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DAVID'S CREED was different from ours. The imprecatory psalms show the spirit of an age in which retribution was a fundamental principle (Lev. 24:19; Jer. 11:20). When the Lord Jesus came, He did not abrogate the Law, for He said, 'I am not come to destroy but to fulfil' the law (Matt. 5:17). He also asserted with authority, 'But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also' (Matt. 5:39). He gave us a new and better Covenant and a new Creed, for in Him grace and truth were perfectly balanced. We may be certain that Divine retribution will overtake the impenitent evil-doer, but we cannot pray now that it may. We have the Gospel of the grace of God as our creed, for in it is revealed both Divine righteousness and Divine grace. So, in harmony with the compassionate yearning of the 'God of matchless grace', we pray for all men and desire 'that all men may be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth'. David's creed was different: he knew only the law of retribution, and therefore could not apply in a dispensation of law the terms of a covenant of grace not yet revealed. Hence the imprecatory psalms have their place in God's progressive revelation to mankind and did not conflict with God's moral law in the age when they were uttered.

THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL

H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

The National Resurrection of Israel (37:1-14)

The long sweep of Israel's history from Sinai to the Babylonian exile is the process by which God taught men in general and Israel in particular that national election and blood descent were inadequate for the creation of a people for God's own possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This goal could only become a fulfilled reality, when all its members had passed through the transforming experience that made of Jacob an Israel. Until then 'they are not all Israel that are of Israel'.

Ezekiel has already given us the picture of God's king, of the transformed land and people. He now turns and examines the

coming into being of this revived people of God. At the beginning of it all in order to stress that the blessing that should come in and through Abraham was the gift of God's grace and not the fruit of man's merit, God continued the line of promise by the 'miracle child' Isaac. Now to stress that the coming transformation is purely of the grace of God and not in some way the fruit of the merit of the Fathers, Ezekiel has a strange trance-vision.

There is no suggestion that the dry bones in the valley are Israelite bones. The second half of v. 11 precludes the first half from being understood in any other sense than that the bones *represent* 'the whole house of Israel'. Ezekiel sees in reality or in vision—who will dogmatize where he is concerned?—the skeletons of an army ambushed and overwhelmed ('these slain', v. 9) in the desert. Just as John the Baptist had to say that God could raise up from the stones around him children unto Abraham, so the new Israel, though Israel, yet in one sense would have no living link with the past; it would be God's miraculous creation.

Is the Church Israel?

We must pause, however, for a few minutes to consider a question which may have been growing in the minds of some readers. Is not Ezekiel in fact prophesying of the Church in these chapters? Is not the Church the New Israel, and so far as the Jew is envisaged at all, are not these promises fulfilled spiritually for him, when he is converted and becomes a member of the Church?

That the Church is the new people of God is beyond question. Equally certain is that the old people is a prefiguring of it; we need look no further than 1 Pet. 2:9 for proof, where the Old Testament titles of Israel are applied to the Church. In passing it is worth saying, that it is only the failure to realize to what extent the New Testament Church has taken to itself all the titles and honours of Israel—for a most striking example see 1 Cor. 10:1—that has led to the wide-spread superstition that certain parts of the New Testament, e.g., Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, were written exclusively to Jewish Christians. But for all that the title Israel is never applied to the Church. Rom. 11:26 *in its context* should be quite

clear for the Pauline usage and prevent us interpreting Gal, 6:16, 'the Israel of God', in a non-natural way of the Church. When we find the Church constantly being called Israel in the sub-apostolic period, without the least doubt as to the rightfulness of the usage, we should respect the refusal of the New Testament writers to do the apparently obvious.

It is beyond cavil or question that what the Lord promises Israel 36:24-27; Jer. 31:31-34 is what He had done to us in Jesus Christ. The fulfilment for Israel can neither be greater or less or other than for us. Yet it is noteworthy that the former passage is not quoted in the New Testament, and though the latter lies behind Mark 14:24 and parallels and is quoted in Heb. 8:8-12 and 10:16 f., it is given in terms of description rather than fulfilment, by which I mean that there is no suggestion that the promise has been exhausted in the Church's enjoyment of it.

We do not question the assertion that promises made under the old covenant have been lifted to a new level in their fulfilment in the new. This perforce means that the language of the promise must as often as not be regarded as symbolic rather than literal. But it is one thing to recognize the symbolic nature of so much prophetic promise, it is quite another to *spiritualize* it to mean something quite other than it could possibly have meant to the original hearers. The transference of symbolic images is harder than many think, hence the grossly materialistic nature of much modern prophetic interpretation, but the spiritualization of Scripture is seldom a spiritual process. It is normally the substitution of the expositor's own views for the teaching of Scripture.

Unless he can give full weight both to the transformed land of Israel in ch. 36 and to the national resurrection of Israel in ch. 37, the expositor has no right to banish the Israel of the old covenant from the picture in favour of the Church. On the other hand we are under no obligation to distort the whole balance of this work by entering into a discussion of the most difficult problem of the relation of the old people of God to the new, of the saved 'all Israel' (Rom. 11:26) to the bride of Christ.

The Prophecy Today

Few of the details of the prophecy call for closer attention. We should, however, note that in vv. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14 we have in the English translations the alternation of breath, wind and spirit, when there is only the one word (*ruach*) in the Hebrew. It is questionable whether it is possible to do justice to the Hebrew in English. Note that 'the four winds' (v. 9) means the four quarters of the earth.

Our interpretation must depend in some measure on our translation of v. 7. RSV and Moffatt render 'rattling', Knox 'stirring', but such translations, though theoretically possible, seem out of place. RV seems justified in translating 'earthquake'—the meaning of AV 'shaking', cf. 38:19 f. Not only is *ra'ash* the technical word for earthquake, but in passages where it is otherwise translated it is clear enough that the trembling of the ground is intended, whether literal or metaphorical, viz., 3:12 (RV rushing), Is. 9:5 (RV tumult), Jer. 10:22 (RV commotion) 47:3 (RV rushing), Nah. 3:2 (RV rattling), Job 39:24 (RV fierceness). The only two cases where the earthquake does not come directly into the picture, viz. 12:18 (RV trembling) and Job 41:29 (AV shaking, RV rushing) it seems clear enough that the type of shaking caused by an earthquake is intended.

The coming of the bones together is not by their own action but by the earthquake shaking that follows on the prophetic word. Only then does the miracle of growth begin.

The bones *were very dry*. The return from exile was no true restoration of national life. It is more a religious community than a national state that we meet in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. There was no time, not even under the short-lived Hashmonean rule (140-63 B.C.), when anything like a majority of Jews was living in Palestine. It was no accident that the people turned to Simon, a priest and elected him as 'leader and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet and . . . captain over them' (1 Macc. 14:41 f), instead of turning to the senior living descendant of the house of David. The pattern set then became even more obvious after the destruction of the second temple when we find that rule in scattered Jewry is almost entirely in the

hand of the rabbis. Though the existence of the Jews was always hard and bitter, a new and even more dreadful chapter began in 1879 with the rise of modern antisemitism in Germany; it spread rapidly to Russia and then right round the world. Just in this period traditional orthodoxy was crumbling rapidly, and so Jewry was shaken to the core as perhaps it had not been since the destruction of the first temple. But it was in this shaking that suddenly a new national consciousness sprang to birth. In just over fifty years from the first Zionist conference an independent Jewish state existed for the first time since 63 B.C. All it needs is the Spirit of God.

Notice the skill used in describing God's work in vv. 12-14 resting on the ambiguity of *ruach*. Though God's breath or spirit must be upon them so that they may return to their land (v. 14), yet the giving of true spiritual life follows on the return to the land (v. 12 f). This is also the order in ch. 36:24-28.

The earthquake shock has passed over Israel; in part he has returned to his land in a consciously national sense, though there are still at least five times as many outside the land than in it. How long it will be before the spiritual transformation takes place is hidden in the councils of God, but we have every reason for believing that it is not far off.

One People, One King, One God (37: 15-28)

Already in v. 11 Ezekiel had spoken of 'the whole house of Israel'; now he makes it clear that he was using the term in its full sense. He is speaking not merely of those loyal families from the North who had joined Judah from time to time—v. 16, 'Judah and the Israelites attached to him (Moffatt), cf. 2 Chr. 11:13, 16; 15:9—but also of those who had survived from the fall of the Northern Kingdom—'Joseph and all in Israel attached to him' (Moffatt). To my way of thinking this is one of those passages which demolish a popular answer to the British-Israel theory, viz., that the Jew does in fact represent all the tribes. Equally I am incapable of understanding how the British-Israelite theory can be reconciled with the general picture in this chapter, for all parts of Israel are equally comprehended in the dry bones. Yet

again it is hard to see how the most hardened allegorizer and spiritualizer can find the Church here. Nor can the small companies of 'Israel' who doubtless joined Judah at the return from exile be considered in any sense a fulfilment.

An adequate discussion of the problem would have to include a consideration of a number of other Old Testament passages, notably *Hosea* and parts of Jer. 30, 31, and it would be quite out of keeping with the scale of this present study. There seem to be only three answers to the problem.

The British-Israel answer, quite apart from what seem to me insuperable difficulties in its Biblical exegesis and general arguments, just does not fit into the general picture of this chapter. There is no question of a powerful company of nations united to a nationally resurrected Judah, but both Judah and Israel have been resurrected.

The view that what is left of the Northern Tribes is scattered through the mountains of the Middle-East* may very well be true. It has, however, the same doubtful merit of certain 'futurist interpretations of prophecy'; there seems to be no means whatsoever of establishing the truth or error of the view until the time of fulfilment comes.

We should, however, seriously consider another possibility. In Vol. XXVI pp. 75-79 we considered the problem of 'unfulfilled' prophecy and saw that 'all national prophecy is conditional'. Seeing that the statement in Jer. 18:7-10 comes in a context of God's dealings with Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 18:11), the principle that prophecy is conditional must be applied to Israel as well as to the nations. The never-dying hatred towards the Jew by the Samaritans, predominantly Israelite in spite of mixed blood and by their own claim the legitimate descendants of Ephraim, suggests their obstinate refusal to accept God's verdict in history, and it may well have been the attitude of the majority of those that found themselves in exile as well. Such an attitude persisted in through centuries may well have excluded them from God's gracious purposes. Sufficient of the Northern Tribes joined Judah under the divided monarchy and doubtless at the return.

* Cf. J. Wilkinson: *My Glory*, p. 103-109.

from exile to make the modern Jew representative of 'all Israel' (Rom. 11:26), and it may be that Ezek. 37:15-22 will never have a literal fulfilment. God's honour is bound to the ultimate salvation of 'all Israel', but this does not imply that any section of the children of Israel must of necessity come within this salvation, for 'they are not all Israel, which are of Israel' (Rom. 9:6). So it may be that the gracious promises to the Northern Tribes of restoration will only have their fulfilment in the descendants of them that clave to Judah.

The climax and purpose of transformed land and people under the king of God's choosing (37:24f) is that God's sanctuary should be among them for ever. The implications of this will be considered later, when we deal with ch. 40-48, but it is clear that Ezekiel is foreseeing the fulfilment of prophecies like Is. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-4 and many others.

Gog (ch. 38, 39)

Before we begin to try to understand these chapters we should ask ourselves at what point in the process described in ch. 34-37 we are to place them. Though there is no intrinsic objection to the suggestion that Ezekiel is looking back to a time earlier than the time when the Lord's 'sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore', yet both the actual position of the chapters and 38:8, 11f, 14 suggest that they belong after the events described in ch. 36, 37. This is confirmed by Rev. 20:7-10, which is post-millennial. If we are sincere in our affirmation of the authority of Scripture, then we must bow to the interpretation that Scripture sets on itself instead of insisting on our own. There are but two mentions of Gog in Scripture, here and in *Revelation*, and unless we can produce very cogent arguments to the contrary, we must let the latter interpret the former*. To place Gog before the Second Advent and then to add 'but includes also the final

* It is worth noting that both in apocalyptic literature, e.g. Enoch 56, 2 Esdras 13, and in earlier Rabbinic writings the usual dating of Gog is in or after the Messianic period. For the Rabbinic evidence see Strack and Billerbeck. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Vol. III, p. 832 ff.

revolt of the nations at the close of the kingdom-age', as does the Schofield Bible (p. 883), seems an illegitimate attempt to have the best of it both ways. The only real basis for the common view that these chapters see their fulfilment before the Second Advent is in 39:21-29*. It is, however, far more satisfactory to look on these verses as a summary of the message of this whole section of *Ezekiel*.

If we place Gog at the end of the Millennium, we will not concern ourselves very much with the identification of the names mentioned. The curious are referred to *New Bible Commentary ad loc.* or to G. H. Lang (*op. cit.*). The statement in Schofield Bible (p. 883), 'That the primary reference is to the northern (European) powers, headed up by Russia, all agree', is an excellent example of the wish being father to the thought. Quite apart from the many who have always refused to identify Rosh with Russia, there is a strong tendency among moderns, e.g., RSV, Knox, Bertholet, ICC, to return to the old Hebrew Massoretic tradition and to translate with AV and RV. mg 'chief prince'.

There is, however, another element we should take into consideration. These chapters are neither predominantly symbolic (at least obviously so) nor minutely descriptive. They are typical of so many descriptions of the future, where the general purpose seems clear enough but the detail is seen to blur, when we examine it more closely, or to be far more general in character than we realize at first reading. Though it would be wrong on these grounds to take for granted that the names are not to be understood literally, yet all analogy points in that direction. When we find that all the names are of tribes on the fringe of the then known world: north, Gog, Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, Beth-Togarmah; east, Persia (only just beginning to make its appearance on the Iranian plateau); south, Cush and Put, it becomes intrinsically most probable that we are dealing with a symbolic use, and Rev. 20:8

* For a careful exposition of this view, which tries to do justice to various divergent opinions, see G. H. Lang: *The Histories and Prophecies of Daniel*, Appendix C (2nd edit.). That careful thinker E. Sauer both in his *The Triumph of the Crucified* and his *From Eternity to Eternity* places Gog at the end of the Millennium.

confirms this by calling them 'the nations which are in the four corners of the earth'.

How then are we to understand the whole prophecy in the light of its New Testament placing? If we accept the conception of a Millennium, of God's rule on earth, when Satan is bound, the curse lifted and saved Israel a centre of blessing on the earth, what room is there for any such outburst of revolt against God?

There are two ways in which we can look at the world and man's history on it, from man's position and from God's. From the former man seems to be an end in himself, and his history a story of a long, slow climb with many a slip back from the animal and primitive barbarity until in an age yet future he reaches perfection. Such a view can be and often is held together with a thoroughly Scriptural view of sin, of the Incarnation and of the Atonement, with the history of revelation primarily a history of man's salvation. Much could be quoted from the Scriptures to support such a view. From the latter standpoint the creation and history of man are placed within a wider framework of a Divine purpose. We are given little more than hints about this framework—perhaps to discourage idle speculation, perhaps because we could not understand, if we were told more—but, alas, the less we are told the more some profess to know.

Within this framework we see God vindicating His character and purposes before principalities and powers in heavenly places. The salvation of man is not an end in itself, but a means to a higher end. Behind all the changes and chances of human life stands the sovereign love of God, too great and too high for the mind of man to comprehend in its fulness. We see salvation available to all for the shadow of the cross stretches from the creation of the world to its end, and He who died on it is the light that lighteneth every man. In every age the question has been whether man will re-enact Adam's sin, speaking himself free of his Creator, or whether he will turn to Him in penitence praying 'God be merciful to me a sinner'.

Scripture shows us that in every age with all their varying circumstances of ignorance or knowledge man has set his will against God and has failed. The bulk of the Old Testament teaches the

failure of the children of Israel, and that is after all the gravamen of Ezekiel's message, see especially ch, 16, 20, 23. The New Testament introduces us to the beginnings of trouble in the Church, and makes it clear that they will grow worse rather than better. Here too, in the mysterious purpose of God, alongside His triumphs in the individual is set the failure of the organization.

The final proof of the failure of man is to be his response, when placed in the most favourable position conceivable. Though the sanctuary of God is with man, though the curse is lifted from nature, though the tempter, the enemy of God and man is bound, yet when the opportunity is offered, the deep-seated rebellion in the hearts of so many at once becomes obvious. I do not know whether we are to understand the names symbolically as of those who have kept far from the glory of God centred in Jerusalem, or whether it refers above all to those who in previous dispensations had not been exposed so directly to God's testing. In either case there is no contradiction between 38:4, where God is pictured as drawing Gog to his doom, and Rev. 20:8, where Satan is portrayed as the deceiver of the nations. Man must be put to the test, or else it will not be clear what is in him. Satan is the willing instrument by which the testing is carried out.

(To be continued)

ALIVE UNTO GOD

Epistle to the Romans 6: 11

W. WILCOX

Paul uses many pregnant phrases by which to describe the great change effected by conversion and the state resultant therefrom. Perhaps as he does so, he recalls the vitally real experience he had on the Damascus Road, and of the subsequent events in Antioch. Those experiences did not involve the acceptance of certain well-defined and clearly worded propositions regarding Christ and His Work, but did bring about a radical change of heart