

One of the most painful challenges that we face in a fallen world is *division*. I really don’t like division. When I encounter division of any kind it consumes my thoughts and makes me emotionally fatigued. Division makes my head hurt and my heart ache. Do you feel the same way?

The year 2020 has been a year that has seen a lot of division. We’ve seen racial division and political division. When we look at the Christian church we see a seemingly endless list of denominations. And inside the local church there can sometimes be divisions.

Does God in his word offer us any help when we face division? Well the Israelites went through a painful division. When King David was king the Israelites were one unified country. But King David’s son Solomon committed idolatry. And God told Solomon, “Because of your idolatry, I’m going to tear ten of the 12 tribes of Israel away from you.”

And when Solomon’s son Rehoboam became king, the northern ten tribes came to him and said, “Make our work lighter.” And Rehoboam said, “No, I’m going to make it harder.” And the ten tribes said, “We’re done.” And from that day forward the kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms. The Israelites knew about the pain of division.

And in the time of Ezekiel, whom we are reading from today, it’s not the like the division had recently happened. At the time of Ezekiel, the kingdom had been divided for more than three hundred years.¹ Plus, the northern kingdom had been taken into exile by Assyria. And the southern kingdom had been taken into exile in Babylon. There seemed to be no hope that the tribes could ever be reunited.² There seemed to be no hope that this division could ever be healed.

But then God told Ezekiel to take two sticks of wood. My kids like to pick up sticks of wood when we go on walks. And when we get home they place the sticks of wood right in front of our front door. I brought a couple of sticks with me today. God told Ezekiel to take a stick of wood. And he told him to write on one of the sticks, “Belonging to Judah and the tribes associated with him” (Ezekiel 37:16). And he told him to take another stick and write on it, “Belonging to Joseph and the tribes associated with him” (Ezekiel 37:16). And then he told Ezekiel to put the two sticks together so that they formed one stick in his hand. And he told Ezekiel to hold the sticks before the people of Israel.

What do you think God was teaching the Israelites? He was teaching them that the tribes would be reunited into one nation. The two sticks represented the divided nation. But they would be reunited in God’s hand.

They would be reunited under one king. God says, “**My servant David will be king over them**” (Ezekiel 37:24). Who is God talking about when he says, “My servant *David* will be king over them”? David had died almost four hundred years before this.³ Well, David pointed forward to someone greater. David pointed forward to Jesus. Jesus came to his own people the Jews. Jesus said that he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24; See also Matthew 10:6). And then missionaries went out into all the world to make disciples of both Jews and Gentiles. And every since then the Holy Spirit has been gathering both Jews and Gentiles into the Holy Christian Church, united under one Shepherd, God’s servant David, the greater David, Jesus.

¹ The kingdom was divided in about 930 BC (Zondervan NIV study Bible). Ezekiel wrote this after the city of Jerusalem fell in 586 BC (Iain Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

² I owe this insight to Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 393.

³ King David died in 970 BC. (NIV Zondervan Study Bible).

Christ is the answer to all of our divisions. The answer to racial division is Christ. In Christ are united people of every race and every nation. When the apostle John saw a vision of the saints triumphant, he saw **“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9).**

Christ is the answer to divisions between denominations. Even if we are in different denominations we still have a spiritual unity because of our common faith in Christ. Doctrinal differences are still important because Jesus tells us to hold to his teaching (John 8:31). But as one commentator pointed out, in heaven there will be doctrinal differences because we will all know and believe God’s word perfectly.⁴ We will be completely and perfectly united with all Christians everywhere.

All believers, people from every race and every Christian denomination, will be completely and perfectly united in heaven because Jesus overcame the division that we all equally faced. You see the biggest and deepest division that any of us have ever faced is the division between us and God. Isaiah said, **“Your sins have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:2).** Our lack of love toward our fellow human beings caused a division between us and God. The part that we have contributed to the various divisions in our lives has also contributed to the division between us and God. We are so quick to take offense at the words and actions of others, how quickly we forgot how deeply our words and actions have offended our God. But the God whom we disobeyed gave up his own Son to heal the division between us and him. How can we not do everything we can to heal the divisions between us and others?

“God said, “I will save them from all their sinful backsliding and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 37:23). Jesus died to save us from our sinful backsliding. The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John). Jesus’ death on the cross reconciled us to God. God healed the division between us and him so that we could be with him forever *in heaven*.

One commentator pointed out that one of the divisions that the Israelites experienced was the division between them and *their land*.⁵ The northern tribes were carried away from the promised land by the Assyrians and the southern tribes were carried away from the promised land by the Babylonians. But God promised that he would bring them back to their own land. **“I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back to their own land” (Ezekiel 37:21).** This promise is fulfilled *ultimately* when God brings his believers into the true promised land of heaven.

And in heaven we will be with God. **My dwelling place will be with them.” (Ezekiel 37:26).** And like Paul said in our second lesson we will be with the Lord *forever* (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Commentators point out that in our passage from Ezekiel today the word *forever* is used a lot (Ezekiel 37:25 (2 times), 26, 28). We will be in *heaven*. We will be with *the Lord*. And it will be *forever*.

In this world we sometimes have to face division. Division from other people. Division from our homeland of heaven. And worst of all, our sins divided us from God. But in heaven we will be completely united with every other believer in Jesus. We will be united in our homeland of heaven. And we will be united once and for all with our God. We will see him face to face. Then we will truly be the saints triumphant. Look forward to it. Amen.

⁴ See the good comments of Iain Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 442.

⁵ Daniel Block, *Ezekiel Chapters 25-48*, 410, 412.