

Ezekiel's Vision of Israel's Restoration

Part 1

—
Merrill F. Unger

The thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy contains a vision which, because of its importance and graphic character, places it at once in the forefront of major Old Testament passages dealing with the return of Israel to its homeland. Indeed, in portions of Scripture abounding in magnificent and glowing accounts of Israel's future hope and glory, the vision of the dry bones stands as one of the most striking and arresting portraiture of the nation's restoration to be found anywhere in the prophetic Word. Its language is compelling and pregnant. Its imagery vivid and trenchant. Its scope sweeping and expansive. Its theme grand and elevated. Accordingly, the proper interpretation of the vision is of vast importance in eschatological study and far-reaching in its ramifications.

The Vision Misinterpreted and Misunderstood

However, despite the vitality and significance of this remarkable prophetic passage and the timeliness of its message, it is widely misunderstood and misapplied. Much error and confusion cling to it. Ignorance abounds with regard to it. Much of the misunderstanding may be attributed to fantastic and unworkable eschatological theories which close, rather than open, the truth, and veil it in darkness, rather than flood it with light. Or, on the other hand, much of the blame may be laid at the door of sheer neglect, even on the part of theologians and Bible teachers. The theme has been avoided by many as being altogether obtuse and incomprehensible. It is astonishing how many students of the Word approach such highly wrought symbolic portions of prophetic Scripture like Ezekiel, Daniel or the Revelation with an emotion somewhat akin to terror, which seems to paralyze them into an agnostic attitude of "I don't know. I can't know!" As a consequence, many do not try to know, avoiding such themes altogether. The resulting toll of such neglect in ignorance and error is appalling.

First, then, in dealing with this subject, it will be necessary to focus attention upon

I. Various Erroneous Views

1. *The First Erroneous View Is That the Vision Describes the Physical Resurrection of the Dead in General.* This position, although espoused by Jerome, and in later times more especially defended by Calov, and most ardently championed by Kliefoth, must be rejected, not because the doctrine of the resurrection of the body would not have been a potent consolation to the pious-hearted in Israel, or because that doctrine was not then known, but simply because, in the prophet's own explanation, the bones are declared specifically to be those, not of the whole family of man, but merely of "the house of Israel," and because careful analysis of the passage will disclose that *physical* resurrection either individual, national, or general is not at all in view.

The phenomenon of physical resurrection is employed merely to depict graphically the resurrection of a nation of living people, who are nationally and spiritually dead because in political and spiritual chaos, scattered and harassed among the nations. The future return of this people (the Israelitish nation) to political autonomy and spiritual blessing in their own land, *is* their resurrection. Accordingly, it is a resurrection with which not a single *physically* dead person is concerned.

For this reason it appears obvious that Jerome, Calov and Kliefoth labor under serious embarrassment to prove a general physical resurrection from the imagery of the vision, especially in the face of the divine interpretation as given in verses 11–14 . It is manifestly a poor makeshift resorted to by Jerome, following the idea of the Fathers, to make verses 11–14 treat of the resurrection of the saints (believers) when, as Keil aptly comments, this “cannot be reconciled either with

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the words or with the context of our prophecy, and has evidently originated in perplexity.”

The attempt of Calov and Kliefoth to reconcile their interpretation of the vision with the divine exposition in verses 11–14 is little better than Jerome’s awkward bungle. They boldly and arbitrarily assume that verses 11–14 contain simply an application of the doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead, which, they maintain, is taught in the vision of the dry bones. Keil, with critical acumen, deftly exposes the fallacy of this bad piece of exegesis with the succinct observation that this “assumption...by no means exhausts the meaning of the words, ‘These bones are the whole house of Israel.’” Fairbairn, too, shows this view to be “...manifestly untenable, as it breaks in two separate parts what is obviously but one discourse, and regards as an independent action what was done only with a view to its intended application.”

This view must consequently be discarded, as it embraces two errors: first, that physical resurrection is taught in this vision; second, that Scripture teaches the doctrine of a general resurrection. It is amazing how this second error is inextricably imbedded in theological thinking, and how much positive harm it has wrought in obscuring the truth and in impeding a full and accurate understanding of the whole field of eschatology.

2. The Second Faulty View To Be Examined Is That the Vision Depicts the Restoration of Israel, but Also Includes Physical Resurrection. This position, notably held by the late Dr. Bullinger, while manifestly an improvement over the first view in that it does not violate the basic premise of the divine interpretation that “the bones are the whole house of Israel,” nor does it interject the confusion of a general resurrection, is nevertheless exposed to serious objection in that it retains the mistake of introducing physical resurrection into this prophecy. Precisely, the contention is that, previous to the establishment of the millennial kingdom, God will resurrect all the descendants of Israel, and will establish them in the land of Palestine.

Such an interpretation cannot be true for a number of reasons. In the first place, the land of Palestine, even if taken to include the larger limits promised to Abraham, extending from the River of Egypt to the river Euphrates (Gen 15:18), and from Hamath on the north (Ezek 48:1) to Kadesh on the south (Ezek 48:28), could hardly accomodate such a vast multitude. But, be that as it may, in the second place the scope of the vision itself forbids the introduction of the physically dead. That the term “graves” (v. 12) does not denote literal graves is obvious, because the bones were not in graves at all, but strewn confusedly over the face of the valley. The graves are clearly symbolical of the nation as being buried among the Gentiles. That the cry of the “bones” (v. 11) is not the cry of individual physically dead Israelites, but the cry of a physically alive but spiritually and nationally dead people, is evident from the very fact and the nature of their words: “Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.” Paraphrased, the meaning is: Our Israelitish nation is dead. We are nationally and spiritually dried up. Our national hope of kingdom status and of blessings under our Messiah is lost. It is ‘all over with us’ as a people. God has forgotten us as a nation and cast us off forever.” In the

third instance, the event could not delineate a general resurrection of the physically dead of Israel, but only of Israelites living in foreign countries, for nothing is said about the opening of any graves in the land of Israel. “Behold, I will open your grave [among the nations], and cause you to come out of your graves [among the nations], O my people, and I will bring you into the land of Israel” (v. 12). Larkin’s summarization of this verse is well-directed and pointed: “This, therefore, could not be

a general resurrection of the dead of Israel, but only of Israelites who lived in other countries.”

Moreover, if the resurrection spoken of by Daniel (Dan 12:2) is taken to refer to Daniel’s people, the Jews—and to them alone, as manifestly it must without evident violation of the scope and context of the passage, then added corroborating evidence is furnished that there is not to be a general resurrection of all Daniel’s people, the Jews, before the millennial Kingdom; for the prophet’s plain intimation is that only some shall rise at that time. The “many of them”, are accordingly, “the many of” Daniel’s people, the Jews (the twice-repeated “thy people” of verse 1). The “sleep” is their national and spiritual death, as scattered and persecuted. The “dust of the earth” is the grave of their shame and national degradation as tossed to and fro among the nations of the globe. Their awakening is the figure of resurrection used to represent their national revival in the end of this age, preceding their conversion and kingdom. The “some” who awake to “everlasting life” are the regathered of Israel who refuse the false Messiah (John 5:43; 2 Thess 2:4), and who are preserved through “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer 30:7) to enjoy “everlasting life” in the kingdom. The “some” who are to arise to “shame and everlasting contempt [abhorrence]” are those who accept the false Messiah in their national revival, and who consequently share the eternal woe of all those who receive the “mark of the Beast” (Rev 14:10, 11).

The same figure is thus made use of in Daniel 12:2 as in Ezekiel 37 to portray the national restoration of Israel in the last days. Neither passage, therefore, has anything to do with physical resurrection.

The mistake of reading physical resurrection into the prophecy of the dry bones has led to wrong interpretation of a very serious nature, which, sadly enough, has been embraced by many Christians. Because “graves” are mentioned, besides the dry bones and their resurrection, the superficial conclusion is hastily reached that physical resurrection is taught. Systems like Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others who teach a so-called “larger hope” and a second chance for the unsaved dead, involving a restitution of the lost, use this vision as a basis for this invention. Since it is held that all the Israelites who have died in an impenitent state will be physically raised and saved, the Gentile dead will also share in a second chance!

Little argument is needed to refute this fabrication when it is comprehended that there is no allusion to the physically dead in this vision, and when the Scriptural truth is perceived that there is a two-fold resurrection, a resurrection of the just and that of the unjust, separated as to time and by no means contemporaneous (John 5:28, 29; Rev 20:5). A. C. Gaebelein effectively dissolves this theological vagary: “According to the above theory, there would have to be a third resurrection, a resurrection for a second chance, and ultimate salvation for those who died in their sins. Of such a resurrection the Bible knows nothing.”

3. *The Third Mistaken View to Be Examined Is That the Vision Represents Spiritual Resurrection or the Conversion of an Individual Soul.* To this opinion it may be replied that the vision embraces spiritual resurrection or conversion, but only of a whole nation, the nation Israel, as an indispensable concomitant of its national resurrection. Individual conversion is not in view at all. It may perhaps be legitimate, upon occasion, to use this very effective imagery to preach

salvation to the lost, and doubtless multitudes have been saved by such a handling of the passage, yet the truth must be remembered that such a treatment of this section of Scripture must never be thought of as an exposition or explanation of its precise meaning.

4. *The Fourth Incorrect View Is that the Vision Sets Forth the Restoration of Israel, but It Is to Be Spiritually Applied to the Church.* This is the spiritualizing method which takes such a vision, together with hundreds of others

of similar purport dealing with Israel's future restoration, and applies it en masse to the church, totally ignoring the future of God's elect nation and its coming glory. It is lamentable to discover how widespread and popular this pernicious practice is. Tragic indeed it is to learn that this method indicates the general trend pursued by commentators.

Take, for example, Carl Friedrich Keil. With discriminating skill and keen insight he brilliantly shows that the vision does not represent the resurrection of all the dead, but only the raising to life of the nation Israel out of "the graves of its political and spiritual death, and brought back into its own land." But then he proceeds forthwith to shy away from what he calls "Jewish millenarian hopes" and the "literal interpretation of the prophetic announcements," spiritualizing the literal return of the Jewish people to Palestine. He is somewhat like a cow giving a good bucket of milk and then kicking it over.

This popular and deeply entrenched method of exegesis is evil, as it robs the Christian of the true key which unlocks the prophetic portions of Scripture. Little wonder eschatology is in such a deplorable state of confusion! Nor is it surprising that the average treatise on Systematic Theology relegates the doctrine of last things to a pathetically obscure corner, or passes it over with a meagre and superficial treatment, utterly incongruous with the sublimity and the importance of the subjects embraced in its scope. Little wonder the whole field of prophecy in many minds is practically synonymous with that which is mysteriously incomprehensible and abstrusely unfathomable!

William Kelly shows that this strong tendency toward applying to the Christian Church what belongs specifically and solely to Israel is a part of the "first and widest and most tenacious corruption of Christianity against which the Apostle fought so valiantly."

It does seem strange that those who think the best safeguard against judaizing is to deny that the Jews will ever be reinstated as a people and restored to their own land, fall into the worst form of this ancient heresy when they take the prophecies of Israel's coming glory, and appropriate them to Christendom now or the Church in glory. This is indeed to judaize the Church of Christ by making it follow and merely inherit from Israel. The truth is perverted. Prophecy is plunged into confusion. Israel's unique place and bright prospects are lost sight of. Gentile conceit is engendered. Things that differ are not distinguished (1 Cor 10:32). Moreover, the Church is rendered worldly and materialistically minded instead of being inculcated with the truth of its heavenly hope and calling in contradistinction to Israel's earthly blessing and destiny.

But why is there such a stubborn insistence on this spiritualizing method by so many able commentators? Why is there such a despising attitude adopted toward the literally verbal, "realistic" interpretations of these prophecies? The answer is, the roots of the error go deep, and their development is the result of century upon century of pernicious growth. As a result theological thought has become so entwined and interwoven with the error, so vitiated and distorted by it, that it seems powerless to free itself. It is amazing how, in an instance like this, the dignity of ancient tradition and the authority of ecclesiastical pronouncement can blind men from the simple truth. It was indubitably a master-stroke of Satan when he succeeded in

overthrowing the healthy millennialism of the early Church. The cessation of persecution and the consequent influx of worldliness into the Church under the imperial favor of Constantine in the fourth century, the allegorizing of the influential Alexandrian School and of Origen, and the confounding of the Church and the Kingdom, notably by the great Augustine, are listed by Louis Berkhof as the paramount reasons for the collapse of Chiliasm in the early Church. Thus the errors then introduced into the thinking of Christians have had a millennium and a half to get the foothold they have today.

One of the main objections to the premillennial and literal expositions of the prophetic announcements of the restoration of Israel is thus advanced by Keil: "...The New Testament says nothing whatever concerning the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple and a restoration of the Levitical worship, but it teaches in the most decided manner that, with the completion of the reconciliation of men with God through the sacrifice of Christ upon Golgotha, the Levitical law was fulfilled and abolished (Heb 7-9)..."

The fundamental fallacy in Keil's objection is his failure to differentiate between the Church with its unique message of grace and Israel with its distinctive religion of Judaism, and to distinguish the specific time-period of each. He forgets that these are separate, never-to-be-confused entities, and that, as far as a Hebrew Christian saved in this dispensation under the message of grace is concerned, the Levitical law is fulfilled and abolished, so that during Israel's dispersion and humiliation Judaism is completely set aside, but that it will be reestablished upon the completion of God's purpose in and for the Church, and Israel's resplendent future will be consummated under a reinstated Judaistic system. The temple will be rebuilt, for the "abomination of desolation" (Matt 24:15) "shall stand in the Holy Place," in the "Temple of God" (Jewish Temple) rebuilt (2 Thess 2:4) with an "altar" and "worshippers" (Rev 11:1) and an "outer court" in the "Holy City" (Jerusalem, cf. Rev 11:2). This arrangement necessitates officiating priests and Levites, who shall be preserved and ready (Rev 7:7).

In spite of the Scriptural statements, Keil makes the assertion that "the New Testament says nothing whatever concerning the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple and the restoration of the Levitical worship." It is amazing how much harm this method of spiritualizing the earthly promises of Israel to apply them to the Church, a heavenly people, does, and how securely it locks up the prophetic Scriptures and blinds even great scholars to the unequivocal declarations of God's Word.

In the same class with Keil's inaccurate conclusions is the assertion of Hengstenberg to the effect that "the New Testament knows nothing of a future possession of the land of Canaan." This statement is incredible in the face of the clear predictions of Israel's regathering in Matt 24:31-34, appended as it is with the solemn assurance of its fulfillment on the basis of the inviolability of God's Word (v. 35). The same truth is given singular prominence in each account of the great eschatological disclosure of our Lord (Mark 13:27-30; Luke 21:24, 29-32). That Israel will be regathered at the end of this age is taken for granted in the Revelation (cf. 7:1-8; 11:1, 2; 12:13-17).

Keil is correct in observing that, if the Jewish people should receive Palestine again for their possession, the temple with the Levitical sacrificial worship would of necessity be restored to Jerusalem. But he is wrong when he insists that "such a supposition is at variance with the teaching of Christ and the Apostles." Both the Old and the New Testament teach the restoration of Judaism after the long night of Israel's present dispersion is over (Isa 60:7; Ezek chapters 40-48; Hos 3:4, 5; Matt 24:15, 20; 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 11:1, 2). Hosea especially clearly gives an

account of the present eclipse of Judaism when the nation is scattered for “many days without a king, without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim” (Hos 3:4). Lest this restoration of Israel and the subsequent reestablishment of Judaism should be confounded with any other event, Hosea emphasizes it as to

be “in the latter days” (v. 5), when they are regathered at the close of their present world-wide diaspora (Isa 2:2–5).

The seeming clash between the clear New Testament doctrine of the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ, with the consequent abolition of the Levitical priesthood, and the distinct scriptural teaching that Judaism will be again put into effect in the coming age with temple ritual reinstated largely vanishes when the essential differences between Israel, the covenant people, and the Church, the Body of Christ, are perceived. Israel is an earthly people, of a very definite racial posterity, with an earthly hope and calling (Rom 9:4, 5) selected to be God’s vessels to proclaim Him as the only true God over all the earth. The Church is a heavenly people, called out from both Jew and Gentile by the peculiar and distinctive message of grace, and fused into one, a wholly new organism (Eph 2:6–3:11). In the heavenly (the Church) there is no place for the earthly (Judaism). They are mutually exclusive. A Judaized Christianity is a sorry hodgepodge. The whole task of the writer to the Hebrew Christians, who had been made themselves members of the new organism, the body of Christ, was to impress this great truth upon them. They must be freed from all ceremonialism, and made to see their completeness in Christ—that they were no longer Jews, but the “Church of Christ” (1 Cor 10:32); no longer under law, but under grace. However, after the completion of the church and the ending of the dispensation of the grace of God (Eph 3:2), with a different people (earthly Israel), under a new economy (restored Judaism), God will be able to reveal Himself under a Judaistic system without any violation of the distinctive Pauline message (given for the present outcalling of the Church), or of the Epistle to the Hebrews (provided to instruct Hebrew Christians in this age as to their relation to Judaism).

Indeed, there is nothing said in Hebrews chapters 7–9, or in the entire book, which would make the reestablishment of Judaism and the Levitical Priesthood impossible in the Kingdom Age. As Auberlen says: “But when once the priesthood and the kingly office have been restored, then, without doing violence to the Epistle to the Hebrews, the ceremonial and civil law of Moses will unfold its spiritual depth in the worship and constitution of the thousand years’ reign.”

Keil and the spiritualizing school make the serious blunder of assuming the impossibility of the resumption of Judaism and the Levitical sacrificial worship as being contrary to the New Testament teaching. Upon this faulty premise, they proceed to what must accordingly be a false deduction—that, since all the prophetic references to the restoration of the Judaic system must “not be understood literally, but spiritually or typically,” therefore all referenees to the rehabilitation of Israel to Palestine must, also, “not be understood literally, but spiritually or typically.” Thus the prophetic Word is set aside, and the whole subject of eschatology strangled at its birth and plunged into darkness by the subtle reasonings of men.

Fairbairn, who is an ardent advocate of this spiritualizing method, attacks the literal method of the exposition of the Old Testament with these words: “We may add...that the common interpretation, which understands Christ by David, and takes all the rest literally, must tend to justify the Jew in his unbelief.” Fairbairn’s point is that, since by David is meant Christ, so all the rest of the prediction is to be spiritualized and applied to the Church, and not to a literally rehabilitated Israel. As the Jews are rejecting Christ because He did not do these very things in

His first advent, they are waiting, they say, for the true Christ to come to do them. “On the basis of the literal interpretation there seems to be no answer to this,” contends Fairbairn.

This objection is not sustained, however, and is very superficial, because Jesus Christ came as king of the Jews, with the credentials of the king, but was rejected as such, and as such crucified. The result was the postponement of the Kingdom till the second advent (Acts 1:7).

Regarding the necessity of spiritualizing the name of David, this is not at all certain. Whether Christ will actually sit upon the Davidic throne at Jerusalem in person, or whether He will rule through another is not transparently clear. There are quite an array of passages that seem unquestionably to teach that king David will be resurrected along with the general resurrection of the righteous Old Testament worthies before the Kingdom Age and that as Israel’s best-loved king will be seated on the throne again (Hos 3:5; Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25).

The meaning of these various passages evidently is that the new king *will be David*. Be that as it may, “Jehovah of hosts will reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem; and before his elders shall be glory” (Isa 24:23). The inference is that David will rule as regent and will be styled “king” or “prince,” as occasion may require. The “prince”, whoever he is, prepares and offers the sin-offering, burnt-offering and meal-offering, notably at Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezek 45:21–25). This, however, does not necessarily conclude him a sinner, and hence an unglorified person. It must be remembered that millennial sacrifices are in no sense propitiations, but are purely commemorative of the one all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, and will be offered by and for those only who are regenerated (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 37:9, 14). It is possible that the princeship and priesthood may be confined to resurrected Old Testament saints.

Ezekiel’s Vision of Israel’s Restoration

Part 2

—
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(Continued from the July-September Number, 1949)

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The Vision Interpreted and Explained

The various erroneous views of Ezekiel’s prophecy of the dry bones have been noticed and discussed. There remains to be examined the true view. It has been demonstrated that the vision cannot picture physical resurrection of the dead in general, nor include physical resurrection in any sense, of Israel or others, nor yet be taken as the spiritual resurrection or conversion of a soul, nor yet spiritualized in any way and made applicable to the Christian church. That the true scope and meaning of the passage is the national and spiritual reinstatement of God’s chosen people will appear as the prophecy is further interpreted and explained. It is necessary, first, to examine

I. The Method of the Restoration of Israel

This is indicated to be *by the divine power*. The question Jehovah addresses to Ezekiel after showing him the valley of the dry bones: “Son of man, can these bones live [i.e., will these bones come to life]?” prepares the way for the miracle. The prophet-priest’s perplexed reply: “O Lord, Jehovah, Thou knowest” (Ezek 37:3) dramatically shows that from a human standpoint it was inconceivable that they could ever come to life again, and, in any case, nothing short of the omnipotence of God could ever effect this—so many they were and so dry were they.

The method of restoration is further revealed to be not only by divine power, but also *by the divine word*. Ezekiel is told to prophesy over the bones and say unto them, “Hear ye the *word* of Jehovah. Thus *saith* Jehovah.... *I* will cause breath to enter into you.... *I* will lay sinews upon you, and bring flesh upon you, and put breath in you.... ye shall know that *I* am Jehovah” (vs. 4–6). It is the divine *power* which operates through the divine *word*, emphasizing the oft recurring thought in the apparent hopeless impossibility of the rehabilitation of such an effete nation, namely, that what Jehovah promises to fulfill He has the power to fulfill.

The idea of the divine power working through the divine word is also significantly and prominently linked with Israel’s national gathering in the key New Testament passages on the subject. Thus in Matthew 24 there is the regathering (v. 31), the restoration under the fig-tree symbolism (vs. 32, 33), the national preservation (v. 34), appended with which comes the glowing finale: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *my words* shall not pass away” (v. 35). The same is true of Mark’s account (Mark 13:27–31) and Luke’s (Luke 21:29–33). The restoration of Israel will be one of the outstanding miracles of the ages (Jer 16:14, 15), eclipsing even the Egyptian deliverance and an indubitable proof that what God promises to do He is both able to do and *will* do (cf. Jer 31:35, 36).

The method of the restoration, however, is not only by the divine power, and the divine word, but also *by the divine life*. The prophet’s words, which were God’s words, were followed by the divine miracle—a “noise or sound” (קול, “a voice”); and what was to extraordinary, “Behold, a trembling or rumbling,” i.e., an earthquake-like commotion as the bones came together, “bone to its bone.” This phenomenon of bones strewn so confusedly over the face of the valley but coming together and fitting so marvelously each into its proper place, picturesquely bespeaks God’s power to bring all the Twelve Tribes together no matter where they are, or in what condition they are. The “sinews,” the “flesh” and the “skin” coming upon the “bones” (v. 8), which are now in

proper place, might well suggest Israel’s awakening to a feeling of nationalism, expressed in Zionism and kindred nationalistic trends of the past decades. All this takes place, however, before there is any national or spiritual life, that is to say while Israel is yet without nationhood, being politically dead. For we read the emphatic and pregnant declaration, despite the bones, being clothed with flesh. “But there was no breath in them” (v. 8). The רוּחַ, as Keil suggests, “is the animating spirit or breath, equal to רוּחַ חַיִּים (Gen 6:17, 7:22).”

The coming of the breath or spirit into the prone and dead bodies of flesh and bones as the prophet calls for the four winds of heaven to blow upon them *is* the coming to life of the politically dead nation of Israel. “The breath (i.e., life) came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding army” (v. 10). The life is *not* their spiritual life because they are not yet gathered to their land, and not converted until *after* they are regathered; but it is their national life—their reconstruction as a nation. It may possibly be said, however, that their spiritual life is, so to speak, in embryo in their resurrection to national life, inasmuch as the latter

is a prerequisite to the former. All the *regathered* nation surviving the tribulation judgments will be saved at Messiah's Advent (Rom 11:26), and certainly the scope of the vision as given in the divine commentary on it (vs. 11–14) embraces Israel's establishment in her own land and her subsequent conversion (v. 14).

It is noteworthy that Ezekiel, in outlining Israel's national resurrection, addresses the word of Jehovah to the "breath" of life for it to "come from the four winds" to breathe upon the dead nation (v. 9). This speaks of Israel's world-wide dispersion at the time of the national reconstitution. Matthew, picturing the same event, significantly speaks of the Son of man gathering together "His elect" (of Israel) from the *four winds*, "from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt 24:31).

Matthew adds some pertinent details to the method of the restitution of Israel which are not mentioned by Ezekiel. The latter merely attributes the accomplishment of this momentous event to the divine power, the divine word, and the divine life. Matthew adds mention of the agency of angels. "And He shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet to gather together His elect" (Matt 24:31).

It may be doubted that the "noise" (v. 7) is to be connected with the trumpet-blast of Matthew's passage, inasmuch as קול involves the philological difficulty of not signifying the blast of a trumpet, not without amplified definition. רעש, however, meaning also "earthquake," is hardly to be taken with that meaning in this connection unless קול is construed as signifying trumpet-blast, inasmuch as both phenomena are often concomitants of resurrection. It seems best then to take both terms as referring to the "noise" and "rumbling" that the dry bones would naturally make in joining themselves together.

It is necessary to scrutinize next

II. The Purpose of the Restoration of Israel

1. *To vindicate the divine word.* The execution of so vast and grand an undertaking at once so seemingly improbable and impossible of accomplishment, will be with the definite divine end in view of demonstrating to the unbelieving world in general, and proving to Israel in particular, that what God has promised His chosen people, everything apparently contrary to its fulfillment notwithstanding, He will most assuredly fulfill. "And ye shall know that I, Jehovah, have *spoken it, and performed it, saith Jehovah*" (v. 14).

And what has God promised Israel? By solemn covenant He promised to Abram's posterity the land extending from the river of Egypt on to the Euphrates (Gen 15:18), confirming His word with an oath (Gen 22:16–18) and extending the promise to Isaac (Gen 26:3) and also in brilliant vision to Jacob (Gen 28:12–16). To the latter, as he was fleeing the land from the murderous rage of Esau, was granted not

only the renewal of the promise of the land to himself, and his posterity, but he was given a preview of that glorious future day when Israel shall be back in the Promised Land, herself converted under Messiah, and heaven and earth in very close proximity as symbolized by the bright ladder set up on earth and reaching to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, the glorious Christ, who will be reigning as "Lord of Lords and King of Kings" on the throne of David (John 1:51).

Dim centuries, meanwhile, have dragged on. Millennia have intervened during which Israel has been dispersed, beaten, despised and murdered among the Gentiles. Yea, the dead which Ezekiel saw in the vision are more than the dead, more than desiccated bones. They are

specifically הרגים (“slain, killed, butchered”), i.e., in ancient and modern pogroms (v. 9). Will God fulfill His word to His distressed and downtrodden people? Will the silence of ages ever be broken? Will the heavens always be brass? Gentiles sneer in unbelief. Israel herself cries out in despair, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off” (נגזרנו לנו), in other words “It’s all over with us!” (v. 11). The consummation of the marvel of restoration will be with the divine intent of demonstrating to an amazed world that it is “not all over” with Israel, but that God will do what He said He would do for them (Deut 30:3, Jer 23:5–8, Luke 1:30–33, Acts 15:14–17). Their future indeed is destined to be far more glorious than ever their past was.

This thought leads to another purpose of the vision, namely,

2. *To revive Israel’s lost national hope.* Since the divine interpretation of the vision is that the “bones are the whole house of Israel” (v. 11), that is, the whole nation looked upon as not divided or “halved” into two separate kingdoms (v. 22), the drying up of these bones means complete loss of that status in national and spiritual death (v. 11). Their condition is certainly depicted as something deplorable, as of course it is. The bold figures of the vision bring Israel’s sad

plight as a nation into sharp relief. What could be more expressive of their national and spiritual death than “bones,” not with some orderly arrangements to form skeletons, not even piled up in a heap, nor bones of recent corpses; but desiccated bones, unburied, long bleached by the sun, reduced to powdery dryness by the wind, strewn promiscuously and confusedly “upon the face [or, the surface] of the valley,” “very many, and very dry” (vs. 1, 2)!

The “valley” is a very apt figure expressing the *place* of Israel’s dispersion. It denotes a “wide valley, plain, or fissure.” The article prefixed הבקעה specifies it as a very definite valley, and likely refers very pointedly to the whole earth—among the nations—as the locality of Israel’s scattering. Often Scripture uses the figure of a mountain to refer to nations or kingdoms (Dan 2:35; Isa 2:2), and as a valley is a low and depressed region among mountains the present image is expressive in not only characterizing Israel’s *place* of captivity among the Gentile nations, but her *condition* there as one of persecution, depression and humiliation.

It is because of the fact in this dreadful state Israel will lose all national hope and fall into desperate discouragement that the prophet is told to give forth his message, to comfort them in their tribulations and to revive them in their national expectation. “Therefore, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves, O my people, and I will bring you into the land of Israel” (v. 12).

Another purpose of the restoration appears, namely,

3. *To settle Israel in her own land.* The rehabilitation plainly includes the bringing of the people *out* from among the nations (vs. 12, 13) and the bringing of them *into* the “land of Israel” (v. 12) and the placing or setting down of them in rest and quietness in the land (v. 14). Three separate momentous events are thus consequently announced in these verses, and must not be confused with each other.

First, *Israel’s being brought out of her place among the nations:* “Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves....(v. 12), “And ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have opened your graves, and caused you to come up out of your graves” (v. 13). The “graves” are Israel’s place of death as a nation, scattered among the Gentiles. That the term “graves” does *not* signify literal graves but Israel’s burial in dispersion in the graveyard of the nations, appears from the fact the bones are not in graves at all, but strewn on the surface of the valley. The bones coming

up out of the graves, therefore, can only mean Israel's coming up out of the cemetery of her dispersion among the nations of the earth, to be a nation once more herself. That the physically dead of the nation cannot be meant looks clear, for the same figure of speech is employed in the New Testament of the prodigal son, who in his backslidings speaks of an Israelite out of covenant relationship with Jehovah and of whom it was said "For this my son was dead, and is alive again" (Luke 15:24). Yet he was not physically dead, nor was he made alive physically. Israel, the nation, playing the prodigal is similarly out of fellowship with Jehovah, and viewed as nationally and spiritually dead.

The second event announced in these verses is: *Israel's being brought into the land*. This event, so pivotal, is referred to only *once* in these verses, and in these words, "And I will bring you into the land of Israel" (v. 12). It naturally follows the coming to life of the nation and is vitally connected with it. As there can be no nation without a definite territory to occupy as a nation, so Israel cannot be a nation until she has received a national home. That that national home will be Palestine, rather than some other part of the globe, is clearly emphasized. The reason that the reconstitution as a nation and the national regathering are presented in the vision as separate and chronological events, though closely connected, is that the nation and the national home will likely be reestablished as such before any considerable portion of the people actually return to the homeland.

The third event distinguished in this portion is *Israel's being settled securely and permanently in the land*. "And I

will *place* you in your own land" (v. 14). והנחתי, "And I will lead you to rest [i.e., set you in peace, let you remain, leave you in quiet] in your own land"; for such is the precise connotation of the verb נוח ("to settle down, rest, dwell") in the hifil. This declaration refers *not* to the leading out from the graves among the nations, nor to the leading into the land of Israel, but to their permanent and unmolested settlement and establishment by Jehovah in the land, after their arrival. From these considerations it becomes evident that Israel's national resuscitation and their national regathering to their homeland, together with their spiritual revival (as will shortly be discovered), are all events in a chain, and all are prerequisites to the nation's secure and perpetual establishment in the land.

"The land of Israel" (v. 12) is said to be "your own land" (v. 14). It is called "the land of Israel" because it was specially confirmed to Jacob (or, Israel) and his seed through Abraham and Isaac (Gen 28:12–15). It is "your own land" because bestowed by covenant and oath upon Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants forever (Gen 17:8, Ezek 37:25). It is important to note that the nation has never yet taken the land as promised under the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, nor yet has it possessed the whole land (Gen 15:18, Num 34:1–12).

The reestablishment of Israel back in her land embraced in the vision of the dry bones must not be confused with the restoration from the Babylonian captivity, as it has been by some. It is impossible to apply the "exceeding great army" of the reinstated (v. 10) with any show of propriety to the return of the less than 50,000 (counting all) who finally returned from Babylon, especially inasmuch as ancient armies were commonly very large. The returning remnant was a very inconsiderable army compared with even that of Judah alone under the kings. "The whole house of Israel" (v. 11), too, puts any past return from captivity out of the question.

The gift of the land of Palestine to Israel is modified by the prophecies of dispossessions and restorations. Some list

three dispossessions and three restorations, taking the Egyptian bondage and deliverance as one dispossession and restoration (Gen 15:13, 14, 16). Under such a listing Israel is thought of as now in the third dispossession, from which she will be restored at the return of the Lord as her king under the Davidic covenant.

However, some believe it better not to think of the Egyptian servitude and march from Egypt to Canaan as a restoration, inasmuch as Canaan could hardly be said to have been considered as in Israel's possession at all until *after* its conquest by Joshua, and hence could not properly be thought of as restored before that time. In reality the Jews have never been restored but *once*, and that was from Babylon. It seems evident then that the return from the Babylonian captivity is to be reckoned as the first restoration, and the Scriptures therefore speak of a *second* regathering when the Lord returns as King to set up the theocratic Davidic Kingdom. "And it shall come to pass in that day [the Millennial day] that the Lord will set his hand again the *second* time to recover the remnant of His people from Assyria and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea" (Isa 11:11).

It is to this *second* regathering to her own land from her present world-wide diaspora that Ezekiel's vision also refers, for the regathered people are to dwell in the land this time "forever" (Ezek 37:25). This cannot be applied to the return from Babylon, as they were driven out of the land after that, and the promise here is for perpetual possession and habitation. As Amos graphically portrays Jehovah's secure settlement of the people in the land this time, "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall *no more* be pulled up out of their land" (Amos 9:15). This passage is equivalent to Ezekiel's succinct but emphatic enunciation of the same fact, "And I [Jehovah] will *place* you in your own land" (Ezek 37:24).

A further purpose of the restoration of God's chosen people is indicated, to wit,

4. *To effect Israel's spiritual conversion.* "And I [Jehovah] will put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live" (v. 14a). This feature, of course, is vital and indispensable to the national reinstatement. Without it the other outstanding events connected with it would be useless or impossible. The gathering out of the nations, the leading into the land, would accomplish little without spiritual renewal of the people, as the divine blessing could not be vouchsafed to hard and impenitent hearts. As for the perpetual and undisturbed settlement in the land, spiritual revival of the nation is obviously an indispensable prerequisite, since the latter would be an impossibility without the former. Accordingly, the prophet observes a beautiful order: national resuscitation (v. 4–10, 12, 13), national regathering (v. 12), national regeneration (v. 14a), national reestablishment (v. 14b).

The facts presented in the divine interpretation of the vision are these: Israel will be raised to nationhood and regathered to Palestine in unbelief. *There* she shall be converted as a nation, previous to being established forever in peace and glory in the land during Messiah's Kingdom (cf. Ezek 37:24).

It is remarkable to observe that in the vision itself (vs. 1–10) the national resurrection of Israel alone is portrayed, both in the symbolism and the imagery, and *not* in the spiritual reviving. Indeed, nothing is included in the actual vision to designate either the regathering, the conversion or the establishment in the land; for the vision itself ends with the resurrected people nationally alive, standing upon their feet, but still in the valley, or as the imagery indicates still among the nations. These last three great events appear only in the divine interpretation (vs. 11–

14) as inseparably included and inevitably growing out of the event portrayed in the vision, but not actually included in its symbolic drapery at all.

The explanation of this striking fact appears to be that the resuscitation of Israel to the status of a nation is the sine qua non for all the other events so vitally connected with her restitution. Establishing the fact of the revival of

Israel's national life as the vision per se does, her national regathering, national regeneration and national reestablishment in the land are guaranteed and assured *in the national resuscitation*. For it is self-evident that Israel cannot actually exist as a nation unless gathered out of the nations and into some territory her own, and there brought to spiritual life to be able to enjoy the blessings of permanent settlement in the land. That is the reason why the divine interpretation lists these events as inherent and germinally included in the vision, although not pictured in the actual figures.

The word "live," accordingly, is employed in a twofold sense in the passage. In verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 it denotes "to live nationally" and expresses Israel's national revivification. In verse 14 it alone signifies "to live spiritually" and the reference is to Israel's spiritual reclamation.

The fact that Ezekiel's vision presents Israel's conversion as subsequent to her regathering is in agreement with the order as assigned elsewhere in prophecy. "For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I ["And I will," R.V.] sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you; and a new spirit will I put within you.... And I will put my Spirit within you.... and ye shall dwell in the land. (Ezek 36:24-28).

This deep-seated work of cleansing and spiritual renewal is tersely expressed by Ezekiel, "And I [Jehovah] will put my Spirit in you," in (v. 14). Thus Israel will be regenerated by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3, 4), indwelt, sealed, and marvelously filled with the Spirit (Joel 2:28, 29) during the Kingdom, and, indeed, enjoying every ministry of the Spirit characteristic of this present Church age except the baptism with the Spirit, which of necessity by its very nature is uniquely confined to the period of the outcalling of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).

The prophet further elaborates on the nature of the spiritual awakening in Israel in verse 23 . The people are said to be saved from their "idols" and their "detestable things" and, furthermore, "saved out of all their dwelling-places, where they have sinned." Their dwelling-places "at" or "in" which they have sinned cannot be their settlements in foreign lands, as Hitzig supposes, but only the dwelling-places in Canaan to which they have been restored, as Keil maintains. הוֹשַׁעְתִּי (cf. Ezek 36:29) signifies to "preserve therefrom"; so in the present instance the thought can only be that "God will preserve them from all the dwelling-places in which they have sinned."

Jehovah thus would remove from their environment everything that could offer them solicitation to sin. For though sin has its seat not in the external, but in the internal (i.e., the heart), and they will be given a "new" heart (Ezek 36:26), yet the outward circumstances of a man do offer various inducements to sin. Through the idolatry and the moral corruption of the inhabitants left in the land, Canaan offered such a temptation to evil in the years before the captivity. In the future, however, when His people are brought back to Canaan, Jehovah promises to keep His people from the sinful influence of their dwelling-places. The land will be thoroughly purged.

With the cleansing of the heart within and the land without and withal having Satan bound (Rev 20:3), Israel's spiritual reanimation will be complete and unfaltering. "So shall they be my people, and I will be their God" (v. 24), and that not only theoretically but also actually and practically (Jer 32:38). And it appears not only nationally but even individually; for all those regathered and surviving the devastating and decimating judgments of the Great Tribulation ("the time of Jacob's trouble," Jer 30:7) will evidently be saved, "And so Israel [nationally] shall be saved, even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom 11:26). The sight of the returning "Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of glory" (Matt 26:64)

will be the medium of the conversion, when the Spirit of grace and supplications will be poured out upon them as they gaze upon Him whom "they pierced" (Zech 12:10–14) and a "fountain" of cleansing will be opened to them" (Zech 13:1).

A final purpose of the restoration will be

5. *To demonstrate Israel's status as an elect nation.* "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves, O my people," עַמִּי (v. 12). Again, in verse 13 Jehovah significantly calls to them, "O my people!" The repetition is forceful. Jehovah calls them His people, and tenderly claims them as such while yet they are in humiliation as dry bones scattered among the graves of the nations. He moreover gives them the glowing and heartening promises of their rehabilitation in their calamity and distress, not because of anything they are in themselves (Ezek 36:32, for they are to be "ashamed and confounded for their ways"), but simply and graciously because they are *His* people, and as such He must vindicate His holy name which they have defiled and disgraced before the nations (Ezek 36:21–23). The tender compassionate love of Jehovah for His people breathes through His dramatic call to them in the midst of their misery and wretchedness, "O my people!"

It is very arresting to notice that in verse 23 Jehovah, having presented the future spiritual renewal of His people, there significantly represents their being His people only as a future event, dependent upon their conversion. "So *shall* they be my people, and I will be their God." The explanation is that now Israel is God's own people, not because of their choice or faithfulness but solely because of His faithfulness as their covenant-keeping God. Had He dealt with them according to their deserts and so forgotten His covenant with them, they would have been destroyed long ago, or swallowed up and digested by the nations instead of miraculously being preserved through fire and sword, and what is still more wonderful from being assimilated by the Gentiles.

This future scene, after their conversion, foretells the time when they, from their own hearts and by their own choice, shall be His people in reality. In other words, verses 12, 13 present Israel as perpetually God's own from the divine side in accordance with His own immutable faithfulness. Verse 23, on the other hand, views Israel as experimentally God's own from the human side, in accordance with the nation's own choice and fidelity in that future day of spiritual rebirth.

It does not appear possible to the Gentile nations that a people so hated and hounded, so despised and distressed, so selfish and sordid (in their unsaved condition) could be God's elect nation, His own chosen people. That God should address them tenderly as "O my people" in the midst of their national dispersion and death among the nations, is utterly incomprehensible to the nations in general among which Israel has been buried. Israel's dispersion and punishment, while a divine necessity for her waywardness, has caused Jehovah's name which Israel bears, as well

as her own name, to be brought into ignominy and reproach. The nations have insulted Israel, and thereby have blasphemed Jehovah. The exaltation of Israel, nationally and spiritually, and her establishment to be the “head” of the nations and “not the tail” (Deut 28:13) will be the most stupendous vindication of God’s goodness and faithfulness the world has ever seen or ever will see, and the most colossal proof that Israel, despite all her backsliding and disobedience, is God’s elect nation, His own chosen people.

Ezekiel’s Vision of Israel’s Restoration

Part 3

—
Merrill F. Unger

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{Editor’s note: Footnotes in the original printed edition were numbered 17–28, but in this electronic edition are numbered 1–12 respectively.}

III. The Scope of the Restoration of Israel

Of this it may be said (a) *it embraces the whole house of Israel*. This bit of information that “these bones are the whole house of Israel” (v. 11) is the most important single statement given in the divine interpretation, and furnishes the key to the exposition of the whole passage. “The whole house of Israel,” of course, means all the twelve tribes, which are to be gathered back to their own land, and redistributed upon it in accordance with Ezekiel’s outline of the settlement in chapter 48 . The term includes *only* Israelites living at the end of this age at the time of the nation’s rehabilitation, and does *not* include all or any Israelites who have physically died. That the godly of Old Testament Israel will be raised sometime before the Davidic Kingdom is set up is certain, for “many shall come from the east and from the west and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 8:11, Luke 13:28, 29); but it is a false invention to teach that all Israel, who have died physically, are to be raised before the kingdom age. If the Old Testament saints are not raised at the out-taking of the Church, as it seems certain they are not, they would assuredly not be resurrected until the decimating and destructive judgments of the great tribulation were over. The logical time for their resurrection would be at the second advent of Christ in glory, perhaps with the tribulation saints, who will have a resurrection at that time (Rev 20:4).

That “the whole house of Israel” will include the twelve tribes is evident. But a problem arises whether the national restoration of Israel will include *every* individual Israelite living in the end time, or just the preponderating majority, some perhaps remaining in national death among the nations and failing to return in the great end-time exodus to Palestine. Concerning this it may be remarked that, if it is correct to take Daniel 12:2 to refer to Israel’s national revival, then the “many of them” (Daniel’s people) “that sleep in the dust of the earth” (who are scattered among the graveyard of the nations) and who “shall awake” (shall be nationally restored), would naturally indicate that the many (the majority) would join in the trek to their homeland, but not *all*. The regathering, like the other events connected with it, would be national, but not necessarily individual. Whether this view is true or not, there is nothing in Ezekiel’s vision in conflict with it, as the scope of his imagery is clearly national and not individual.

Further, concerning the scope of Israel's restoration it may be remarked (b) *it comprises the union of both Judah and Israel into one nation*. The last part of this thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel (vs. 15–28), while not an actual part of the vision of the dry bones, nor of the divine commentary upon it, is to be thought of as in the closest connection with it and as shedding abundant light on it. Verses 15–28 give the reunion of Israel as one nation under the future King David (Messiah). Jehovah directs the prophet to represent the reunion of the tribes of Israel by a sign of two sticks joined together (vs. 15–17), and to explain this symbolical action to the people (vs. 18–21) and to show its connection with Israel's national and spiritual reconstitution (vs. 22–28).

This section abundantly corroborates the interpretation of the vision of the dry bones as depicting Israel's national and spiritual recovery. The prophet is directed to take "a stick" עץ אחד ("a—or one—piece of wood"), and to write on it, "For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions [associates]" (v. 16). The preposition ל before "Judah" and "children of Israel" is, as Keil notes, the sign of the genitive of possession. So it is "Judah's stick" and "the children of Israel's, his companions," belonging to them and thus representing them. The action recalls Moses' writing on the twelve rods of the Israelitish princes in the wilderness, when Aaron's rod of the tribe of Levi budded (Num 17:1–10).

The action, however, is a different one here, and there is no evidence that the "sticks" were rods or sceptres denoting rulership, but simply flat pieces of wood upon which it was easy to write. The divine injunction to write upon one piece of wood not only "Judah," but "the sons of Israel, his associates," arose from the circumstances that the southern kingdom included besides "Judah," the leading tribe, which accordingly gave its name to the kingdom, the greater portion of Benjamin and Simeon, the tribe of Levi, (because in the temple service), and many pious Israelites from the northern kingdom who fell away to Judah. The secession of the ten tribes in 922 B.C. was on *political* grounds, so that in the idolatry and apostasy of the northern kingdom many members of the ten tribes came over to Judah on *religious* grounds, when Jeroboam rejected the worship of Jehovah (2 Chron 11:14, 16, 17). In 941 B.C. when Rehoboam's grandson, Asa, was King of Judah "they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that Jehovah, his God, was with him" (2 Chron 15:9).

In the reign of Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, positions of honor and trust were occupied in Judah by "the chief of the fathers of Israel" (2 Chron 19:8). Likewise, there was a falling away to Judah under Joash, and particularly under Hezekiah's godly reign in 726 B.C., about five years before the captivity of the ten tribes. Thus in the two centuries from the separation of the ten-tribed kingdom of Israel from Judah in 922 B.C. until its destruction as a kingdom by Sargon in 721 B.C., large numbers of the ten tribes proved their detestation of idolatry and their loyalty to Jehovah by going over to Judah.

Upon the second piece of wood Ezekiel was to write "For Joseph, and for all the house of Israel, his associates" (v. 16). "The stick of Ephraim עץ אפרים is an explanatory apposition to ליוסף, "for Joseph," and must not be thought of as actually written on the piece of wood, but only as given in the text by way of explanation.

The name "Joseph" is chosen because the house of Joseph (an honorable appellation) consisted in the two powerful tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and formed the "trunk of the kingdom of the ten tribes." This fact, too, explains "the stick of Joseph which is in the hand of Ephraim" (v. 19), inasmuch as the power and hegemony were with the tribe of Ephraim (Isa

7:17). The “whole house of Israel, his companions” are the remaining tribes belonging to that kingdom.

These two sticks, thus representing the house of Judah and the house of Israel in their entire constituency, were to be joined “one to another into *one stick*,” that they might become one in the prophet’s hand (v. 17). This symbolizes the end God will make of that sad division which has harassed Jacob’s posterity since the fateful schism of 922 B.C. Ezekiel performed the symbolic action before the people, and in response to the questioning concerning such a strange procedure (v. 18) explains it as prophetic of God’s healing the ancient political breach at the time of the nation’s restoration to the land (v. 21), when they are made “one nation in the land,” “upon the mountains of Israel,” with one king over them (v. 22) and enjoy spiritual conversion (v. 23).

From this vital passage the fact is ascertained that the whole house of Israel, that is the whole twelve tribes, are to take part in the national and spiritual reconstitution set forth in the vision of the dry bones. If all the twelve tribes are to be reinstated in the Holy Land, the question then resolves itself “Where are they now?” For the ten tribes never returned from their captivity in Assyria, but until this day remain “the outcasts of Israel” (Isa 11:12), while only a remnant of Judah came back in the restoration from Babylonia in 536 B.C. The Jews are Israelites, but actually descendants of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. How are the ten tribes then to be identified?

It will not completely satisfy the demands of the problem

to prove, as John Wilkinson does in *Israel My Glory*, that the Jews today are representative of the whole twelve tribes. Says he: “Now what is our general inference from these wanderings...after the ten tribes from 975 B.C. to 521 B.C.? Simply this—that sufficient numbers of the ten tribes, while in the land, fell away to Judah on religious grounds, and a sufficient number returned from Babylon on political and religious grounds, to render the restored captives properly representative of the entire nation; so that should no other people in the world ever present a reasonable claim to Israelitish descent, the people known as the Jews may be regarded as fairly entitled to be representative of the interests and destiny of the whole twelve tribes.”

As Clarence Larkin succinctly summarizes the same historical evidence: “The conclusion therefore is that those who returned from the captivity were fairly representative of the whole twelve tribes. Now as the descendants of those who were restored from Babylon were scattered in A.D. 70 and A.D. 135, we may well ask ‘*The Ten Tribes? Where are they NOT?*’”

However, a careful examination of Ezekiel 37 will lead to the inevitable conclusion that these facts do not cover the entire question of the ten tribes, for the scope of this portion of prophecy comprehends the reassembling of the ten tribes as tribes of Palestine in the future. With this circumstance accords that famous and vivid passage of Isaiah, which evidently views the reinstatement to Canaan in the future of a people known as the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel, and styled “the outcasts of Israel” in contradistinction from the “dispersed of Judah” (Isa 11:12). Therefore the *ten tribes must be somewhere!* But the question is Where?

Some say they are in Ireland, some in Wales. Others in North America, in Afghanistan, or China. Say the British-Israelites, In England—the Anglo-Saxon race must be the descendants of the ten tribes! This latter view is so fantastic and ridiculous that it hardly merits any space or recognition. Scripture deals it four knock-out blows: *First*, Scripture says the people shall dwell alone, but shall not be reckoned among the nations (Num 23:9). This is true of the Jews, but emphatically untrue of the Anglo-Saxons. *Second*, Scripture teaches that Israel is to

remain many days without king, prince or sacrifice (Hos 3:4, 5). True enough of Israel, but in diametrical contrast to the Anglo-Saxons. *Third*, Israelites out of the land were to be few in number, and under a national curse (Deut 4:26, 27; 28:62–68). The exact state of Israel, but just the opposite of Anglo-Saxons. *Fourth*, the penalty of uncircumcision is excision (Gen 17:10–14). The Anglo-Saxons are uncircumcised, and therefore unentitled to Jewish privileges.

David Baron exposes some of the ignorant and even blasphemous contentions of British-Israelism, and justly speaks of “discarding the whole heap of Anglo-Israel trash.”

If then the Anglo-Saxons are not the ten tribes, and they have not been found in the many places where search has been made for them, Who, is the question, are they? And where are they? John Wilkinson laments the singular and humiliating circumstance “that the ten tribes have been sought in almost every other country but in the one into which they were taken captive.” He would “search for a thing where it is lost,” and aided by the diligent research of Dr. Asahel Grant and enthusiastically concurring with the latter’s conclusions, he announces the location of the ten tribes in the Nestorians in the mountains of Kuristan, and by the Lake Oroomiah in Persia.

In support of this view, he first of all advances the evidence of sacred history—that the northern tribes were carried away thence into the very same district of Assyria proper. Next, he adduces the testimony of prophecy. With history

saying the ten tribes were carried to Assyria and prophecy predicting they are to be brought out of Assyria (Isa 11:11, 16), the plain inference to be made is, they are still there.

Next, John Wilkinson cites the confirmation of secular history. Josephus says the ten tribes were there in A.D. 70. Jerome in his notes on Hosea says they were there in the fifth century. Summarizing, John Wilkinson says: “No history or tradition at all reliable gives any account of their removal... the plain inference is—*they are still there.*”

Wilkinson gives lingual and ethnological proofs which add to the weight of his argument. The Nestorians and Jews in Oroomiah and Kurdistan are not claimed to constitute the totality of ten-tribed Israelites over and above those mingled with Judah, but evidence is claimed to be ample and sufficient to establish them as a nucleus. Portions may be located among other peoples in that part of the world.

Lastly, to be noticed are

IV. The Results of the Restoration of Israel

These embracing as they do their national and spiritual rehabilitation, will include (a) *a land forever*. “And they shall *dwell* in the land... forever” (v. 25). Jehovah will displace” (cause them to rest permanently and quietly) “in the land of Israel” (v. 12), and they shall “no more be pulled up out of their land” (Amos 9:15). They will return from their long night of sorrow to enjoy perpetual day, when the “Sun of Righteousness” arises with “healing in His beams” (Mal 4:2). Then they shall possess all that was promised to Abraham—the territory extending from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates (Gen 15:18), from Hamath on the north to Meribath-kadesh on the south (Ezek 48:1, 28). The long, barren, leafless winter will be past for Israel, and the fig-tree will be arrayed in the thick and splendid foliage of millennial summer (Matt 24:32) to give shade and refreshment to the Gentiles in the kingdom. Then the promise of the restoration to the land given in the Palestinian covenant

(Deut 30:5) and confirmed so picturesquely by Isaiah (Isa 11:11, 12), by Jeremiah (23:3–8), and by Ezekiel (34:23, 24 ; 37:21–25), shall be realized.

Moreover, there shall not only be a restoration to the land, but also a restoration of the land. Palestine so long cursed because of the sins of its people (Deut 11:13–17) shall be converted, when the inhabitants are converted. “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isa 35:1). The hillsides shall be covered with such prolific vineyards that the glowing words of the prophet are “The mountains shall drop new wine,” and the grass of the pastures will be so verdant and succulent, sustaining such prize milch cattle, that the hills are said to “flow with milk” (Joel 3:18). Harvests will be so rich and abundant that the ploughman will overtake “the reaper,” and treader of grapes him that “soweth seed” (Amos 9:13).

The curse on the earth shall be lifted to such an extent, at least (Gen 3:17, 18), that the “thorns” will give place to the “fir-tree” and the “briar” to the “myrtle tree” (Isa 55:13). Even the ferocity of the animal creation, also the result of man’s fall, at least shall be partially removed, if not fully, in the millennial earth (Isa 11:6–9, Rom 8:21f), although full reinstatement of Edenic conditions may not be expected until in the new earth (Rev 22:3). Nevertheless, patriarchal longevity shall be restored (Isa 65:20, 22, Zech 8:4), and men shall live as long as they did before the flood. There will be increase in the light and brilliance, too, of the sun and moon (Isa 30:26).

God’s vast and glorious purpose for His “earthly people” will be thus worked out in their earthly inheritance during the kingdom age, and then on into eternity. “A land forever” is an essential feature in the divine plan for Israel.

Another prominent consequence of the restoration will be (b) *a king forever*. “And my servant David shall be *king* over them... and David, my servant, shall be their prince forever” (vss. 24, 25). Here is introduced Israel’s King and Prince, both in the same person. He shall be מלך, “King,” in the hereditary sense of the word, whose right it is to

reign as David’s son and David’s Lord (Ps 110:1); but more than that He shall be נשיא, the one lifted up and exalted or “elected by the free will of the people,” and that “forever.” What a magnificent day that will be when the Jewish people see their colossal mistake of the ages, and their demon-inspired yell “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” merges into the soul-stirring, penitential strains of Isaiah 53 and the joyful refrain of “Blessed is He Who cometh in the name of Jehovah!” They will recognize His claim not only as the King whose legal right it is to rule over them, but spontaneously and exultantly they shall declare Him their נשיא, their elected and exalted One!

Then will be fulfilled the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:8–17) according to which the magnificent kingdom of Christ, “of the seed of David according to the flesh,” is to be set up. The Covenant, confirmed to David by the oath of Jehovah and announced to Mary by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:31–33), is unchangeable (Ps 89:30–37). It guarantees a house (posterity), a throne, and a kingdom “forever” to the thorn-crowned “King of the Jews” (Acts 2:29–32; 15:14–17).

One condition only was attached to the Covenant. Chastisement was to follow disobedience in the Davidic family, but not to the abrogation of the Covenant (2 Sam 7:15). The division of the nation into two kingdoms at the time of Rehoboam and the punishment of the captivities was the fearful price of Solomon’s apostasy. But the glorious work of Messiah will embrace the healing of the ancient breach. “They shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided [halved] into two kingdoms any more at all” (v. 22). “And they all shall have *one* Shepherd” (v. 24).

The kingdom shall not only continue through the millennial age, the earth being “filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14), but on into the new earth Israel will be glorified and exalted, and the “throne of God and of the Lamb,” the glorified Son of man, will be in the eternal state “to carry on the Davidic dynasty.”

Another salient issue of the restoration will be (c) *a covenant of peace forever*. “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them” (v. 26). This is the great covenant Jehovah shall make with His ancient people after they get back to their own land. It is denominated “a covenant of peace” because it will insure their undisturbed and complete quietude in the land. Considered as issuing in *inward spiritual tranquility*, it will involve Jehovah’s putting His “fear in their hearts that they shall not depart” from Him (Jer 32:40). It will embrace His placing His law “in their inward parts” and writing it in their hearts, forgiving their iniquity and remembering their sin no more (Jer 31:31–34, Heb 8:8–12). It will mean rest of heart as “the God of peace” makes them “perfect in every good work to do His will, working in them that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ” (Heb 13:20, 21). Considered in this aspect, it assures the future conversion of Israel, and embraces the spiritual blessings of the “new covenant.”

Regarded as effecting *outward or political* peace, it will guarantee not only Israel’s restoration to the land of Palestine under the provisions of the Palestinian Covenant (Deut 30:1–10), but will insure the cessation of all internal hostility and war between Judah and Ephraim, and the complete healing of the ancient breach in their being made one nation in the land, with one King and Prince over them, even the greater David—Christ—the one Shepherd-King (vss. 22, 24–26). With the benefit of a King, a throne, and a kingdom in perpetuity, established under the Davidic Covenant, the all-embracing “covenant of peace” will extend through Messiah-David to the ends of the earth. And as, of old, Jehovah had “cut-off” David’s “enemies” out of his sight (2 Sam 7:9), so the reigning Christ will rule the nations in absolute righteousness “with a rod of iron,” so that all iniquity and ungodly opposition shall be put down (Isa 11:4, 5), and an enduring and all-pervasive peace shall reach to the ends of the earth.

Even the brute creation shall not be able to mar this scene of calm and unmolested repose, for Ezekiel (34:25) speaks of this “covenant of peace” providing that even “evil beasts” shall cease out of the land. No doubt, as already noted, their wild ferocity will be divinely tamed (Isa 11:6–8) or they may, in some instances, be wiped out altogether, so that “they shall not hurt nor harm [destroy] in all my holy mountain” (Isa 11:9). In that day shall the “God of peace” through the great resurrected Shepherd of the sheep (Heb 13:20), through Him who is also “the Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6), “fill the whole earth with peace,” for “of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end” (Isa 9:7).

The final result of the restoration of Israel will be (d) *a sanctuary forever*. “And I will set my *sanctuary* in the midst of them forevermore” (v. 26). “My *tabernacle* also shall be with them” (v. 27). “The nations shall know that I am Jehovah...when my *sanctuary* shall be in the midst of them forevermore” (v. 28).

The prophet’s prediction specifically comprehends the kingdom temple as the “dwelling place” of Jehovah “in the midst of the children of Israel forevermore,” but sweeps on into the eternal state and comprehends the time when this temple made with hands gives place to God’s own effulgent Presence itself—that Temple made without hands, God tabernacling with man, when no human temple will be needed.

The kingdom temple will be rebuilt in the land during the millennial age. In chapters 40–42 Ezekiel gives us a detailed description of that temple itself. In chapters 43–46 he sets forth the temple worship. At the second advent Christ will restore the Judaic system with far greater glory and spirituality than it ever had in the Old Testament period until its complete dissipation with the destruction of Herod’s temple in 70 A.D. The heart and centre of reestablished Judaism will be the millennial temple, in connection with which Judaism will enjoy its final state of development.

The Aaronic priesthood will be reinaugurated, with the sons of Zadok officiating and offering sacrifices (Ezek 44:15–31). The new temple will be in contrast to the old in that it will have no ark of the covenant, no pot of manna, no Aaron’s rod that budded, no tables of the law, no cherubim, no mercy seat, no golden candlestick or shew-bread or altar of incense, no veil or Holy of Holies, no high priest, unless Christ be thought of as performing the duties of highpriesthood in the joint office of King-priest (Zech 6:12, 13). Of offerings, with a memorial and retrospective character looking back to the finished work of Christ, will be the burnt offering, the meal offering, the sin offering, the drink offering and the peace offering (Ezek 25:17), and the trespass offering (Ezek 42:13). Two annual feasts, Passover (Ezek 45:21–24) and Tabernacles (Zech 14:16–19), will be observed; but there will be no passover lamb, as Jesus fulfilled that type. The Shekinah Glory which departed so reluctantly from the temple at the time of the Babylonian captivity (Ezek 10:18–20, 11:22, 23) will again return to the new temple (Ezek 43:1–5).

That the millennial temple does not belong to the new earth and the final state of sinless bliss, is shown by the fact that the land in which it is located is bounded by the sea, and the waters issuing from it flow into the “sea.” In the new earth, however, there is “no more sea” (Rev 21:1). This is further indicated by the prophet’s mention of the “desert,” the river Jordan and other localities, which will not be found on the earth after its renovation by fire.

That there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem of the eternal state is explicitly revealed in the Revelation (21:22), which is indicative that the system of temple worship outlined for the millennium by Ezekiel will be absent. Sin and all its reminders having been completely extirpated and abolished at the conclusion of the kingdom age, there will be no need for a temple or for Judaic ceremonies. A higher order of spiritual blessing will have been reached when God’s effulgent glory will dwell everywhere, unimpeded by the presence of sin, for there “shall be no more curse” (Rev 22:3). “The Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22) will be the temple. Then the “tabernacle of God”—His own unveiled Presence—”shall be with men, and He will dwell [tabernacle] with them” as He did in the Holy of Holies only in the Old Economy, “and they shall be His peoples” (Rev 21:3) and He shall be “their God.”

In the kingdom age God’s own unique presence with Israel in His government of them through David-Messiah, and in the Shekinah Presence connected with their temple worship, will convince the nations that it is Jehovah Who “sanctifieth Israel,” and Who has eternally set them apart for blessing and glory as His own. This will be especially true in the eternal sinless state, when “the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb” make their sanctuary with them forever, and through them reaching to all mankind.

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