

**ISRAEL – LAND OF UNWALLED VILLAGES , A WALL
AND A COMING WAR
By Andy Walton**

Israel – full of contradictions!

Israel is a land of contradictions at the moment.

It is, in a sense, confident of its military might and it still has the support from powerful nations such as America.

It has reduced the number of attacks massively on its people by building a wall that snakes through the land which has increased the feeling of security. The weekly suicide bombings have stopped.

On the other hand Israel's confidence in their own military might has been shaken with the Lebanon war in 2006. They were taken by surprise and they did not win the war against Hezbollah who continued to fire rockets into Israel until the very minute the ceasefire came into effect. Hezbollah was NOT defeated.

This has led Israel's enemies to believe (perhaps for the first time) that they really can beat and destroy Israel in an all out war. We see Hezbollah and Hamas continue to mass missiles for the next round of hostilities.

So we have confidence on the one hand and yet on the other is it clearly misguided and there is a sense of foreboding in Israel as well.

In Ezekiel 38 we read of Israel dwelling safely at the time the Gogian forces invade.

8 After many days thou [Gog / Russia] shalt be visited: in the latter years thou [Gog/Russia] shalt come into the land *that is* brought back from the sword, *and is* gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall **dwell safely** all of them.

10 It shall also come to pass, *that* at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought:

11 And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of **unwalled villages**; I will go to them that are **at rest**, that **dwell safely** , all of them dwelling **without walls**, and having **neither bars nor gates**,

So when Russia invades Israel is dwelling "safely."

This leads many to suggest that there must be a comprehensive peace agreement made between Israel and her enemies. To such an extent that Israel in fact dismantles the wall that has been built and also the security checkpoints.

Perhaps this is the case. But it is also possible to see the situation described in Ezekiel 38 as the exact situation that we see NOW.

Before we look at the "dwelling safely" and the "unwalled villages" etc there is another passage that is worth looking at in relation to the current situation and also in parallel with Ezekiel 38. That is Ezekiel 13. Just read carefully these following 4 verses.

Ezekiel's Prophecy Chapter 13

- 10 ¶ Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and *there was* no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered *morter*:
- 11 Say unto them which daub *it* with untempered *morter*, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend *it*.
- 12 Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where *is* the daubing wherewith ye have daubed *it*?
- 13 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even rend *it* with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in *my* fury to consume *it*.

We have the following key points.

1. The people in Israel have been seduced
2. The seductive message is one of "PEACE"
3. Then a wall is built with untempered mortar
4. HOWEVER there is NO peace and
5. GOD DESTROYS THE WALL IN HIS FURY
6. WITH STORM AND HAILSTONES

For some time now Israel has been working on a "land for peace" deal.

This has bought NO peace though – in fact as fast as they gave up land more destruction came. Israel entered into the OSLO accords under the false sense that trading land to the Palestinians, allowing the formation of the Palestinian Authority and arming the Palestinian security force would bring peace to Israel. It did not. Israel further compromised and entered the "Road Map" for Middle East peace by giving up more land and concessions to the Palestinians. It do not bring peace. Israel pulled its forces out of southern Lebanon, allowing Hezbollah free reign over the territory to the north of Israel. Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and acceded control of Jewish settlements and synagogues to the Palestinians. Israel's leaders said it would bring peace. It did not bring peace to Israel. Instead it bought chaos, suicide bombings and increased terrorism.

A wall is built

And so Israel's leaders decided to build a wall. A wall that snaked through the centre of Israel and around Jerusalem. A 436 mile long wall! The wall is the largest construction project ever undertaken by the nation. This wall would bring peace the leaders promised.

"After 35 years of living with the Palestinians and facing this blatant, ugly, terrorist wave, Israel had no choice but to put up a barrier as an important element in an overall defensive system that would intercept those on their way to blow themselves up among us." Minister Uzi Landau, a Knesset Member since 1984, who serves as Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and previously served as Minister of Internal Security.

The wall or barrier would protect them.
And so the land was divided.
These events are precisely as detailed in Ezekiel 13 in points 1 to 4 made above. Read them again!
But note this one thing. It is GOD who destroys the wall NOT Israel. It is God in his FURY who does this with STORM and HAILSTONES.

Why does he do this?

Because Israel have no right to trade his land. They have no right to divide it as they have done with a wall. Their trust is in a foolish wall. The word “untempered” used in relation to the wall means “Foolishness”. They have been fools. They have not trusted in God but in their own strength.

Now compare Ezekiel 38

18 And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, *that my **fury** shall come up in my face.*

22and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that *are* with him, an **overflowing rain**, and **great hailstones**, fire, and brimstone.

So in identical language to Ezekiel 13 we have God saying that in his FURY he causes Gog to fall in Israel using STORM and HAILSTONES.

The Hebrew word used for “hailstones” in Ezekiel 13 is the same word used in Ezekiel 38 and this is the ONLY other time it is used!

The point is this. The two passages are talking about the same event. It is not a peace agreement that enables Israel to dismantle the wall they have built. It is God in his fury that brings this about. His judgement on his people. He uses Gog to do this!

Therefore it is unwise to predict a time of peace for Israel that will see them dismantle the wall that snakes through the country. GOD WILL DESTROY IT!

Unwalled villages and safety

So then what does Ezekiel mean when he says that at the time of Gog’s invasion they live “safely” and in “unwalled villages” and “without bars and gates”

In Ezekiel’s time villages were surrounded by rock walls for protection from enemies. However modern Israel is a nation consisting of unwalled settlements and cities. This is true in spite of the security checkpoints that control access to most settlements. It is also true in spite of the wall that Israel is constructing between certain Jewish and Palestinian controlled areas. Walls, bars and gates still exist, but they do not play the same first line of defence role that they did in ancient times. To a large extent modern weapons have made the ancient protection provided by walls, bars and gates obsolete. They do not provide protection from rockets, missiles or mortars.



While Ezekiel does state that Israel will be “at rest” he does not actually state that Israel will be completely at peace or without enemies. The very fact that Gog leads a huge alliance of armies against Israel is evidence that Israel will have many enemies and will not completely be at peace. I believe the reference to being “at rest” may simply indicate that Israel will not be engaged in a state of war.

One point that Ezekiel emphasises is that Israel will “dwell safely”. Ezekiel stresses this point three times in verse 38:8, 38:11, and 38:14. The key word that shapes this interpretation is the Hebrew word “betach” which the KJV translates as “safely” in all three verses.

Betach or betah

Strong’s Concordance shows that the KJV has translated this word “betach” in various ways throughout the scriptures of the Old Testament. It is variously taken to mean: safely, safe, safety, secure, securely, boldly, confidence, assurance, and hope. In the majority of instances the word is taken to mean safely or safety. The context of how “betach” is used in scripture indicates that the word can imply safety in either a physical sense or in a mental sense as relating to a state of mind.

However, there is another side to the word “betach.” It is also understood to sometimes mean: without care, careless, or carelessly. In this context “betach” describes a group of people, or a place such as a city, in a mental state of assumed security where they are unsuspecting and confident in their safety and security while that is in reality a false perception. Thus “betach” can mean having a false sense of security.

We will take a look at several examples concerning how the word “betach” is utilized in scripture. Several passages will emphasize the importance of the mental state of mind associated with “betach” and how dangerous dwelling under a false sense of security can be. Although many scholars equate “betach” with safety, we will see that “betach” can actually mean just the opposite.

There are 10 examples following. If you are convinced after one or two examples just go straight to the conclusion!

1 Kings 4:25

“And Judah and Israel dwelt **safely**, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon.” The KJV renders “betach” as safely in 1 Kings 4:25 and clearly that is exactly what it means. The context of the surrounding passage indicates that Solomon had established peace on all of his borders.

Genesis 34:25

“And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city **boldly**, and slew all the males.” In this KJV translation of Genesis 34:25, “betach” is rendered as boldly. This is the first use of the word “betach” in the Bible. It is interesting to examine how this use of

“betach” is rendered by other translations. Instead of boldly, *The Living Torah* states “without arousing suspicion.”ⁱ *The Jerusalem Bible* uses the word “unresisted.”ⁱⁱ The NASB utilizes “unawares,” while the NIV employs the word “unsuspecting.”

Where the KJV translation of “betach” as boldly seems to point to the frame of mind of Simeon and Levi, the other translations point to the unsuspecting frame of mind of the men of the city of Sechem. The occupants of Sechem suffered from a false sense of security. The city was unsuspecting which resulted in all of the males being killed. While the Hebrew word “betach” relates to the concept of safety or security, we can see in this example that the people of Sechem were, in reality, anything but safe or secure.

Judges 8:11

“And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was **secure**.” In Judges 8:11, the KJV translates “betach” as secure. In this case, *The Jerusalem Bible* also interprets “betach” as secure but does so by stating “for the camp thought itself secure.”ⁱⁱⁱ Yaakov Elman translates this passage in *The Living Nach*, to the effect that the camp was “off guard.”^{iv} The NASB renders this as “when the camp was unsuspecting.” The NIV also utilizes the word unsuspecting for “betach” in this verse.

“Unsuspecting” is the best understanding of “betach” in this example. The very wording of Judges 8:11 implies that the security of these people was an illusion because Gideon was able to successfully attack the camp. These people had a false sense of security. They certainly were not secure or safe in any real sense.

Judges 18:7

“Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt **careless**, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and **secure**; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man.” In Judges 18:7 the KJV translates “betach” as careless in the first part of the verse. The word translated as secure later in this verse is the Hebrew word “bâtach” which is related to “betach.” Instead of careless, both the NASB and *The Living Nach* render “betach” as “in security” while both the NIV and *The Jerusalem Bible* understand it as “in safety.”

The five men were spies from the tribe of Danites, who were spying out the land. Ultimately, in Judges 18:27, the Danites attacked and destroyed the city of Laish. Thus, the occupants of Laish were not dwelling in any real condition of safety or security, but were living under a false sense of security.

Jeremiah 49:31

“Arise, get you up unto the wealthy nation, that dwelleth without **care**, saith the LORD, which have neither gates nor bars, which dwell alone.” The KJV translates “betach” in Jeremiah 49:31

as care in the sense of being without care or carefree. *The Jerusalem Bible* renders this as “dwells in security.” The NASB has this as “which lives securely” while the NIV translates it as “lives in confidence.”

Can the concept of living in safety or security or dwelling securely relate to one’s mental sense of confidence? Can having a false sense of security lead people to live seemingly without care, carefree, or carelessly?

Ezekiel 30:9

“In that day shall messengers go forth from me in ships to make the **careless** Ethiopians afraid, and great pain shall come upon them, as in the day of Egypt: for, lo, it cometh.” In Ezekiel 30:9 the KJV translates “betach” as careless. The NASB renders this as “to frighten **secure** Ethiopia” while the NIV translates it as “to frighten Cush out of her **complacency**.” *The Jerusalem Bible* renders this passage as “to terrify the **confident** men of Kush.”

We see that the concept of “betach” as secure in this example of its use is really about the mental state of mind of the Ethiopians. The prophet Ezekiel is describing a pending judgment from God which reveals that the Ethiopians were not really safe or secure. The Ethiopians were under a false sense of security.

Isaiah 47:8

“Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest **carelessly**, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children.” The KJV translates “betach” in Isaiah 47:8 as carelessly. The NASB and *The Jerusalem Bible* both translate this use of “betach” as securely, while the NIV renders it as security in the sense of “lounging in your security.”

The context of Isaiah 47:9-11 makes it clear that these people are neither secure nor safe. Both the loss of children and widowhood will suddenly fall upon them. These people are not only dwelling under a false sense of confidence or security, they are living in denial of the true circumstances they face. Thus in this example of “betach” they are dwelling carelessly.

Zephaniah 2:15

“This is the rejoicing city that dwelt **carelessly**, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.” Zephaniah 2:15 provides another instance where the KJV translates “betach” as carelessly. The NASB and *The Jerusalem Bible* both render this as securely, while the NIV translates it as in safety.

This is another example of the Hebrew word “betach” being used to demonstrate that a false sense of confidence or security can lead to disaster.

Ezekiel 39:6

“And I will send fire on Magog, and among them that dwell **carelessly** in the isles: and they shall know that I am the LORD.” This is the fourth instance that the word “betach” shows up in the prophecy of Gog and Magog. Instead of safely, the KJV translates this occurrence of “betach” in Ezekiel 39:6 as carelessly. *The Jerusalem Bible* renders this use of “betach” as securely, while both the NASB and the NIV translations have it as in safety.

Since God is promising to send a judgment of fire upon these peoples who dwell in the isles or coastlands, they are obviously not living in true safety or security. They just think that they are safe. They are living carelessly, unsuspecting, dwelling under a false sense of confidence or security. They are also living in denial of God’s promise to send a judgment of fire upon them. This is another form of carelessness – discounting God’s prophetic scriptures.

Conclusion

These are only a few examples of the use of the Hebrew word “betach” in scripture. Some uses of “betach” focus on God’s protection of Israel as the defining characteristic which brings safety to Israel. This is how the word is used in Deuteronomy 12:10; Psalm 4:8; and Psalm 78:53. In Leviticus “betach” is used in the context of Israel dwelling in the land safely or in safety but only if they keep God’s statutes and commandments (Leviticus 25:18-19, 26:5). Many other verses which incorporate the word “betach” look forward to the time when God will give Israel rest from all of her enemies so that Israel will dwell in safety. These uses of “betach” point to the future safety of Israel following the Day of the Lord judgments (Deuteronomy 33:28; Jeremiah 23:6, 32:37, 33:16; Ezekiel 28:26, 34:25, 34:27, 34:28, and 39:26; Hosea 2:18; and Zechariah 14:11).

However, it should be clear from the lessons of the cited examples that the surface interpretation of “betach” as: safe, safely, safety, secure, or securely may not present the actual condition of the people who are being written about. The state of mind of the people must be considered in the context of their larger surroundings. Are they dwelling safely or are they harboring a false sense of security? Are they dwelling carelessly when they should know better?

The context of Ezekiel 38 has Israel looked upon as a vulnerable prey by a number of enemy nations. This is not the characteristic of a nation which is under the strong protection of a covenant of peace, but the characteristic of a nation which has left itself vulnerable by placing its trust in the wrong places. This is the characteristic of a nation which harbors a false sense of security. Israel will be dwelling carelessly in regards to its own real security interests.

Does this sound familiar? Israel’s present misplaced false sense of security is quickly catching up to her place in God’s prophetic scripture. The prophecy of Ezekiel 38 and 39 reveals that a massive invasion by an alliance of nations will suddenly strike Israel to take advantage of her apparent weakness.

But what of the passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 that says “For when they shall say, Peace and safety [security]; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”

We must note that it does not say when there IS peace and safety but when they shall SAY peace and safety. The word “say” means to talk about and discuss. We have seen the peace talks and discussions take place for many years. We saw for instance a peace conference take place November 2007 between Israel and the Palestinians. We hear constant talk of the “Roadmap to Peace”.

We have US President Obama who has been given the Nobel peace prize. When he received it he said “we must all do our part to resolve those conflicts that have caused so much pain and hardship over so many years, and that effort must include an unwavering commitment that finally realizes that the rights of all Israelis and Palestinians to **live in peace and security in nations of their own.**”

We have now the prospect of peace talks occurring again. Once more a time of people SPEAKING about peace and security. On August 20th 2010 the following leaders said these words in relation to Israel and the Palestinians.

Hillary Clinton said in her statement that she wants a “viable Palestinian state living side by side in **peace and security** with Israel.” The Quartet made a statement saying they want two nations living in “**peace and security**”. The British Foreign Secretary said “A two-state solution is the only hope for lasting **peace and security**. Today’s announcement is a courageous step towards that goal.”

To conclude. We know that when people speak of “peace and safety” that at that very time sudden destruction comes. We also know from Ezekiel 38 that Israel does NOT have to dismantle the walls and be living in peace at the time of Gog’s invasion.

We should be looking for a future time when Israel is truly settled at peace with her neighbours to the extent that the wall and all its security checkpoints have been destroyed. That time is the coming kingdom when Christ shall reign as King over the whole world.

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ⁱ Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *The Living Torah*, (New York: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1981), p. 165.

ⁱⁱ Harold Fisch, ed., *The Jerusalem Bible*, (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Ltd., 1992), p. 40.

ⁱⁱⁱ Harold Fisch, ed., *The Jerusalem Bible*, p. 303.

^{iv} Yaakov Elman, *The Living Nach*, (Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1994), p.126.