

CHAPTER XIII

PROPHECIES OF RESTORATION

WHILE Ezekiel waited anxiously for news from besieged Jerusalem, news that he knew could only be of destruction, God re-commissioned him, for now a new phase of work was to begin. Whereas he had previously been primarily a messenger of doom, he was now to be the builder of a new community.

Whether there was a new vision of the chariot-throne we are not told. It does not matter, but probably there was not. Visions and ecstatic experiences belong mostly to the beginnings of communion with God. There are those that measure spirituality by such measuring rods, but in fact they are very often God's compensation for its lack. When a man has walked with God for six years, as had Ezekiel, he does not need visions to guarantee the source and authority of the voice that spoke to him.

Vv. 2-9 are essentially the same as 3: 17-21 (see p. 29), but with two important differences. The parallel between Ezekiel and a watchman is more fully drawn (vv. 2-6). This reflects Ezekiel's changed status in the community. As the storm clouds gathered over Jerusalem he had increasingly been winning the ear and the regard of the exiles; when his message was vindicated by the fall of Jerusalem, he would become an undisputed spiritual leader. So we are given both the human and the divine side of his appointing.

On the other hand the danger to the righteous is not mentioned (cf. 3: 20f.). This had been above all despondency, lack of trust and a following of those false voices that had whispered spurious hopes of speedy return from exile and a restoration of the glories of Zion. If in spite of all they had listened to and believed Ezekiel's message, its fulfilment would remove their chief danger. On the other hand, the wicked, for whom the pull of the surrounding heathendom was perhaps the chief danger, would feel themselves drawn by it the more now that the temple was no more and the enemies of Jehovah seemed to have triumphed.

The second part of the commissioning (vv. 10-20) is a summary of ch. 18 (see pp. 71-75), though again with a shift of

emphasis. Then the temptation had been for the exiles to see themselves so caught up by the entail of the past that effort on their part was useless. Now, as with dull foreboding they waited for the end of all hope, their fate seemed so evil that the doing of God's will seemed to offer no hope of improving it.

Earlier Ezekiel had to bring home to the exiles that their very exile was an act of God's grace; now he had to make them see that their share in the future, their living, would depend entirely on their loyalty to God. They could not lift the burden of exile, nor does Ezekiel suggest that it might be ameliorated. But under a harsh and capricious government their very survival was in itself a guarantee of a fulfilment of the promises of return.

The Church has known its Babylonian Captivity, and those that pass through it are tempted to conformity with the corrupt systems around it. But whether in the dark night of medieval superstition or in the shorter persecutions of later days God has always preserved a handful of the faithful; their very living has been the best guarantee that the truth would some day triumph again.

"THE CITY IS SMITTEN!" (33:21-33)

Some six months after the fall of Jerusalem (cf. v. 21 with II Kings 25: 3f.) the long expected news came. It is imperative to read "eleventh" in v. 21 with eight Hebrew MSS., some MSS. of LXX and the Syriac, unless we assume, as does ICC (*ad loc.*), that a double system of time-reckoning is involved. In any case it must be August 586 B.C. that is intended, for while the fugitive could indeed have met many difficulties and delays on the road, Nebuchadnezzar's official dispatch must have been known in Babylon long before the year was out, and the gloating of minor officials and insolent neighbours would have brought them the news, even if it had not been conveyed officially.

Ezekiel had known it already the day before (v. 22), and with the knowledge came the release from his dumbness. If my explanation of this is correct (pp. 31 and 98), it means that Ezekiel was now free to act as a normal teacher among the people and to enter into all the details of their lives. This seems supported by the impression given by ch. 34-39 that they are merely a summary of a much fuller teaching. Note that we are given no time indication in these chapters.

But before we are given the new message we have a double picture of the people that are left. In vv. 24-29 we have a

glimpse of the unrepentant remnant in Judea. Jer. 40-43 gives us a fuller picture of them and shows at least part of the fulfilment of the prophecy. There is a religious fanaticism that nothing can shake. We saw in Ezekiel's earlier prophecies the blind confidence of the men who believed that the temple could not be destroyed (cf. Jer. 7: 4) and that it would guarantee their safety. Now they had switched their confidence from the temple to their origin (v. 24). In a time of anarchy their behaviour had only deteriorated (vv. 25f.)—"ye stand upon your sword," i.e. you live by violence.

As for the exiles (vv. 30-33), Ezekiel had now become the topic of general conversation—the AV "against thee" (v. 30, see mg.) is particularly unfortunate. He was the popular preacher and the craze for the moment (v. 31). With the disappearance of Jerusalem as a centre of possible rebellion the position of the exiles improved greatly. The new possibilities of gain (v. 31, RV, RSV) were so filling their thoughts that the message of restoration had little attraction for them, and it would need the fulfilment of Ezekiel's new message before they would take him really seriously in his new role (v. 33).

RULERS PAST AND FUTURE (CH. 34)

In a day when monarchy is a convenience and a nostalgic inheritance from the past, we find it very hard to understand the role of the king in the Bible. Throughout the Bible lands monarchy was a divine institution; the king was the gods' supreme representative, himself a god in Egypt, a man capable of achieving deity elsewhere—chief ruler, chief priest, chief prophet. Though in Israel this union of offices was dissolved, a psalm like 110 shows that men looked for the Messianic king that would reunite them.¹ It followed that a people who were living out the will of Jehovah would have to have a head who truly represented Him. So in his picture of restored Israel Ezekiel begins with a picture of the king, though, as the prophecy develops, a deeper reason for this becomes apparent.

One of the disadvantages of fallen man is his very great difficulty, if not incapability, in picturing the ideal and perfect described purely in terms of itself. It is only when we see it against the background of the imperfect that we can really appreciate it. Hence Ezekiel begins with a picture of the kings as they had been (vv. 2-8).

Ezekiel uses the metaphorical name "shepherd." It cannot

¹ See my *The Centrality of the Messianic Idea for the Old Testament*, pp. 9-14.

be too emphatically stressed that whenever shepherd is used metaphorically it means king, except in the comparatively rare cases where the context makes it clear that the highest princes of the land are intended. The term is used especially by writers round the exilic period, e.g. Jeremiah and Zechariah, and was probably chosen to rule out the illegitimate religious connotations that had become attached to "king" (*melek*). When the title is used of God, it thinks of Him as the perfect king, Psa. 23: 1, etc.

At the same time it was peculiarly suited to stress the royal duty of enforcing social righteousness. ICC considers that Josiah's successors are here intended, but I think that the whole monarchy is under condemnation. Ezekiel's eye can see the rottenness under the surface, where we may be dazzled by superficial appearances, cf. his root and branch condemnation of Israel's religious history (ch. 20). Already in our study of 22: 30 (p. 91) we had reason to find a far-reaching condemnation of the kings. It is by examining the social record of the better kings that we can best see how little the monarchy had provided true shepherds for God's people.

I Sam. 8: 11-18 gives a prophetic preview of the social effects of the monarchy. We know too little of Saul's reign to be able to say how far he conformed to the pattern, though there are indications, e.g. I Sam. 22: 2; 25: 10 that the process had begun. II Sam. 20: 24 shows that David had already begun the hated system of "forced labour" (RSV; "levy," RV mg.), how hated may be seen from I Kings 12: 18. The cry for less taxation and forced labour (I Kings 12: 4) shows there was a side to Solomon's glory we often tend to forget. The evidence heaps up when we come to the written prophets. Isa. 5: 8-24 can be dated with reasonable certainty in the reign of Jotham (cf. II Kings 15: 34) and Mic. 2: 1-11; 3: 1-12 in that of Hezekiah (cf. Jer. 26: 18). Equally certainly Jer. 5 and Hab. 1: 2-4 belong to Josiah's reign *after* his reformation. It is noteworthy that the fullest picture of the Messianic king (Isa. 11: 1-9) stresses virtually only that he is the creator and maintainer of social righteousness.

We need not doubt that the religiously better kings were also socially better, but all of them failed to see that they were trying to make the best of a fundamentally evil system. There is no evidence that they ever even considered the possibility of placing the monarchy on any other basis than that foretold by Samuel.

The past rises so vividly before Ezekiel's eyes that he can speak of the vanished kings in the present tense (vv. 2ff.); in

vv. 5f. we have a reference to the exile. Then in vv. 7-10 he tells the royal family that restoration of national life will not bring the restoration of their privileged position with it. This is more than merely barring Jehoiachin's descendants from the throne. This had already been done by Jeremiah (22: 30). Ezekiel goes further. Instead of announcing the accession of a collateral branch of the Davidic family, or even of a new dynasty, he proclaims that for the time being Jehovah Himself would be their king with no man as His representative (vv. 11-16).

How remarkable the fulfilment has been. Under the long centuries of Persian and Greek rule (538-142 B.C.) there was no official head of the Jewish people, although increasingly the high priest was looked on as such, but his position was one of respect rather than of right. When in 140 B.C. the people regularized the existing position, they gave to Simon the Hashmonean the position of "leader and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet; and that he should be captain over them, and should take charge of the sanctuary, to set them over their works, and over the country, and over the arms, and over the strongholds . . ." (I Macc. 14: 41f.). Apparently no king from the house of David was proposed, but on the other hand the title king was carefully withheld from Simon, for the people knew they had no right to bestow it.

When Simon's son, John Hyrcanus, assumed the royal title,¹ it meant a bitter breach between him and the Pharisees. The Hashmonean priest-kings fell in 63 B.C. only to be followed by the half Edomite Herods, whose only claim to the throne was the power of the Roman sword behind them. It was more than mere hatred of the Herodian family that prompted the embassy of Jewish notables to Rome after the death of Herod the Great (4 B.C.) asking that Palestine might be incorporated in the Roman province of Syria instead of a new king being appointed over them.² They had accepted the principle that only a king of God's appointing could really be a blessing to them.

The object of Jehovah's shepherding was to be the reformation of His people (vv. 17-22). The meaning will become clearer, if we substitute "sheep" for "cattle" in vv. 17, 20, 22; the rams and the he-goats are, of course, the rich and powerful among the people. All those who abuse the power of rank and wealth are to experience the judgment of God. We are apt to

¹ Josephus (*Ant.* XIII. xi. 1) affirms that Aristobulus, Hyrcanus' son, was the first to assume the royal title, but modern scholars are in agreement that Hyrcanus must already have done so.

² Josephus: *Ant.* XVII. xi. 2.

overlook the reality of God's working in Israel through the long centuries of his hardening in part. We doubt that any other nation can parallel the Jews' centuries' long rule by the wisest, by spiritual leaders. Probably no other people in the world today has a truer understanding of democracy or has less real class distinction. By centuries of suffering they have largely learnt the limitations of purely physical power, and the well-known generosity of the Jew shows that he has often understood the true purpose of wealth. Obviously there are many Jews that do not live up to their national ideals, and there are faults they are prone to which may be less common among the peoples in whose midst they live. For all that the objection of the Jew to the Church—quite apart from the way he has been treated by it—that he finds more understanding for social righteousness in the Synagogue than in the Church is, alas, all too often justified.

When Jehovah's purpose with His flock is accomplished, He appoints His "servant David" king over them (vv. 23-31). It is true he is called prince (*nasi*'), but, as 37:24f. show, this is not intended to deny that he is king. This is not the usage of 12:10 and 21:25 (cf. pp. 51 and 86). Here, and in 44:3; 45:7; 46:2, the use of *nasi*' is meant to stress that God's king will not obscure the kingship of God; he will represent, not misrepresent Him. "My servant David" implies both the fulfilment of the promises of God to David and also that "Great David's greater Son" would truly be a man after God's own heart. There is general agreement that we should read with LXX in v. 31, "You are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture."

THE DOOM OF THOSE THAT HATE ISRAEL (CH. 35)

It is usually taken for granted that we have here merely one more prophecy against Edom, but a little thought will show us that, as so often, the apparently obvious can do with reconsideration. The punishment of Edom was already announced in 25:12-14, its natural position, and in 36:5 Edom receives special mention among the lands coveting the soil of Israel. Unless we assume, in spite of the lack of any positive evidence, that Edom had already begun its infiltration into the Negeb that was to bring it as far as Hebron by the time of Judah's return, there seems no adequate spiritual motivation for this added denunciation. We have, however, seen that the prophecies against Egypt and Tyre (cf. pp. 113 and 105) have a deeper purpose than the superficial and obvious one, and we may well examine whether the same is not true here.

The first thing that should strike us in the unusual name, Mount Seir, which Ezekiel uses for Edom. It is found nowhere else in his prophecies—it was pointed out on p. 101 that the not completely parallel "Seir" in 25: 8 is probably due to textual corruption—its use in the Old Testament is comparatively rare, and except in this chapter it is a purely geographical expression. Since it is Ezekiel we are studying, we cannot go far wrong, if we look for a symbolic meaning.

Esau's "blessing" was, "Away from the fatness of the earth shall be thy dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above" (Gen. 27: 39, RV mg., RSV, etc.), and nothing symbolized this better than Mt. Seir. G. A. Smith describes it: "Few territories of this size cover such a range of soils. In parts well-watered, in others with a precarious agriculture, the most is unproductive. . . . Mount Esau [i.e. Mt. Seir] attains a general elevation of 4,000 to 5,000 feet above sea-level, far higher than that of Hauran, Gilead, or Moab . . . the variety of Mount Esau is thus greater than that of the Range to the north. Besides the cool stony plateaus, which it has like the latter but lifts higher, its west flank is a series of ridges, shelves and strips of valley, mazes of peaks, cliffs, and chasms that form some of the wildest rock scenery in the world. In the sandstone above the Arabah are the Siks (shafts), clefts or corridors between perpendicular rocks. Springs emerge between the porous upper strata of limestone and at the contact of the latter with the sandstone. On the limestone plateau devoid of springs cisterns preserve some of the winter rain, and at various periods dams and reservoirs have caught the surface waters in both the shallow and deep wadies."¹

Mt. Seir may indeed act as a symbol of the lot of all those who despise their birthright and set as their goal "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life." Their achievement may at first sight excite admiration and even envy, but at its latter end it is sterile.

From the time of Amos Edom is charged with implacable hatred against Israel (Amos 1: 11; Ezek. 25: 12; 35: 5; Obad. 10; Psa. 137: 7). The fact that we can so easily understand this hatred in no way diminishes their sin. The long periods of subjection to Judah, and the cruelty of Joab (I Kings 11: 15f.), in itself probably a reply to treachery, may palliate their hatred but do not excuse it in God's eyes. None hate the people of God, be it the Church or be it Israel, more than those that have despised God's giving in grace and have seen their own achievements prove sterile and empty. It was a true instinct that

¹ *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 25th edit., pp. 561-565.

made the rabbis apply the name Edom to Rome with all its pomp and spiritual emptiness.

So before Ezekiel turns to the accomplishment of God's purpose with His land and people, he solemnly foretells judgment on all those, who having gone their own way like Edom, hate the people of God and seek to deprive them of what is theirs by God's giving.

Note v. 10. Though Jehovah had abandoned His land (11: 23), that was something merely apparent and external. What has been chosen in God's election remains eternally His (cf. Rom. 11: 1f., 28f.).

RESTORATION: OUTWARD AND INWARD (CH. 36)

Ezekiel's message of restoration began with the monarchy (ch. 34), for without leadership chosen by God and well-pleasing to Him the people cannot prosper. After a digression dealing with those that hate God's people, Ezekiel turns not, as we might expect, to a transformed people, but to their transformed land. Since we are dealing here with a concept strange to the modern man, we will do well to examine it more closely.

THE TRANSFORMED LAND (36: 1-15)

For the average modern man a juxtaposition of land and people in a spiritual setting is meaningless. As a result this section is normally spiritualized away or used as yet another example of the material and inferior character of the Old Covenant. We shall see that though this attitude is not altogether unjustified, it fails to do justice to Scripture and exposes those that adopt it to very real spiritual danger.

For the Bible man is essentially material. He is *'adam*, for he is made of the dust of the *'adamah* (cf. in a different setting, p. 72). The solidarity of mankind lies not, as in Greek thought, in his being partaker of one spirit but of one body-stuff. It is his individuality that is guaranteed by the spirit breathed into him, which makes him personally answerable to God. So a man and the land on which he lives and from which he draws his nourishment are linked, and he by his sin can bring a curse on it, cf. 36: 17; Deut. 24: 4; Jer. 3: 1, 9; Psa. 106: 38; 107: 34. The Old Testament ideal is that a man should have his ancestral portion of land, which thanks to the law of Jubilee could not be permanently alienated (Lev. 25). Passages like Deut. 8: 7-9; 11: 10-12 hardly imply that

Palestine is the fairest of lands, but rather that it is the land of God's perfect choice for Israel.

The New Testament neither denies nor abrogates this basic truth about man's being. It does not preach a pale internationalism of the type so popular in socialist movements today, but it lifts the Christian, not mankind, to a new level. "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3: 20, RV—Moffatt expresses the sense excellently by, "We are a colony of heaven"), where in a spiritual sense we already are (Col. 3: 1; Eph. 1: 3; 2: 6); we draw our sustenance from the body and blood of the new Adam, who is not earthy but is "the Lord from heaven." Therefore we have been lifted above questions of Jew and Gentile to become the Church of God (I Cor. 10: 32). It is only in measure as the Church and the individual Christian are lifted to a truly supernatural and spiritual plane that it can ignore the great basic verities of human nature. Much of the greatest tragedy in the Church comes, when its members living on a more or less material and natural plane attempt that which only the spiritual can do in fear and trembling.

There is a growing understanding in widening circles today that much of our modern malaise is due to man's divorce from the land and to the artificial conditions of city life. Modern man in his pride constantly wishes to defy the laws of his being, but nature always has the last word.

The Church cannot hope for perfection until our Lord Jesus comes from heaven as a Saviour to take it there; equally the transformation of Israel on the earthly level must be preceded by the transformation of the land.

In ch. 6 Ezekiel had denounced the mountains of Israel, because of the idolatry that had been carried out on them and which had defiled them. For that reason the message of transformation is addressed to them too. But there is a further complex of ideas why they are singled out for mention. Though the whole land had been given Israel by God, fear of the walled towns and the iron chariots had delayed the capture of the plains; the Philistine lands in the south of the Coastal Plain became tributary in the time of David, but already under Solomon they had once again become independent not again to come under Israelite rule until the time of the Hashmonean kings. It is very possible for men so to fail to possess their spiritual possessions that in the end they make excuses for not possessing them and persuade themselves that they are not intended to have them. It is a commonplace among Christians, for example, to deny the possibility of true holiness in this life, or to affirm that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit were only

intended for the first days of the Church. In 47: 13-20 it is clear that God's original giving holds good, but here Ezekiel speaks in terms of that to which men had grown familiar. We can, however, legitimately consider the plains of Palestine to be included in the language of ch. 36. Whether one stands in the Coastal Plain or in Esdraelon, one is more conscious of the hills than of the plain; it is they that set the predominant note, hence the description in Deut. 11: 11.

For the right understanding of vv. 4-6 we must bear in mind that Ezekiel is not speaking of Judah only but of Israel as well, where strangers had ruled for over a century and a half. The clear implication of vv. 9-11 is that the new settlers had been unable to derive full profit from the soil. There are many natural explanations, all of which are superficially valid, why Palestine has never been a truly fertile land for long ever since Israel was driven out. God uses natural means for accomplishing His purposes. The wit of man may do what it will, but God sees to it that the land of His choice does not show its true riches until it is once again linked to the people of His choice. In the last analysis Deut. 11: 12 remains true—Palestine will always be what God makes it, not what man tries to make of it.

The translation "high places" (v. 2) is misleading; RSV "the ancient heights" is preferable; the prophet uses *bamot* in its non-technical sense, but allows the hearer to remember the misuse of the hill-tops as sanctuaries.

Already in the story of the spies (Num. 13: 32) we are told that Canaan is "a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof." We are presumably to understand this in a double sense. The position of Palestine is such that it has at all times been exposed to invasion both from major powers in the Near East and from the constant inroads and infiltration of the nomad tribes in the east. The traditional lists of pre-Israelite peoples (Gen. 15: 19ff., etc.) show how from the earliest times this process was going on. Then too it has always been a land where the risk of inadequate rainfall, locust swarms, pestilence from Egypt and other natural catastrophes has made life precarious. Now all this is to be no more (vv. 12-15); Jehovah's presence (48: 35) will preserve from both dangers.

THE TRANSFORMED PEOPLE (36: 16-38)

A belief in his own merit, or in his ability to acquire merit with God is one of man's commonest and most subtle sins. Ezekiel's stress that the exiles under Jehoiachin had been peculiarly the recipients of God's grace will, after the fulfilment

of God's judgment on Jerusalem, have convinced many of them that in some way they had merited God's choice of them. Ezekiel is therefore compelled to insist that the coming restoration is in spite of the exiles, not because of their merits; they had been driven from their land because of their sins, and the same sins they had shown in the lands of their exile (vv. 16-21). He repeats the thought in vv. 22f., 31f.

It needs no proof that the centre of this prophecy, vv. 24-28, is based on and is an expansion of the great promise of the New Covenant in Jer. 31: 31-34. For the modern man it seems strange that although the prophets repeatedly betray a knowledge of the words of their predecessors and contemporaries and sometimes carry their message further, yet they never suggest this nor mention them by name—the non-mention of Jeremiah by Ezekiel is particularly striking. We must not assume that they were indifferent to plagiarism; it is expressly condemned by Jeremiah (23: 30). It is rather that they were so conscious of being Jehovah's spokesmen that they were not sufficiently concerned with the sundry ways and divers manners by which Jehovah had spoken before them to underscore and stress them. That would have been to stress the means by which the message had come, when the message was what really mattered.

It is doubtful whether Ezekiel really tells us more than Jeremiah. The latter concentrates on the spiritual work, the former, consistently with his whole outlook, sees it as the gracious action of God in all its details. That is perhaps why it is Jeremiah rather than Ezekiel who is quoted in the New Testament in *Hebrews*, in which we see the ritual passing away.

It is doubtful whether Ezekiel wishes to convey any clear-cut idea by clean water (v. 25); to equate it with baptism is to forget that this is a mere symbol also. In v. 25 he is thinking of defilement rather than of guilt and so he uses the picture not of the sacrifices but of the ceremonial cleansings in the Levitical law. He knows that there both blood and water only function through the grace of God. He had not, like Isaiah, been given the vision of the Servant of Jehovah, from whose side should flow both blood and water, and so he is looking through the symbols of the Law to the grace behind them.

Already in 11: 19 we had the promise of the changed heart (cf. p. 48). It is far from easy to translate Hebrew psychology into that of the modern man in the street, for where the latter tends to divide and separate, the Hebrew always thought primarily of man in his wholeness. Probably the best translation here is "will," provided we do not think of it as some independent entity in man. For the Hebrew the heart is the

will as the expression of his complete character. His heart is a heart of stone because all parts of his being have been in revolt against God, so his will could not respond to His voice. The consequence was that Israel was made incapable of responding to God, except in part (Isa. 6: 9f.; John 12: 39; Rom. 11: 25)—it is hardly necessary to add that this is true of all men (Rom. 9: 15f.), except as the grace of God is in operation. For linguistic reasons beyond the scope of this study flesh in the Old Testament does not have the connotations it has in the New.¹ Here, since a heart of stone is something contrary to nature, a heart of flesh is a natural heart, a will as God designed it to be.

Spirit (*ruach*), when spoken of as part of a man, again does not bear the meaning generally given it, but tends to mean his dominant disposition, even an overmastering inclination.² Here, obviously the new spirit is God's spirit, which is to become the dominating factor in transformed Israel. Hence there will be the desire and urge to do God's will.

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

¹ There is an interesting discussion in J. A. T. Robinson: *The Body*.

² See especially Snaith: *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, ch. vii.

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 I 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 I Cor. 10: 1—that has led to the widespread superstition that certain parts of the New Testament, e.g. Hebrews, James, I 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 has done to us in Jesus Christ. The fulfilment for Israel can neither be greater nor less nor 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: 16f., 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 book 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 (but see p. 143).

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: 19f. 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"); Isa. 9: 5 (RV "tumult"); Jer. 10: 22 (RV "commotion"); 47: 3 (RV "rushing"); Nah. 3: 2 (RV "rattling"); Job 39: 24 (RV "fierceness"). In 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 shortlived 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" (I Macc. 14: 41f.), 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 anti-semitism 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. 12f.). 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. II Chron. 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 together.

The view that what is left of the Northern Tribes is scattered through the mountains of the Middle East¹ 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 pp. 102ff. 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 his-

¹ Cf. J. Wilkinson: *Israel My Glory*, pp. 103-109.

tory, 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 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 Isa. 2: 2-4; Mic. 4: 1-4 and many others.

THE FINAL REVOLT (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.¹ To place Gog before the Second Advent and then to add "but includes also the final revolt of the nations at the close of the kingdom-age," as does the Scofield Bible (p. 883),

¹ 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. 832ff., Klausner: *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, pp. 496-501.

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: 21-29¹. 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 the Scofield 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." If we want to identify Meshesh and Tubal, it should surely be as in 27: 13, though 32: 26 (see p. 116) suggests the real meaning (see below).

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 blurred, when we examine it more closely, or is 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, Meshesh, 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 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

¹ 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.

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 regarded primarily as 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 fullness. 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 all ages, 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 chs. 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.