

## THE REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

Like a golden thread, there is a consistent theme running throughout our three readings for the day. The Apostle Paul speaks of how he was bound in chains for “the hope of Israel”, and both of our Old Testament readings describe the future glorification of Israel. By considering these things, we can only strengthen our vision of the Kingdom to come, and so have a sharper focus on the things pertaining to that Kingdom. In our exhortation for today, we will see how that in order for the Kingdom to be restored to Israel, there must firstly be a humiliation and repentance of the Lord's people that they might learn to bow before the King they rejected 2000 years ago. Even though, within the last 50 years or so, we have seen the Jews pouring back into their Land, these Jews are not yet ready to submit to their King - they still reject the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus, and do not accept the things testified concerning Him in the Oracles of God. And in addition to these faithless sons of Jacob, there are still many more of them resident in foreign lands, who also refuse to bow before their Lord. There is then, a need for *a dual conversion*; for all 12 tribes, both inside and also outside the land to have the veil currently cast over their understanding to be removed (*2Cor 3:14-17*), that they might turn to the Lord in recognition of His Saving Power.

As regards to the Jews resident in the land at the epoch of our Lord's return, the Divinely selected means of causing them to turn back to Him, as in the days of old (*cp. Deut 28:49*), is to afflict them at the hands of a foreign invader. The prophetic testimony is that by the hand of his angelic ministers, the Lord will gather the armies of the world against Jerusalem, to afflict them for “all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land” (*Ezek 39:26*). Thus, Zechariah was “moved” by the Spirit to proclaim: “Behold, the day of Yahweh cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For *I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle*; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity ...” (*Zech 14:2*). This “day of Yahweh”, is styled by Jeremiah, the “day of Jacob's trouble” which shall be “great, so that none is like it” (*Jer 30:7, cp. Dan 12:1*), and it is in that unique “day”, that Isaiah testifies the Lord shall remove “the filth of the daughters of Zion ... by the spirit of judgement, and by the spirit of burning” (*Is 4:4*).

It is clear then, that there will be great suffering and sorrow, as the disobedient sons of Jacob are chastised for their iniquities, and brought to a situation of desperation and utter helplessness, that they might learn to trust in a Strength far greater than their own. And in the midst of such affliction, there will be heard the voice of bitter crying; Rachel weeping for her children (*Jer 31:51*), her tears running as a river day and night (*Lam 2:18*), as once again the enemy shall open the mouth against her: “they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it” (*Lam 2:16*). Women shall be raped, houses pillaged (*Zech 14:2*), sons taken as slaves (*Joel 3:3,6*), the survivors of half the city shall go into captivity and “a great spoil” shall be taken, and divided in the midst of the land.

In that day, Jerusalem truly shall become a furnace of affliction (*Ezek 22:18-22*), in order that the people might be refined, as silver and gold in the heat of the fire, and finally look to their God for deliverance: “And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith Yahweh, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: *they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, Yahweh is my God*” (*Zech 13:8,9*). In the depths of sorrow, and on the brink of annihilation, the survivors, “an afflicted and poor people” (*Zeph 3:12*) shall cry unto their God, in confession of their uncleanness: “*we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us because of our iniquities” (*Is 64:6,7*).

This will truly be a turning point in the history of the world - the final repentance of Israel, in order that the work of reconstructing their Kingdom might begin. From that day forward, Israel

shall trust in Yahweh their God, Who shall turn and fight against their enemies. Following their confession of sins, and recognition of their utter dependence upon the mercies of the God of their Fathers, they shall cry for deliverance: "Be not wroth very sore, O Yahweh, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation ... Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Yahweh? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" (*Is 64:9-12*). And Yahweh shall indeed hear the cry of His People - He shall answer swiftly with the outpouring of His Grace (*Zech 12:10*), and contend with those nations which so bitterly oppressed His People: "*He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee*" (*Is 30:19, cp. Ps 50:15*), for "*then shall Yahweh go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle*" (*Zech 14:3*), "and I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone. Thus will I sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am YAHWEH" (*Ezek 38:22:23*).

### **JUDGEMENTS UPON THE HEATHEN**

From these words of Ezekiel, we learn that the events of Armageddon are designed for more than one end. Not only will Israel be brought to trust in their God once more, as they see the power of the Almighty in effecting their salvation; the heathen also are to be witness to that Power being manifested in destruction to their armies, and shall themselves be thus taught of the God of Israel. These nations who assemble together against Jerusalem will do so unaware of the providential control over them, and unaware of the true reason for their gathering. They will be motivated entirely by their own carnal desire to "take a spoil ... to take a prey" (*Ezek 38:13*), and humiliate the Jews. They will say, "let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. *But they know not the thoughts of Yahweh, neither understand they his counsel*" (*Mic 4:11,12*), which is to cause His people to turn to Him, and then judge those who sought to oppress them. Never before will the armies of the entire world have been united together in one place on such a scale - it will be an unprecedented assembly of all peoples to Zion, the Holy Mount of the Lord. This is the site of the future capital of the world, the place that the Lord has chosen to Place His Name there from ancient times (*1Kings 11:36*). How appropriate therefore, that He should bring the nations to that very place that they may all appear before Him for judgement: "... my determination is to gather the nations, *that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy*" (*Zeph 3:8*).

So it will be, that the preparatory work of establishing the Lord's reign, shall commence with the Glorious Power of the Lord being laid bare in the sight of all nations, in bringing Salvation to His People, yet destruction to "the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen" (*Hag 2:22*). Isaiah speaks of this, in describing the joy of Israel for their deliverance: "Yahweh hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. Yahweh hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of *all the nations*, and *all the ends of the earth* shall see the salvation of our God" (*Is 52:10, cp. 40:5*). They will see the Salvation of Israel's God, at great cost to themselves, as Yahweh's anointed shall "rebuke many people" (*Is 2:4, Ps 9:5*), and so make himself "known in the eyes of many nations", who will then be called upon to submit themselves to him (*Ps 2:12*).

The repentant people of Israel themselves are also to have a hand in the final destruction, and removal of their oppressors. The strength of Gog's armies having been miraculously overthrown at the hands of the Lord's immortal hosts, the people will turn, and contend against those which remain, destroying their weapons and reclaiming their spoil: "And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears; and they shall burn them with fire seven years ... and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord Yahweh" (*Ezek 39:9,10*). And again, Zechariah speaks of this burning: "In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and *they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left*; and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem" (*Zech 12:6, see also Obad 17,18*).

The oppressing army having thus been obliterated by the power of the Almighty, the voice of rejoicing shall be heard in the mountains of Israel, as the former misery shall become but a fading memory: "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. Yahweh hath taken away thy judgements, *he hath cast out thine enemy*: the King of Israel, even Yahweh is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more" (*Zeph 3:15*). The tears of sorrow shall be replaced by the voice of gladness and joy, as the Lord's repentant people will be joined to Him once more, that the abundance of His blessings might be poured out upon them (*Joel 3:21-29*) and the beginnings of their restored Kingdom might become the nucleus of a world-wide dominion with all nations bowing before the greatness of Israel's God.

### ***ISRAEL IN DISPERSION***

This then, briefly describes the circumstances of the repentance of the Jews in the Land. But what of those outside, who will not experience such humiliation at the hands of the Gogian host? It is testified that the great prophet Elijah shall be instrumental in bringing Ephraim to repentance: "Behold, *I will send you Elijah the prophet* before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Yahweh: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (*Mal 4:6*). Speaking of his work, Bro Thomas wrote: "The person with whom they will have more immediately to do in their Second Exodus is Elijah. There would seem to be a fitness in this. In the days of their fathers, when they forsook the Lord and abolished the Law of Moses, Elijah was the person whose ministerial life was occupied in endeavouring to "restore all things". Though he did much to vindicate the name and law of Jehovah, he was taken away in the midst of his labours. For what purpose? That he might at a future period resume his work and perfect it by restoring all things among the ten tribes according to the law of Moses, preparatory to their being planted in their land under a new covenant to be made with them there. But it may be objected that Elijah has come already, and that John the Baptist was he (*Luke 1:17*). True, in a certain sense, he has. John was Elijah to the House of Judah in the sense of his having come "in the spirit and power of Elijah". But John was not the Elijah who talked with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. The latter is Elijah to the house of Israel. The scribes taught that Elijah must precede Christ; which Jesus approved, saying, "Elijah truly shall first come and restore all things". He said this after John was put to death ..." (*Elpis Israel*, p 451, 452).

This Elijah, it is testified, shall "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers" (*Mal 4:6*), that is, to join together the hearts of the Sons of Israel to become at one with that of their Fathers, that they may rejoice together in the covenant made with them. He will "restore all things" - that is to restore the remnant of Jacob to their God, and effect the second exodus, the final restoration to the land. How appropriate in this regard that on the Mount of Transfiguration (a foretaste of the Kingdom, (*2Pet 1:16-18*)), there should appear Moses, the leader of the first Exodus out of Egypt, with Elijah, the leader of the final Exodus, through the wilderness of the peoples (*Ezek 20:35*) to communicate with the Lord concerning his "decease (or "exodus", as the Greek has it) which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (*Luke 9:31*) - the means by which as the captain of salvation, he would lead many sons out of darkness into glory (*Heb 2:10*). But by what means are the people to be brought to repentance? What signs and wonders (*Joel 2:30*, see *Mic 7:15*) will testify to the Truth of what the *diaspora* find themselves being taught? It would appear that the restorative work of Elijah will run concurrently with the humiliation and redemption of Jerusalem, for we read that Elijah shall be sent "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Yahweh", that is, *prior to* the invasion of Jewry by the Gogian host. Yet it will not be finally accomplished until *after* the salvation of Jerusalem, for "Yahweh also shall save the tents of Judah first" (*Zech 12:7*). So it will be that Elijah's preaching shall receive a powerful witness in the desolation, deliverance, and miraculous blessing of the land. He will, doubtless warn the exiles of the impending judgements to come upon the earth, and will be able to look to Jerusalem as an example of this. And again, he will doubtless speak of the blessings which will fill all the earth - and will be able to point to the blessing of Jerusalem as an example of this. Thus it will be, that Elijah will lead the people out from the kingdoms of men, their dominion about to be crushed by the Stone-power of God (*Dan 2:44*) into the land of promise, it's desolate

wastes transformed into an Edenic paradise (*Is 51:3*) by the beneficent power of the Lord, upon the repentance and cry of his people. And beholding these things, what greater incentive could there be for the scattered tribes to seek after the One who has performed these “great things” (*Joel 2:21*)? So it will be, that as they sojourn among the countries of the heathen, they shall see these things, and rejoice: “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, Yahweh hath done great things for them. Yahweh hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad” (*Ps 126:2,3*).

The response of the people to Elijah will be good: “thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (*Ps 110:3*), and in belief of their God, they shall depart from their adopted lands, to return home, to Zion.

### ***AFFLICTION IN THE WILDERNESS***

But the Scriptures indicate that many of the returning exiles shall be compelled to leave their host countries because of persecution. Just as the inhabitants of Jerusalem are to experience great affliction at the hands of the confederacy denominated in the 38<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel, so their brethren, resident in “their enemies’ lands” (*Ezek 39:27*), are to groan under great travail and distress:- “behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts” (*Ezek 37:11*), as they shall become a “curse among the heathen” (*Zech 8:13*). And even having left those countries, the people shall not find peace in the nations they will need to pass through to reach the Promised Land. Rather, they shall be subjected to a purging: “I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and *there will I plead with you face to face* ... And I will cause you to pass under the rod, *and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel:* and ye shall know that I am Yahweh” (*Ezek 20:34-38*).

From these words, it is evident that as they seek to return to their homeland, the Jews shall experience many terrible atrocities, as anti-Semitic feelings are aroused, probably by the leading countries of the campaign against Jerusalem. The scene of these events is to be “the wilderness of the peoples” - it is in this place that the rebels (those who desire to escape persecution in their own lands, and experience the blessings of Zion, yet refuse to accept Yahweh’s terms of deliverance) shall be removed. And it is here also, that the remnant shall be brought into “the bond of the covenant”; that is, the New Covenant (*Jer 31:31*), having been taught of it, through the Mosaic schoolmaster (*Gal 3:24*), and the ministrations of Elijah.

We have been unable to find in the Divine Testimony precise details of the route which the returning sons of Jacob shall follow in their journeyings, and so it is difficult for us to define with certainty the exact location of this “wilderness of the peoples”, if indeed it be referring to a specific place. But in the apocalyptic visions shown to John, he beheld a European “wilderness” (*Rev 17:3*), inhabited by the harlot mother of Christendom, the Catholic system, seated upon a multi-headed beast. This beast, we learn from verses 9-13, is a Roman political animal, comprised of 10 kings over which the Papacy exerts its influence - in short, Roman Catholic Europe, as it will exist at the Epoch of the Lord’s Return. And of these 10 Kings, we read, “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (*Verse 14*). We shall say more of this war with the Lord Jesus later, but these words serve to place the “wilderness” beheld by John in the time-period under our present consideration - at the epoch of the destruction of the Kingdoms of men, and their replacement by the reconstructed Kingdom of Israel.

This Apocalyptic wilderness then, is the arena inhabited by the papal-driven European political creature (*See Eureka for further evidence of this*). It speaks of the European land which, although in many ways is a fruitful place - physically speaking - due to its lack of spiritual nourishment, is little more than an inhospitable, barren desert, in the Divine Estimation. And it is quite possible,

therefore that it is this area of the globe that Ezekiel styles the “wilderness of the people”, the places in Europe through which the returning exiles will pass through on their journey homeward - the place which has been the scene of some of the most bitter campaigns of hate against God’s people in past ages.

### ***DIVINE DELIVERANCE ASSURED***

But be that as it may, it is clear that in this wilderness, having been “purged” of the “rebels”, the refined remnant shall find grace in the sight of their God: “Thus saith Yahweh, the people which were left of the sword *found grace in the wilderness*, even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest” (*Jer 31:2; see the whole chapter. It may be thought that these words relate to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, but in that event, it was not just a remnant, those “left of the sword”, but the whole nation which was saved. See also Hos 2:14*). These people have a promise of Divine protection: “When thou passest through the waters, *I will be with thee*; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, though shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (*Is 43:2, see Ps 66:12*) and so it will be, that having entered into the New Covenant, just as the Lord shall deliver the Gogian confederacy into the hand of those in the land; so He will be with his people, in contending against their enemies outside. And just as Judah will have a part in executing judgements against their oppressors under the auspices of their Redeemer (*Is 59:20*), even so Israel will execute the Lord’s judgements upon those countries which seek their destruction. Thus we read of the proclamation of Yahweh: “Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for *with thee will I destroy kingdoms*; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider ...” (*Jer 51:21*). And again, in speaking of Yahweh’s “weapons of war”: “when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece ... And Yahweh shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord Yahweh shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. Yahweh Tzavaoth shall defend them; and they shall devour ...” (*Zech 9:13-15*).

In that day the sons of Jacob shall fight victoriously against their enemies, in the preliminary work of subduing the nations, under the reign of their King. As it is written, “the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off” (*Mic 5:8,9*). Thus it will be, that Israel shall prosper, being victorious over their oppressors, in preparation for that time, prophesied so many years earlier, when “*the sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee*; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The City of Yahweh, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel ... I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations” (*Is 60:15*).

The Scriptures also reveal that there shall be many physical blessings also, provided for the benefit of the travellers. Thus, we read of the Lord’s mercy in once again providing water in the wilderness: “when the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I Yahweh will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. *I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water*” (*Is 41:18 cp Ex 17:6*). The effects of the provision of water in the previously barren desert will be most remarkable, and will remain throughout the Kingdom Age, as a testimony of the grace of God extended to his weak and feeble sons, during their homeward journey: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad *for them*; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing ... strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you” (*Is 35:1-4*).

The provision of these mercies in the deserts, will primarily be “for them”, that is, for the benefit of the returning exiles. But once provided, we may not unreasonably suppose that as the people of the earth shall attend the Temple for worship (*Zech 14:16-18*), these things will remain for their

benefit also, providing them with both water, and also magnificent scenes of beauty, as they come nearer to the Holy Land, witnessing to the exalted position that country shall have in the age to come. And it will form part of a most splendid approach to the Holy Temple, adding to the wonderful scene of glory the travellers will behold, and testifying to the greatness of the Power and Grace of Israel's God.

There is much profit in considering the details given in Scripture concerning the coming kingdom. Jesus himself taught: "... seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (*Mat. 6:33*), and to focus our attention on what will take place then, can only help us to sharpen our vision of the future. We look at these things, not simply to ascertain the facts of what will take place – although that is important in itself. But we rather look at them to strengthen our faith, and to know what it is that we look forward to in the future reign of Messiah. And having a vision of joy set before us, we can go forward with boldness, enduring the trials of this life, that we might ultimately be joined as one spirit with Christ, rejoicing in glorious immortality throughout the ages to come.

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