

Israel and the Time of Jacob's Trouble

I have the unwelcome task of giving an overview of what the Scriptures call, "The time of Jacob's Trouble." It is a painful survey of the devastation and suffering, yet future, for Israel and the Jewish people, but I think that the Church needs to have this view brought into its understanding, lest it finds itself offended at the lengths to which God will go in dealing with this Jacob nation in order that they might finally become the true Israel of God. It is not only the Jacob in Israel who will be the victim of such devastation, but Jacob wherever he is to be found in the earth. It is not the time of political Israel's trouble, but the time of *Jacob's* trouble. Present political Israel is Jacob, but it does not by that exhaust the Jacob that is in the world. We need this brought home to us as the Church, because the Jacob people that are in our cities and nations will not be exempt from the sifting and refining fire of God.

God's motive toward Israel is *not* because of Israel's virtue. If Israel had virtue, they would not be suffering the calamities that have come. He chose them for no other reason than that He loves them. It is not because of Israel's lovableness, but because of who and what *God is*. The final revelation of God in His severe dealings and mercy upon this nation is of Himself. "*I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy,*" not because it is deserved, but because "I AM WHO I AM," and "I will be who I will be." Until *that is* established, God is not yet God. As long as we think there is any condition or qualification, either in Israel or the Church, that compels Him to be merciful, we still do not understand as we ought.

There is still something in us of a human self-righteousness that wants to be acknowledged for itself, and that has not come to the ground of poverty that alone inherits the blessings of God. It is only the poor in spirit who recognize that they have no distinction or qualification. God has got to go to the greatest lengths to establish that point. We have not correctly understood how deep-seated human intransigence and sin are. Israel is God's textbook, but primarily His dealing with them is the revelation of *Himself*. It has been a painful lesson for Israel, but it is a lesson that is going to last for all eternity. Israel, even in her unbelief and apostasy, is the nation chosen to reveal God, all the more because she is presently unbelieving and apostate. In other words, Israel is doing more to reveal God in her apostasy than ever she could have succeeded in her faithfulness.

God's free sovereign grace has chosen Jerusalem, the city where He was crucified and where the prophets were stoned and slain—and yet it is still His choice. What would you say of a God like that? We would have long ago rejected and discarded any people who had so shamefully abused their privilege as Israel has. God's promises, nevertheless, remain irrevocable, even independent and contrary to the people themselves, who give absolutely no thought to fulfilling their destiny, and who do not even want to be chosen. If we are having difficulty with these statements, the issue is not intellectual; it is because there is somewhere in us a residue of self-righteousness and confidence in ourselves as man, which we project onto a view of Israel. We want them to succeed because *we* want to succeed on the basis of our own virtue and ability, rather than on the basis of *His*. He will not allow the partial participation of man on the basis of what is in men, for He knows what is in man.

The name 'Israel' was given to Jacob *after* a climactic confrontation with the Son of God, the pre-incarnate revelation of Christ, when he saw Him face to face, wrestled with Him, was touched, made lame and received the blessing. Israel means, 'one who has prevailed both with God and with man.' The name was given *after* a final, ultimate kind of confrontation between a man who lived in his 'Jacob' energy and strength of mind and determination, so much so, that he virtually stole the inheritance from a willing Esau, whom God hated because he so readily gave it up. Even though Jacob had a well-meaning intention, he was not much more than a 'conniver,' which is what the word 'Jacob' means. He was a man who was succeeding by his own artifice and conniving, and no conniver is going to bless all the families of the earth. Something has got to happen to the conniver in a final showdown, when he comes to the end of himself, and has such an intense interaction with God in a wrestling of ultimate combat, that he becomes transfigured and becomes another man—a lame man. He can no longer depend on his own sap and original strength. He is dependent now on the God who has allowed Himself to conquer him.

It is the very same scenario that is happening now in Israel. It is called Israel, but it would be better called Jacob. Israel is vexing her neighbors, and threatening the Middle East in her own self-defense of her Jacob strength and life, trusting in the confidence of her own arm. Jacob *must* become Israel, and it is not an exaggeration to say that this Last Days' time of Jacob's trouble is the final end of Jacob. He must pass through the searing dealings of God in a final wrestling, and he will not survive it, or come through it, *except* as the Israel of God in a transformed condition, *because* he has met Him face to face. The whole saga will be a re-enactment of the struggle of the original Jacob with the Lord in order to become the Israel of God. As long as Jews remain in their superior disdain and contempt for the Gentiles, and until they become transformed through a transformed life, they cannot bless the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning. And the nations will see your righteousness....(Isaiah 62:1-2a)

When that people will be revealed as having a righteousness not of their own, but His, then God will be glorified in the face of all nations. To bring Israel to that place, where her righteousness is God's, will require a purging away of her own self righteousness [a righteousness which God calls 'filth'] by a burning judgment, the like of which has not been seen before. By a certain logic, this judgment *must* be greater than all past tribulations. Can we not assume, therefore, that being greater, it must subsume and exceed all past calamity, and necessarily again include dispersion, exile and devastation in the Land? When God says, 'great' or 'greater' than any previous calamity, then it raises the question, "How great then must be this final calamity of Israel that purges it from its filth by the spirit of burning and of judgment?" Jesus referred to this time in Matthew 24:21-22,

...for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life [Jewish life] would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect [of Israel] those days shall be cut short. (Parentheses mine)

In Isaiah 6, the prophet saw the Lord high and lifted up, and cried out, "*Woe is me, for I am ruined!*" (v. 5a). And after the angel had applied the coal from off the altar to his lips, agreeing that he was a man of unclean lips, Isaiah's answer to, "*Who shall go for Us?*" (v. 8b) was, "*Here am I. Send me*" (v.8b). He then receives the most fearful mandate of being the mouthpiece that will not so much speak blessing as it was to pronounce fearful judgment:

Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed. (vs. 9-10)

It was a word that was going to *desensitize* the people, deafen them and dull their hearts. It was going to *fix* them in an apostate condition. God's sending of the prophet was not to bring salvation, but judgment, and His word would condemn the nation to an inability to turn or hear. But the prophet rightly asks in v 11, "*Lord, how long?*" Isaiah understood God's character well enough to know that judgment is not God's final word, but rather a penultimate one [next to last]. He wanted to know how long this condition would prevail. It is not an exaggeration to say that this describes Israel's present condition and, in fact, Israel's historical condition. That condition has not been alleviated or altered from Isaiah's time until this day, and the history of Israel, past and present, attests to that. Israel is still under this judgment condition, and so the question of 'how long?' that Isaiah raises is enormously significant. And here is the answer,

Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people, and the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Yet there will be a tenth part in it, and it will again be subject to burning, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump. (vs. 11-13)

There have always been a saved remnant of Jews, existing in every generation, but as a nation, Israel is still under this judgment and curse, until the 'until' is fulfilled—until a vast devastation comes upon the nation, laying waste its cities, its inhabitants, houses without people, the Land utterly desolate, and a great expulsion. There will be a vast emptiness in the midst of the Land, and though only a remnant remains, the text suggests that even they shall be burned. We have here an initial statement indicating there's an 'until' not yet fulfilled, and that when it comes, it will require this devastation and desolation *in the Land itself*. Many other Scriptures suggest the same scenario, and I will be citing them. This is a devastation *in the midst of the Land*, so it requires a presence *in the Land* to suffer this judgment. Other prophetic Scriptures confirm this, in that when the Lord brings the 'redeemed of the Lord' back, the first function that awaits them is the rebuilding of the cities that lie in ruins and desolation.

It is clear that when Israel will be removed from this apostate condition, a certain character of events must take place that leaves the Land wholly desolate and in ruins, uninhabited and the people cast far away. This is so suggestive of other periods in Israel's history where there *has* been desolation, expulsion and exile. How then do we interpret this statement as being not yet fulfilled, and will only be fulfilled when these conditions are experienced? They are waiting for the 'until' of devastation and a great forsaking in the midst of the Land. This will, therefore, require a presence *in the Land*. Our mistake is to understand present Israel as being itself the enduring Israel of God's intention, rather than the initial presence that must first experience desolation and ruin. And out of that ruin will come the establishment of the millennial glory. My sense is that this is not a description of any of Israel's previous experiences, both of calamities and exiles, because their heart condition remains that would otherwise be alleviated by this catastrophe. The Scriptures are clear; when *this* violence takes place of an ultimate ruin and devastation, *then* the condition has been given by which the spiritual blindness, deafness and obdurate heart would be removed from the nation.

It almost takes a willful blindness to believe that the time of Jacob's trouble is past, and that it was, as some say, the Holocaust of Nazi Germany. Deception has its opportunity when men are unwilling to consider hard things; when they have scant ability to bear things of an apocalyptic kind, and want to believe for a 'good' thing. Deception comes to those who have not taken to heart the issue of the Cross and suffering. In fact, this sense of what the future must hold need not come by some mystical revelation; the whole tenor of Scripture is clear that the redemptive way of God is always through death and resurrection. It is a root principle of God that even His own Son was not exempt, neither shall His chosen nation—or, for that matter, the Church. To expect that Israel will somehow succeed without that necessity, though the Scriptures are explicitly clear, is remarkably naïve.

As I have said, there are many Scriptures in the prophets to corroborate this devastation, waiting upon this *until* of God. Until this happens, there is no loosing of Israel from its blindness, deafness, or hardness of heart, and that this judgment, we repeat, must first take place *in the midst of the Land*. My own prophetic understanding is that the cities that will be rebuilt upon the final and enduring return, effected by the Lord Himself, are not the cities of antiquity, but the existent modern cities of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Tiberias, and so on.

Thus says the Lord God, 'On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. And the desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passed by. And they will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate, and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.' (Ezekiel 36:33-35)

This can be confusing, because it is easy to look at present day Israel, and assume that the building taking place now is the *fulfillment* of these Scriptures. Scrutiny of the Scriptures, however, and attention to the detail of them, are more significant at this hour in order to indicate whether something being described is past or future. And here we have to be careful Bible students, because it says that the desolation is the result of *violence*, and the rebuilding is in keeping with the time when "*I cleanse you from all your iniquities*," which, as Israel's present condition indicates, is yet future. The devastation is future, the restoration is future, and the Scriptures indicates the time—"On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities"—which has *not* yet come.

Ezekiel continues in chapter 36,

Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the Lord, have spoken and will do it.
(v. 36)

There is a *knowing* that is yet future, and the statement "*that are left round about you*," indicates a kind of regional disaster that Israel may evoke by the use of its atomic ability. This is clearly a statement of that which is still future, and culminates in the nations themselves recognizing God in both the desolation and the rebuilding. The same text concludes with a reference to the millennial blessing—yet future,

Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the Lord. (v. 38)

Yes, there have been judgments, desolation, and expulsion in the past; this has been the characteristic pattern of God's judgments on Israel's sin, but this Scripture refers to a future and concluding judgment, because it ends with both Israel and the nations round about *knowing* that God is the Lord. No previous desolation or ruin has ever eventuated in this knowledge. So the Scripture itself indicates that we are speaking about a future time.

There is another supportive text in Amos 9,

'In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they might possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,' declares the Lord who does this.
(v. 11-12)

Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. (v. 14)

From the context, it is clear that the reference in Amos 9 to the tabernacle [fallen booth] of David is not to a form of worship, but a form of government. The Scriptures that follow speak of an Edom and all the nations that are called by "My name" coming under, or being submitted to, or affected by, the restoration of the tabernacle of David. They will not be performing Hebraic dances [as some interpret the meaning to be], but coming under the authority of the government that has been raised up at that time. So with Israel's restoration is the restoration also, or the establishment of, the Kingdom of God, the Davidic Kingdom, which we know is still future. The word 'Edom' is a symbolic term that refers to Gentile nations.

*It is I who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!' And of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built.' And I will raise up her **ruins** again.* (Isaiah 44:26. Emphasis mine)

For your waste and desolate places, and your destroyed [devastated] land—surely now you will be too cramped for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you will be far away.
(Isaiah 49:19. Parenthesis mine)

The whole of Isaiah 51 speaks of Israel being trapped, as antelope in the net, with the enemy "walking over them." It indicates a colossal defeat and humiliation, which makes greater sense, now, in the context of present events themselves. The enemies of Israel, this Islamic hatred, are not satisfied with mere defeat, but want, and will obtain, an ultimate humiliation of Israel. And so, it is not uncommon to have to wait for an understanding of a prophetic text until we come closer to the time of its fulfillment. This reference in Isaiah 51 was in the Scriptures seven centuries before the advent of Christ, but now, in this present hour, with the threat to Israel—the enemies that are surrounding her, the vitriolic hatred against her, the insatiable Islamic need for vengeance—these Scriptures then come into focus. This is a way of reading and understanding Scriptures, which have been positionally there, but have waited for a proximity to the time and events to become clearer.

Jeremiah chapters 30 and 31 are the classic texts that graphically depict this devastation.

'For, behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes [translated also as 'captivity'] of My people Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.'

Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah, for thus says the LORD, 'I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace. Ask now, and see, if a male can give birth. Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it ['out of it' - King James version].

*And it shall come about on that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'that I will break his yoke from off their neck, and will tear off their bonds; and strangers shall no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. And fear not, O Jacob My servant,' declares the LORD, 'and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. **And Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and no one shall make him afraid.** For I am with you,' declares the LORD, 'to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished.'*

For thus says the LORD, 'Your wound is incurable, and your injury is serious. There is no one to plead your cause; no healing for your sore, no recovery for you. All your lovers have forgotten you, they do not seek you; for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the punishment of a cruel one, because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous. Why do you cry out over your injury? Your pain is incurable. Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous, I have done these things to you.

Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured; and all your adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and those who plunder you shall be for plunder, and all who prey upon you I will give for prey. For I will restore you to health and I will heal you of your wounds,' declares the LORD, 'because they have called you an outcast, saying, 'It is Zion, no one cares for her.'''

Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwelling places; and the city shall be rebuilt on its ruin, and the palace shall stand on its rightful place. And from them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry; and I will multiply them, and they shall not be diminished; I will also honor them, and they shall not be insignificant. Their children also shall be as formerly, and their congregation shall be established before Me; and I will punish all their oppressors.' (Jeremiah 30: 3-20. Emphasis mine)

The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back, until He has performed, and until he has accomplished the intent of His heart; in the latter days you will understand this. (verse 24)

We need to ask if what is being described here is a description of things already in Israel's past. Yes, there have been defeats; there have been expulsions; there have been enemies that have brought Israel into captivity. But, "I will save you from afar," implies that Israel is cast out again into many nations, "and your offspring from the land of their captivity. And Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and no one shall make him afraid." This is not a description of the resettlement of Israel in 1948, because they are still being made afraid; they are not in that place of security. This 'peace, rest and quiet' is something that follows the time of Jacob's trouble, and is evidently yet future because Israel's present condition cannot be described as being 'at rest.' That this is not the consequence of previous disasters is evident by the still unchanged condition of the nation today. Israel must exhibit its moral bankruptcy, not because it is Israel,

but because it is *man*. It is mankind unwilling to recognize the statement of God on the human condition, and therefore must be condemned to seeing it in its own conduct.

But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. (Jer. 30:9)

This is identical to the promise given in Ezekiel 37, after the dry bones of the whole house of Israel [or what remains of it] are given life, and raised out of their graves, and Judah and Israel, the two branches are united, and then the Lord says, "*And My servant David will be King over them, and they will all have one shepherd;*" (v. 24a). It is another aspect that needs to be considered in the whole review of Scriptures that speak of devastation and return, namely, the millennial conclusion, that the King Himself, the greater David, Jesus, is raised up to rule over the nation now being restored, and whose ruins are being rebuilt.

'For I am with you,' declares the Lord, 'to save you; for I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished.' (Jer. 30:11)

This scripture shows the effect of God's judgment on nations who are employed to bring the chastisement to Israel. He says, "*I will destroy them.*" We have not seen a *destruction* of the nations principally being used as the 'rod of chastisement' being visited on Israel, indicating that the chastisement itself is yet future. It is noteworthy that the nations employed to bring the destruction have historically and invariably gone *beyond* God's intention, spurred by demonic fury, and take an especial delight in bringing dimensions of suffering and humiliation to Israel for which reason they themselves suffer judgment, which is also yet future. "*For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you completely*" suggests that some of the nations existing today will lose their identity when God fulfills the judgments of which He speaks.

Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured; and all your adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and those who plunder you shall be for plunder, and all who prey upon you I will give for prey. (Jer. 30:16)

The word *devoured* implies something of catastrophic proportions, not some minor discomfort, or even a defeat, and shows the vehemence, bitterness, and total dominance that Israel's enemies shall have over them in this time of Jacob's Trouble. This violence will precipitate an expulsion of Jews, not only out of Israel, but also out of all nations, in fulfillment of Amos 9,

For behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations. (v.9a)

Ezekiel 20:23-44 supports this flight into the wilderness of the nations where Jews will encounter another entity, face to face, in whose face will be seen the light of God. At the end of this statement in Jeremiah 30 and 31 comes the millennial blessing, *after* the promised restoration. In Ezekiel 36, the Scriptures speak about Israel abhorring herself for her own sins *after* her return.

For I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and give them joy for their sorrow. (Jer. 31:13f)

This indicates clearly, by the frequency of those words, that Israel's last experience in her history—*even as everlasting joy now comes upon their heads*—is the memory of mourning, sighing, and sorrow. This has never been descriptive of any return to Israel since the advent of the State in 1948, but it will be descriptive of the return that will come in the expulsion from the nations, that is precipitated by the explosion of the time of Jacob's Trouble. They will return as the redeemed of the Lord, with mourning and sighing fleeing away. In many places, God's promise is that Israel will no longer sorrow, no longer be afraid, and no longer experience terror. This indicates that the last historical experience of Israel, both in the nation and in the world, is fear, terror, violence, being devoured, being swallowed up and a mourning and sighing. Mourning and sighing *must* precede the rejoicing and the dance, both young men and old together. God is explicitly

the agent, both of the expulsion and the judgment, as well as the return and the comfort. Israel *must* know that "*I am the Lord Who has spoken and done this.*" God Himself will turn their sorrow to joy.

And the ransomed [redeemed] of the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 35:10. Parenthesis mine)

They will obtain from their God comfort and joy. Israel must know God in this totality, both in the severity of their expulsion, and in the gladness and joy of their return, when they will obtain it, and not before by some fabricated, humanly achieved alternative.

Part of my controversy with other prophetic spokesmen, who claim that the time of Jacob's Trouble [Nazi Holocaust] is past, is answered by the fact that the time of Jacob's Trouble does not have its inception *in Europe*, but *in Israel itself*, in the Land. And it indicates, therefore, something that has not yet taken place. But the stage is being set for that eruption and expulsion by the present Jewish presence in the Land that necessarily precedes it. Our mistake is to misconstrue that preliminary resettlement, however extensive, as constituting the final return out of the chastisement described above. To continue in that error will result in a tragic disappointment and a shameful unpreparedness to be to Israel in that hour what we ought.

And Jacob shall return, and shall quiet and at ease, and no one shall make him afraid. (Jer 30:10f)

If Jacob's trouble has already taken place, and the return has taken place, then Israel should be experiencing a condition in which *no one shall make him afraid*. On the contrary, present Israel is riddled with fear, terror, apprehension, and anxiety, not knowing when the next human bomb is going to explode at a shopping mall, or discotheque. So here is clear evidence that the time of Jacob's Trouble is yet future, or else they would now presently be in a place of peace, where no one makes them afraid. The fact that they *are* afraid clearly indicates the time of Jacob's Trouble is future. And if Jacob's Trouble is future, and we are *not* giving warning, then Israel and the Jew are going to suffer a sudden devastation without the mercy of someone telling them. And believers within the nation will be equally undone at the coming catastrophe, for which they have no expectation, at the very time when they should have provided routes of flight and refuge for a fleeing and panic-stricken remnant.

There are other unmistakable signs that indicate what is future or past, as we will see from other texts, and not the least of the statements that God makes is that, "*In that day, Israel will know that it is **God** who has both spoken and performed it.*" Israel does *not* know *that* now.

You may ask, where is the justice and righteousness of God, that He would expel them again, having brought them from Russia and Ethiopia in their hope for security in the Land? What kind of righteous God is this? Have they not suffered enough? Is He a God who will bring calamity merely to serve His purposes, or are His judgments altogether righteous and true, and in exact proportion to the sins of the people who are experiencing them as judgment? The judgments of God are not arbitrary; He is not cruel and malicious to inflict without reason:

for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the punishment of a cruel one, because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous. (Jer. 30:14)

There are many acts of injustice and violence presently being perpetrated on the 'stranger' in the Land: imprisonment without cause, brutal beatings, intimidation, fear, threat and the kind of conduct that we could well understand coming from Gentile nations, but shocks us as coming from Jews. God is allowing what is in man to be expressed, even Jewish man, because Jewish man is not exempt from the nature of man, to reveal what is in our hearts as men. God will allow it to have its expression, and that our sins will judge us and find us out.

The Land, we must remember, is not automatically guaranteed to Jewry, but is relative to their covenantal obedience, and walking in the light of that enablement alone makes possible the humaneness of how to treat

the stranger in our midst. Increasingly, there are certain sectors of Jewish society [40% in a recent poll] that would see the 'stranger' ruthlessly expelled without any consideration. History has come full-circle, and Jews, who were once the victim of the mistreatment of other nations, are increasingly finding themselves, ironically, acting in a like manner, because of the presence that threatens now their own security and preservation!

Despite their own intention, they are exhibiting, as a nation, a character of another kind, which will only worsen, and not get better. It *must* be so, and God will do whatever it takes to show men their self-deception. I am not, by this, saying that God was not providentially absent from the resettlement of Israel in 1948. Men were certainly prominent in effecting that return by their own finances, strength and prowess. God has preserved them through previous wars because of the necessity of giving them this experience, that they might compare their own failed attempt with that which *He Himself* will bring when *He* will restore them and plant them in the Land.

In the final analysis, and much more than we know, it is our own lusts and desires that affect our theology and doctrine. What is the lust and desire here? An unwillingness that Israel should again face calamity—a wanting so much to see them succeed, particularly by Gentiles whose consciences have been bruised by the Holocaust and Jewish suffering, and who are unable to consider the Holocaust as the judgment of God, but rather as the failure of the Church, and want now to make up for it, and to encourage Israel to every false assurance of their safety. It is a well-meaning desire, but as someone has rightly said, "The steps to hell are paved with good intentions."

I am saying that a careful examination of the prophetic Scriptures, both here and elsewhere, indicates calamities for Israel that are yet future, because the things that follow are millennial blessedness, security, acceptance, restoration and the knowledge of God, which this present Israel has not yet evidenced. Present Israel is only 'of God' in the sense of being a necessary preliminary to the full, true and ultimate return. If there were not a nation to experience defeat and exile, there would not be the brokenness and dependency upon God that will characterize the final and enduring Israel. There would not be the spiritual and heavenly unless there was first a natural [See I Corinthians 15]. It is 'of God,' which saves men from condemning and judging Israel, "Look at how they are failing...Look what they are doing with the Palestinians." We must remember that Israel *must fail*; there must be the death of their hope *in* themselves and *of* themselves to be the superior nation of God.

If we are not understanding this, it is because we have not opened our own lives to such dealings from God, where He will allow us a measure of success only to bring it to the place of failure, disappointment and heartbreak. God wants to show us that we cannot have our confidence in ourselves; and we cannot learn *that* principle in any academic or abstract way, but *only* out of our own painful experience unto death. You call that a loving God? Absolutely, especially in the light of eternity. It is because we have wanted to be spared, ourselves, the pain of God's own dealings with us, that we want to spare Israel from similar such dealings. We have been guilty of thinking only in terms of *ourselves*, and not in terms of "the glory of God forever" (Rom. 11:36). That is why we have an inadequate view, because our focus has been on the issue of the *avoidance* of pain and suffering, rather than the issue of God's glory.

There is another unmistakable sign that can show us the difference between the judgments of God in the past, and those that are future: it is how God Himself judges the Gentile nations that bring His severity to Israel. Look at verse 16 of Jeremiah 30,

Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured; and all your adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and those who plunder you shall be for plunder, and all who prey upon you I will give for prey.

Has Germany been devoured? From other texts we know that what we today call Jordan (Edom) and Syria (Moab) are indicated as being among those nations judged; they are annihilated as nations. God's judgments are severe upon those nations that have inflicted themselves upon Israel. The fact that this has not yet taken place shows that we are speaking of something future.

...because they have called you an outcast. (verse 17)

Let that word sink in. An outcast is someone who has been cast out.

It is Zion, no one cares for her. (verse 17)

That means that there was no evidence of any mercy being afforded this people.

*The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back, until He has performed, and until he has accomplished the intent of His heart; **in the latter days you will understand this** (verse 24. Emphasis mine).*

Jeremiah 31 brings us into the New Covenant that is made with His restored people, but look first at verse 2,

Thus says the LORD, 'The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when it went to find its rest.'

Out of the debacle of devastation, flight, persecution, exile and being cast into the wilderness, a remnant of Israel will yet find grace there. God will prepare for them a place of safety and rest *in the wilderness*. There is a further symbolic description of this in Revelation 12:6 where the Dragon seeks to devour the woman, who flees on the wings of an eagle into the wilderness, in a place prepared for her, where she can be fed for three-and-one-half years. Look how God speaks in Jeremiah 31:4a,

Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel!

Though Jerusalem is called 'the Sodom and Gomorrah' where the Lord Himself was crucified, here God speaks of Israel as a virgin! How do we understand that? It is the precious redemptive language of God, despite Israel's historic sins and the fact that we have blasphemed Him in every nation where He has driven us. When He restores us, it is as if the past is blotted out and the remnant is called '*the virgin*' and '*the redeemed of the LORD, with everlasting joy upon their heads.*' This is our resurrection glory. We have a new life and character that is virginal, which is what happens to individual believers when we are saved, but now it happens to a complete nation for the first time. God's redemptive dealings move from individual salvation to national salvation, and Israel is the first of the nations to experience it.

With weeping they shall come, and by supplications I will lead them. (verse 9a)

What will be the root of this weeping? It is *not* the sentimental 'kissing of the ground' that we see on our television screens when Jews make return [*aliyah*] to Israel. It is the weeping of the recognition of God, against whom we have blasphemed and rejected, who has now proven Himself to be *our* very Deliverer out of a condition in which we would have found ourselves otherwise entirely hopeless. God's returning of Israel to the Land will be one of the greatest miracles of the Last Days. There will be no confusion at that time as to whether it was the work of man in our own ability and financing as opposed to the work of God. It will be utterly supernatural, and at the same time, the magnitude of our sin will be revealed to us. We will see our condition, our judgments, and God's mercies, and if that does not break our heart for weeping, then nothing will! It will be the deepest national contrition and remorse ever seen in the history of the human race. If a grace were not given, we would not be able to bear it. We are going to be racked with convulsive sorrow, unable even to repent before each other:

And the land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves.... (Zechariah 12:12)

There will be such a depth of recognition of the historical sins of our fathers and ourselves, and the mercy of God that has yet saved us out of it. Notice the admonition to the nations in Jeremiah 31:10:

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare in the coastlands afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.'

It is not men who have scattered Israel; it is not adverse nations; it is not the P.L.O. nor Arafat. God may employ such, but it is *God* who will scatter Israel. The same God who is the God of severity and judgment is also the God of mercy and return. Tell *that* to the nations, because they need to know it.

For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he. And they shall come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the bounty of the LORD—over the grain, and the new wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; and their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. (verses 11-12)

This is so clearly a description of something that has not yet come into the experience of Israel as a nation—but *will*. When God promises that they will never languish again, we need to know that it is the millennial blessing. Those who are trying to bring a false comfort now, at this time, and say that Israel need not fear these things, are prematurely invoking this kind of millennial blessedness *before* the time. Has there ever been such a moment as this, when careful exegesis of the Scripture is a critical issue of a life-and-death kind for the Church? We are being required to search the Scriptures, because the critical issue as to whether something is past or future affects *everything*.

Then the virgin shall rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together, for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and give them joy for their sorrow. (verse 13. Emphasis mine)

All of these repetitions of sorrow, mourning and fear are clearly a future description. There is a joy, but it is something that comes when *God* alleviates the mourning and sorrow His own judgments have precipitated. This, then, shall be their eternal condition. There shall never again be a blight of this kind, for it can only be a sorrow and mourning when one's deepest hope has been made absolutely desolate. When the hope we thought we could have in a place of security among the nations of the world, that would exhibit a particular character of Jewish civilization of a superior moral and ethical kind, finally crumbles and goes up in terrible calamity, then shall the sorrow and the mourning ensue. It is more than just a grief for physical loss; it is a sorrow and mourning that comes when human hope, devoid of God, is made absolutely barren.

Thus says the LORD, 'Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded,' declares the LORD, 'and they shall return from the land of the enemy' (verse 16).

For the most part, present emigration to the Land has come from nations that cannot be described as, "*the land of the enemy*." Can those Jews be said to be coming from the land of the enemy, or is this a very careful description of those who are *yet* to be their enemies in fearful ways?

And there is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall return to their own territory. (verse 17)

It is a final, redemptive event.

Bring me back that I may be restored, for Thou art the LORD my God. (verse 18b)

Here is Israel acknowledging their God.

For after I turned back, I repented. (verse 19a)

Notice that even the issue of repentance is the work of God, and not of men. God does not even give Israel the liberty or luxury of performing *that* act on the basis of their own ability. In Zechariah 12:10a, God says,

And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son....

That is to say, except that *that* Spirit had been poured out, this mourning would not have been possible in the depth of the repentance that then takes place. Look how absolute God is in every detail in insisting upon Himself as the single sole agent of Israel's total redemption. God is so jealous as *not* to allow Israel to be an agent in its own restoration, or even in its own repentance, that even their capacity to repent is contingent upon the Spirit being poured out upon the house of David! He will not trust us in anything, so we can later say, "It was *my* repentance that turned *me*," and that "*I saw*" and "*I*", "*I*", "*I*". When God says *dead*, He means even to the possibility of repentance! Their repentance comes *after* their return—not before. If He had not given them that grace, they would not have been able to repent of themselves. God will not share His glory with another.

All of this because Israel represents Man in his self-sufficiency, and God, therefore, has got to demonstrate through Israel, that *in man is no good thing at all*; that *He* is all in all, and must be the *God of their restoration* as much as He is the *God of their judgment*. God is insistent, because Israel needs millennially to compare, as we have earlier said, her previous return, the Zionist State, largely the result of her own human prowess and ability, with that which is effected by God, out of His own power.

God *must* go this far with that nation, because Israel and the Jew are the inveterate stubbornness of the pride of Man, honed, perfected and established to its ultimate degree. Israel is mankind in its stubborn and perverse humanity, and God is not going to give us an inch to do anything in which we can boast. For "*from Him and through Him*," even the repentance, in order that it might be "*to Him*" as glory forever. If we have problems with this view, it is because we are not as absolute as Paul was for God's glory. We ourselves want to mix in a little bit of what we do with what He does, that *we* might somehow catch a little bit of that glory. Our inability to see God's dealing with Israel is the statement of our inability to see God for ourselves. As the Church, we are projecting on them the liberty that we ourselves desire, and have not recognized how absolute and jealous God is with regard to His glory—let alone His glory forever.

How many of us like to live with God that way? How many people want to be so destitute of any ability in themselves, even 'to do' for God? Paul was not being poetic when he said, "*For from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things*." He knew it from the reality of his own life in God. "*For to me, to live is Christ*" was not a little generality, but the most profound description of Paul's apostolic life. Unless it becomes ours, there will be no fulfillment of the mystery with regard to the Church and Israel.

All flesh will know, both in the severity of God's judgments and in the magnificence of His restoration and return, and the exaltation that He will grant to the nation that has now so been abased. These are non-negotiable statements. No amount of intercession to see Israel spared from the extremity of this kind will avail, because we need to recognize that this is God's last historical statement to the nations of Himself, by what is to be demonstrated in His conduct towards Israel. God says in Ezekiel 36:23,

And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord,' declares the Lord of Hosts, 'when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.'

In other words, "You have blasphemed My name in every nation where I have driven you. Do not think that I am doing this for your sake, but for My holy Name's sake, which you have blasphemed in every nation where I have expelled you. Your very expulsion is the statement of a blasphemous kind that your sins demanded this kind of dealing. But I will be sanctified through you; I will be made holy; My name will be rescued and honored again before all nations, through My dealings with you, and the nations will recognize that I am your Savior, Redeemer, Restorer, and the Mighty One of Jacob."

This clearly does not correspond to any past restoration in Israel's history. There has been the pattern of sin, judgment, expulsion, but never this kind of witness or testimony *to the nations*, or even to Israel's own recognition that *I am the Lord*. This acknowledgment is necessary, because the nation has a calling to *ble*

all the families of the earth, and we cannot understand the extremity and length to which God will go in this dealing with Israel in painful judgment, devastation, expulsion and return, unless we consider it in the context of Israel's destiny and calling□"a nation of priests", and a "light unto the world." The gifts and callings of God are irrevocable. It must be fulfilled; His word and covenant *must* be honored.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (verse 33)

"I will do it...I will...I will ...I will." It has nothing to do with them, but *Him*.

And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. (verse 34)

If we were to count the number of "I wills" in these two verses, we would find exactly seven, the number of perfection. Nothing will come from Israel; God reserves that right for Himself. It will be an everlasting covenant that they will never break. However stinking Israel's track record is in covenant unfaithfulness up till now, we will never break this one, because "*I will, I will, I will, I will, I will...*" You can almost say that the past covenants were given to demonstrate that we had to break them, and that we had to fail, and only God can succeed in honoring His own Word and His own law. *That, and only that*, is a righteous nation.

What a revelation of God! "I will, and I will do it by choosing the absolutely foolish and weak thing, that no flesh shall touch My glory□and all the world shall *know*." This is the revelation of God, the last and final one. It is His everlasting glory, and Israel, in her abject failure, and only in her abject failure, can reveal the greatness of God, because He will choose whom He will choose, and He will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy.

In His "Olivet" discourse (Matthew 24), Jesus is asked by His disciples, "*Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*" (v. 3b). And Jesus answers by giving one of the most pronounced signs of a time of trouble that shall come for the nation Israel,

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life [Jewish life] would have been save; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short. (v. 21-22. Parenthesis mine)

Jesus' whole statement in that chapter refers to the 'abomination of desolation,' that those who read understand, quoting from Daniel that speaks of an antichrist coming to desecrate the temple, and make the oblations and the sacrifice to cease, and requiring the worship of the nation, having made with them a covenant of death that has brought a seeming peace for a short period of time. All of this is clearly future, because there has been no such event in the history of Israel that has eventuated in an explosion of violence against them in their refusal to condescend to this antichrist figure, who has effected a seeming peace for a short time, through negotiation, that finally makes Israel to know they have made a covenant with death and hell.

So this is a sign of the end, and of His coming, that must take place in the Land, even as we read in Isaiah 6, that this is a desolation *in the midst of the Land*, which gives every reason why there needs be a preliminary Jewish existence in the Land. The present-day state of Israel is not intended to fulfill the millennial intention of God for the nation, but rather it sets in motion those tensions and conflicts that require this devastation, humiliation and expulsion. That gives God, in Himself, the opportunity to also effect their restoration and return, when the cities that have been laid waste shall be rebuilt, and in such a way that those nations that remain round about shall know that He is the Lord who has spoken and done this.

For the first time in all my years as a believer, an issue has surfaced of such a kind that raises the question of who is truly speaking for God? Who is the prophetic voice that is giving a right interpretation of prophetic Scriptures, because I believe that God gives to those who hold the office a view of prophecy that is not given to others. The whole issue of true and false prophets has come into focus in a way that I have not seen it, and has become a critical issue for the Church in its ability to discern and recognize which of these voices is indeed speaking the counsel of God. Historically, false prophets have always been the ones that have said "*peace, peace, when there is no peace.*" The true prophets have always been the harbingers of doom, of coming devastation, and of judgment, and the nation has not wanted to hear, so their voices, being unpopular, have been shunted away. It seems like that same alignment and reality is true to this day.

To assure Israel, therefore, that this time is past, when it is yet future and imminent, is to leave her wholly unprepared for both the suddenness and extent of the catastrophe. To warn of its inevitability is to encourage as many as will, into the Ark of Safety, which is the saving knowledge of the Messiah. In the light of what I am suggesting, should we not be 'disturbing' Jews with the issue of the Gospel and salvation, especially if there is a destruction imminent? And that there is a place of safety that can be found, even now, in the Ark of Safety that Jesus Himself is? In other words, we have every incentive *not* to relax the Gospel, but to promote it. The way we read the prophetic Scriptures, and understand those things that are future for Israel, will determine our present stance and posture toward the nation.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' (Romans 11:25-27)

The issue of Israel's return is the issue of God Himself, and incorporates His ability to keep covenant, and to honor the word He has spoken. The knowledge of God *as God*, both in the recognition of the nation, and of all nations, is the reason for these Last Days' severe judgments and mercy upon the nation, which is why God says, "*I will show Myself holy through you.*" When His global mission is accomplished, and God will have obtained a people for His name from among all nations, that "fulness being come in" releases *the Deliverer to come out of Zion, and take ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.* So that gives to us an incentive to complete our mission task, as the Church, in finding a people for His name among all nations.

The millennial Kingdom and glory waits on the Church, not Israel, but what if there is a qualitative aspect to this as well as quantitative? What if the fulness means, not only the actual number, but a certain *quality* that God waits for in the Church, a certain character, a certain identification with Himself, which has to do with our sanctification, the truth of our life, and what we are in the representation of Him? Then again, both in number and in character, the issue of Israel's deliverance is the issue of the Church.

What therefore is the responsibility of the Church if these things be true? Do we have an obligation to sound a warning of impending disaster that would otherwise leave the unsuspecting devastated? Will their blood be on our hands if we do not sound a warning of judgments to come, as watchmen on the wall, who fail to sound it? Or will we be those who give them a false comfort; that their troubles will pass, and that they need not be afraid of any future devastation? This is the critical question before the Church at this historical point in time.

To give Israel an advance comfort *before* the time is to disqualify us, as the Church, of being a prophetic witness to the Jew. Jesus, on learning that His friend Lazarus, whom He loved, was sick, did not immediately rush to the bedside to heal him, or to deliver him from his distress, *but waited two days longer where He was.* There is something symbolic in the two thousand years that must be fulfilled before the third year, even as Hosea spoke, "*He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him*" (6:2).

There is a third day that we have to wait for. To give a premature comfort is to act out of our humanity, and if Jesus had done that, though He may have healed Lazarus, He would have robbed the Father of the glory

that came later by the resurrection. That is why Jesus could say to His disciples, "*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, and the Son of God.*" He had equally to suffer the humiliation of the misunderstanding of His disciples, who likely assumed that He was afraid to go to Bethany, because it was too close to Jerusalem, where His life had already been threatened. It had nothing, however, to do with sparing Himself, but everything to do with holding Himself in a prophetic constraint, and not to act before the time, prematurely, by bringing a relief, when God had something more in sight for Lazarus than relief, namely the revelation of *His glory*, by the raising of him from the dead. And I believe that that is a remarkable picture of the Church's relationship to Israel in the Last Days. To give Israel a false comfort now is to disqualify ourselves from standing later at their tomb, and saying, "Lazarus, come forth." In His obedience to the Father, Jesus restrained every humane impulse to go to the bedside of a friend, whom He loved, and to wait for the moment of God's choosing, not just to effect a relief from illness, but a resurrection from the dead *unto glory*.

A Church that shrinks from such an apocalyptic view makes itself a candidate for apostasy, when the disillusionment and disappointment of unexpected calamity falls. The Apostle Paul speaks of a "great falling away in the Last Days," and I believe that part of this falling away will come out of the disappointment of a Church naively hoping that present Zionist Israel would be the fulfillment of God's prophetic intention. In that 'failure,' *God* will be looked upon as having failed. To save the Church from an apostasy of disappointment, it is imperative that we have a correct and prophetic anticipation of those things that must necessarily come to pass, and not be disappointed when we see the present State dispersed, and brought to nothing—knowing that there is a greater thing in store for which this chastisement is necessary.

To hope that the nation, Israel, can be 'improved' is more of a progressive view of change than an apocalyptic view. It is the humanistic mindset to think that there could be an improvement rather than the requirement of an apocalyptic judgment, death and resurrection. So there is a remarkable question here of how we understand God and His redemptive work. Even if the present threat to Israel were alleviated, have they not already crossed a point-of-no-return condition of moral character that cannot be retrieved? The moral loss that comes through violence, corruption, and the use of torture cannot be regained. Israel has already gone too far in a response to the threats that it itself may have encouraged, so even if the threat is alleviated, the character of the nation is already irretrievable, and can never be improved. If the character of the nation could be improved, we, as believers, do not need our own salvation; we, too, could be improved in our natural condition, and do not ourselves need to be brought into death and raised up unto newness of life. It is exactly the same question for us as it pertains to Israel herself.

So the crisis of Israel is God's provision to wake the Church up from its own escapist sleep and unpreparedness. It should compel the Church to return to apostolic consciousness that has at its heart a necessary suffering that precedes the glory. The issue of the "*glory of God forever*" ought to bring us to the kind of recognition of the Cross, imperative for us in the fulfillment of our own role toward Israel. It is by what we, the church, will extend to Israel, at great cost to ourselves, that will cause "*the ransomed [redeemed] of the Lord to return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away*" (Isaiah 35:10. Parenthesis mine).

In Psalm 102, there is another reference to the Deliverer coming out of Zion when the set time to favor Zion has come. God is waiting for something, not from Israel herself, but 'someone' called 'His servants.'

"Thou wilt arise and have compassion on Zion; for it is time to be gracious to her, for the appointed time has come. Surely Thy servants find pleasure in her stones, and feel pity for her dust" (vs.13-14).

At that time, the Deliverer will come out of Zion, and take away her transgressions and restore her, not for anything that Israel does, but something that His servants do, who are not themselves Israel. For if Israel were His servants, they would not be requiring judgment at all. Is the dust referred to here the dust of antiquity? Or are the stones, the stones of ancient cities? Or are they the ruins of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and all the present modern cities of Israel? Could the servants be the believing Christian Church,

who are so identified with Israel, as not to be repelled by her judgments, but rather identified with her *in* them, and can, therefore, have godly compassion on sinful Israel in her judgment? Did not Jesus identify with us, *while we were yet in sin*? When we will have an attitude toward Israel, in her sin, of the same kind the Lord had toward us while we were in ours, the fulfillment for which God waits will have come; the set time to favor Zion comes when the true Church is in an identification with God, in ultimate union with Him, and in His compassion for Israel, as He expressed toward us in His compassion for us while we were yet sinners.

To have compassion on Israel's stones and pity on her dust will come at the same time that the world will be gloating in delight at the devastation that will bring Israel to ruin. The Gentile world will love it, and they will be relishing all of Israel's distress. There will only be a small remnant in the earth that will not join this global chorus of delight in Israel's distress, namely, the true people of God, those who will have compassion on her stones and pity on her dust. When God has obtained that in the predominantly Gentile Church, the set time to favor Zion has come, for the Church has come into the place of God's intention, which releases Him to deliver Israel. It is not what Israel says or does, because she will be inert, helpless, and devastated; it is what we, as the Church, *exhibit* not what we can express out of our humanity or religious intention.

It is one thing to have a sentimental affection for Israel, but to have a compassion and mercy when she is in judgment for her sins, requiring the devastation of her cities and expulsion, is an identification beyond anything we can perform humanly and religiously. It is nothing less than what God is in Himself, now wrought in His people. When He has a bridal Church like that, the purposes of God have been fulfilled, both for the Church and Israel.

The same thing is expressed in Isaiah 66 in a very cryptic and mysterious way:

'Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she gave birth to a boy. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons. Shall I bring to the point of birth, and not give delivery?' says the Lord. Or shall I who gives delivery shut the womb?' says your God. 'Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, that you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, that you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom' (vs. 7-11).

What had been an object of mourning, has now become an object of delight. What had been barren, is now so copious in her bosom, that she is nursing and feeding the very ones who mourned for her, prayed for her, and birthed her into a nation, born in a day.

For thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall be nursed, you shall be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees.' (v.12)

Those who travailed in birth for Israel's redemption shall now be carried on her arms, and be nursed by her. What you brought into being, by your labor of birth, is now benefiting you by a particular comfort that can only come from the consolation of an Israel that has been born in a day. But if you had not travailed, if Zion had not travailed, there would be no birth. Israel will be so stricken, depleted, and incapable of any action in herself to effect her birthing, as a nation, in a day, that someone else has got to bear the pangs of birth for her.

Show me a woman today who has ever experienced the pangs of birth, and would be willing to bear that pain for another woman, who is pregnant and who cannot herself perform it. It is precisely there that you have a picture of what God is waiting for in the Church. Travail is painful, ultimate, and an embracing of 'death,' in order that something might be birthed *out of* death, from an Israel incapable of her own birthing. It is entirely voluntary, but you will receive the benefit of what shall be birthed, and receiving consolation and blessedness from what has been born in a day. It is a mystery!

It is a debatable whether Isaiah understood what he was talking about, but he had to express what the Spirit was giving him, and now we are the ones that need to fathom, interpret and rightly understand what is being mystically described here. Who is this Zion? Who is this servant who has compassion? What is this fulness of the Gentiles? Because wherever you look in the Scriptures, it is the confirmation of the mystery of which Paul speaks in Romans 11, that the Church is God's appointed agency □ not to "take away ungodliness from Jacob," but to be that presence and vessel through whom the life-giving word of the Spirit can be uttered.

Isaiah 35 shows a further role that this mysterious, unidentified servant people play where it says, "*the wilderness and the desert will be glad*" (v.1). Inanimate nature rejoices in seeing something that passes through the wilderness, that makes it to leap and to blossom as Sharon. They are seeing bedraggled Jews coming through the remote wildernesses, and they are rejoicing because they know that this is the final, redemptive dealing of this people, and that it will result in their conversion and return. It will mean that the curse, which is upon creation itself, will be lifted; it is rejoicing for the end of its own bondage in which nature itself has been kept, until the restoration of all things. Then we read in the text,

Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance....' (v. 4a)

Israel is not being addressed here. The "*say to them*" is referring to someone in the wilderness *with* Israel, and being commanded to speak something to those who are spent and lame.

Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. (v3.)

The exhausted and feeble will mostly be comprised of urbane Jews, who have never been on a desperate march like this in their life, in the most primitive of places and conditions, full of despair, and there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel. It is terrifying to be lost in a wilderness, especially for city dwellers, as we Jews are, and all of a sudden to be thrust into the most unfamiliar and hopelessly barren situations. But there is evidently someone there with us, who is being commanded by God,

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah (desert). And the scorched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. (vs. 5-7)

In the very speaking of that word, the lame leap, the blind see, nature itself is affected □ the dry places break out in pools of water. It will be a word that is more than human assurance, more than human well-meaning encouragement; a prophetic word that *always* constitutes an *event*. Something takes place when a prophetic word is spoken, because it is issued in the authority of God. But it is also a word that is spoken by some mysterious and unidentified presence *in* the wilderness *with* the Jews, out of which salvation comes to them, even *before* the Lord's appearing. A *hope* has come that makes them to leap □ merely on the statement, "*Your God will come!*"

But it has got to be with an assurance of such conviction that it *creates* or *brings forth* the reality itself, and that is what a true prophetic word is. Who will speak it, and who is willing to be in the wilderness with this bedraggled and suffering people, and who will instantly heed the command, speaking with such an authority that it brings their restoration even before the advent of the Lord's coming? That is the task of the Church of the Last Days, and we are not going to find that prophetic unction or authority in a final moment, if it is not consistently the sum of *all* the moments that have preceded it! The Church has always been called to be a prophetic presence in the earth, and speak for God, with His authority, to communicate a hope, which if it does not come to Jews in that condition of ultimate destitution, they will not survive.

The issue of survival in the Nazi death camps was not for those who had the greatest physical strength, but those who had the greatest *hope*. Hope has an inherent power. Hopelessness is when there is no light at the end of the tunnel, when you are filled with despair, and ready to perish because your knees are feeble and your hands are dragging; you are downcast and lame, you are ready to go, and if you do not get a word of hope, you will not survive. That word, therefore, is critical.

What, therefore, gives a prophetic word a power and authority? As the Church, we are called to be a *prophetic presence*, to speak to this people as they pass through, in the authority of God an authentic, authoritative word of hope that proceeds from the reality of our own corporate condition and experience. This is altogether different from merely reciting a formula. Do we really know a God who comes in ultimate distress, because we have been placed ourselves in ultimate distress, where we ourselves would have expired for the lack of encouragement? Have we been tested in a comparable kind of situation to which we now are able to grant a word of assurance to Israel in that like situation? Are we willing to be sifted? Are we willing to receive the intensive dealing that is its prerequisite?

Remember that the 'son of man' in Ezekiel 37 had to be brought down, and out, and into the valley of dry bones. He had to see the grit of Israel's death *before* he could address it. We shun painful things, and even our contemporary Christianity has disposed us to desire happier scenarios. There will be a glorious ending for Israel, but not before the necessary suffering that precedes the glory. Israel will be a chastised, broken nation, which will remain as a permanent aspect of a character that constitutes her priestliness. Only in that condition can she minister to all of the nations of the earth, not out of the arrogance that we associate with Jews and Israel today, but out of the contrition and brokenness that comes with God's severest dealings and chastisement. Israel's chastisement will not be in some cruel, arbitrary way, but in exact proportion to the sins that makes that judgment righteous, and indeed, may well be the greatest statement of God's love.

We are suffering from a generation of fathers who do not love their sons enough to chastise them. God says in Proverbs, that the failure to chastise your son reveals an actual hatred for him, and a greater love for yourself in sparing. But true love requires the severity of a chastisement, one that God will not withhold from Israel, and in the severity of God's dealing, Israel will recognize His uttermost love. God inflicts the chastisement, but He also suffers the excruciating pain of it, yet does not withhold it. Something happens in the moment of this nation-son and the Father coming into an embrace of tears and brokenness, through the chastisement, that bonds the nation with the Father in a way that it has never known Him. And it is in this relationship that Israel will continue to know Him all of the days of their life. This chastisement must come, and we must not be offended by it, but rather ourselves welcome it as such, or we will not be able to be to Israel what we must. Even as God brings the chastisement, and inflicts the judgment, in His compassion, He Himself is broken-hearted over the necessity. He does not delight in what Israel must experience even at His hand nor must we delight either, though we know that it is necessary.

Humanly speaking, we would rather hope for some other way in which Israel's restoration could be effected. We would say with Abraham, "*Can't Ishmael live?*" But we need to understand how glorious a destiny this nation has, and that it cannot be fulfilled on any cheaper or lesser terms. Jews will find themselves in the wilderness of the nations, where places have been prepared for them, where they shall be fed for three and a half years. This is not only a physical feeding that they shall enjoy, but also a spiritual one. They will receive an explanation, out of the Scriptures, in those homes, places and communities that have taken them in, and to explain to them why it is they are suffering this Last Days' chastisement, prophesied of in the Scriptures, and must be fulfilled. Many Jews will meet their God face to face in the wilderness of the nations (Ezekiel 20), and, by it, come into the bond of His covenant, and under the rod of His authority, in order that they may return to the Land [Zion] as the redeemed of the Lord.