the sanctuary. None of these appeared in 1948.

Even if the gathering came long before the cleansing, a reader would need a way to tell from Ezekiel when the gathering began. Ezekiel provides none.

5. The question of continuing sovereignty

The popular view usually treats 1948 as the start of a settlement that will last until Christ returns. Lance Lambert said so directly when he applied to his own generation the promise of Amos 9:15 that Israel would never again be uprooted.[13] I have a reason from outside Ezekiel to expect otherwise.

In Daniel 7 the fourth beast has ten horns, and the angel explains that they are ten kings. "Another shall rise after them," and he subdues three of the ten (Dan. 7:24). I understand this later ruler to be the Antichrist. A government of ten kings therefore exists before he appears.

Revelation 17 describes a beast with seven heads, which are seven kings (Rev. 17:9–10). In *A Bible Prophecy Timeline* I identify the first six as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Each of these empires ruled over Israel. I identify the seventh head as the government of the ten kings, and I infer that it will rule over Israel as the first six did.[14] Israel governs itself today. If my reading is right, Israel will come under foreign rule again before the Antichrist appears.

Jewish people could still live in the land during that time, as they did under Rome. The independence won in 1948 would end, and a state that loses its independence is not the permanent restoration Ezekiel describes.

Some teachers who see prophecy in 1948 already expect an interruption. Paige Patterson said in 2002 that he expected the Jewish people to be driven from the land once more before finally reclaiming it.[15] That expectation cannot be squared with Ezekiel. The people God gathers in chapter 37 live in the land "for ever" with their children and their children's children, and David is their prince (37:25). A gathering that ends in another expulsion is a different gathering from the one Ezekiel describes.

---

13 Lance Lambert, "The Church's Responsibility to Israel and the Jew" (address, 1975), under "Israel as the Fulfilment of the Word of God."

14 Chris White, *A Bible Prophecy Timeline* (CWM Publishing, 2026), chap. 1.

15 Michael Foust, "Theologians Tackle Question of Israel, Biblical Prophecy," *Baptist Press*, May 6, 2002.

6. What can be dated from Ezekiel

Ezekiel 36 and 37 describe the restoration of Israel in enough detail to recognize it. God gathers the whole house of Israel, cleanses them, and puts his Spirit in them. David’s heir is their king, their children’s children live in the land in peace, and God’s sanctuary is among them forever. I expect all of this when Christ reigns. None of it happened in 1948.

The two-stage reading was offered to explain that gap, and it fails on Ezekiel’s own words. He puts the rebuilt cities on the day of cleansing. God’s explanation of the vision promises the Spirit and the land together. The people gathered in 37:21 are ruled by David.

God’s providence has governed the history of the Jewish people, including their survival through the twentieth century and their return to the land, and a Christian can give thanks for it. The declaration of 1948 established a state. Ezekiel gives no good reason to treat that event as the beginning of the restoration he describes.

Bibliography

Cone, Christopher. “An Interview on the State of Contemporary Dispensationalism.” Interview by Adrian Isaacs. Posted October 8, 2014.

Constable, Thomas L. *Notes on Ezekiel*. 2026 edition. Sonic Light.

Foust, Michael. “Theologians Tackle Question of Israel, Biblical Prophecy.” *Baptist Press*, May 6, 2002.

Lambert, Lance. “The Church’s Responsibility to Israel and the Jew.” Address, 1975.

LifeWay Research. *Evangelical Attitudes Toward Israel*. 2017.

Lindsey, Hal. “A Miracle Most Astounding.” *The Hal Lindsey Report*, July 31, 2019.

Lindsey, Hal, with C. C. Carlson. *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970.

Rydelnik, Michael. “Is the Modern State of Israel a Fulfillment of Prophecy?” Paper presented at the Borough Park Symposium, 2014.

Smith, Erin A. “*The Late Great Planet Earth* Made the Apocalypse a Popular Concern.” *Humanities* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2017).

White, Chris. *A Bible Prophecy Timeline*. CWM Publishing, 2026.

Publication Information

Series: Biblical Theology Research Series

Publisher: Chris White Ministries

Author: Chris White, Independent Researcher

ORCID: 0009-0004-5050-4263

Version: 1.0, November 27, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24594500

Preferred citation: White, Chris. “Did Israel Fulfill Ezekiel’s Dry Bones Prophecy in 1948? Ezekiel 36–37 and the Regathering of Israel.” Biblical Theology Research Series. Version 1.0. Chris White Ministries, 2026. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24594500.