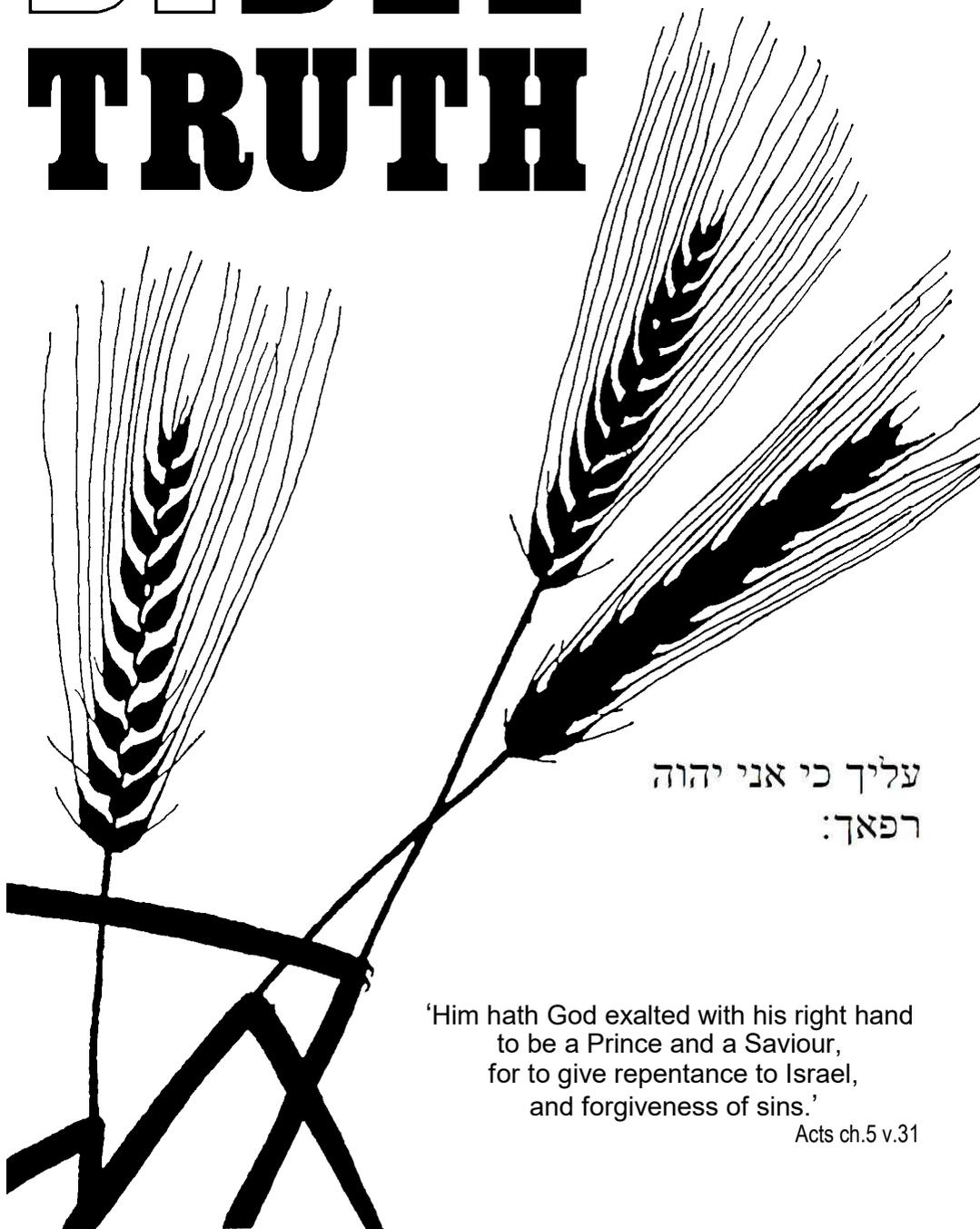


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עליך כי אני יהוה
:רפאך

'Him hath God exalted with his right hand
to be a Prince and a Saviour,
for to give repentance to Israel,
and forgiveness of sins.'

Acts ch.5 v.31

The Reformation In Bible Prophecy

In honour of the Protestant Reformation's
500th Anniversary in 2017

by Pastor Jory Steven Brooks, CBIA



Ezekiel gave us one of his most memorable prophecies in ch.37 vv 1-14, popularly known as 'the valley of dry bones'. Early theologian, St Jerome, said, 'this passage is very famous'. The modern Christian scholar, Dr Thomas L. Constable, declared,

'This may be the best-known section of the Book of Ezekiel ... this well-known apocalyptic vision of the valley of dry bones pictures the manner in which Yahweh would restore His people. Few other passages have suffered more from the extremes of interpreters who see either too much or too little in both meaning and application of the figures, symbols, and types'.

Expository Notes, Dr. Constable

Many ideas of the expositors are indeed extremely fanciful and outlandish. The prophecy tells us (see ch.37 v.1) that Ezekiel was taken in the Spirit and set down in the midst of a valley which was full of bones. Jewish interpreters have added their own flourishes. The Talmudic Targum adds that Rabbi Jochanan says it was the valley of Dura, and these were the bones of those slain by Nebuchadnezzar there (see Daniel ch.3 v.1). Medieval expositor Rab says these were the children of Ephraim, slain by the men of Gath (see 1 Chronicles ch.7 vv 20-21). Some of the Jewish Rabbis think there was a real resurrection at this time. Rabbi Eliezer says, the dead quickened by Ezekiel stood upon their feet, sang a song, and died. Yet another Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Rabbi Jose the Galilean, avers they were resurrected, went up into the land of Israel, married wives, and begat sons and daughters (*Talmudic Babylonian Sanhedrin*, folio 92; see Kimchi & Abendana in loc.). Such are the fabulous and romantic ideas of popular Jewish theology.

A great number of Christian theologians of the past and present have also seen the reawakening of the dry bones as an actual resurrection from the dead, and believe that the scene presented is of a huge number of actual dead bodies of Israelites slain in exile in some assumed great slaughter. However, the late Dr Arno C. Gabelin wisely observed,

'In this vision of the dry bones, physical resurrection is used as a type of the national restoration of Israel. It is used in the same way in Daniel ch.12 v.2. In that passage the sleep in the dust of the earth is symbolical of their national condition. And when their national sleep ends there will be an awakening. When we read here in Ezekiel of graves, it must not be taken to mean literal graves; the graves are symbolical of the nation as being buried among the nations. If these dry bones meant the physical dead of the nation, how could it be explained that they speak and say, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost!" The same figure of speech is used in the New Testament. Of the prodigal it is said, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again" (see Luke ch.15 v.24). Yet he was not physically dead, nor was he made alive physically. Therefore, this vision has nothing whatever to do with a physical resurrection'.

Why then were these exiled Israelites depicted as dead men with bleached bones? The *Expositors Bible* explains,

'Israel as a people had ceased to exist. Not only were the outward symbols of national unity destroyed, but the national spirit was extinct. Just as the destruction of the bodily organism implies the death of each separate member and organ and cell, so the individual Israelites felt themselves to be as dead men, dragging out an aimless existence without hope in the world ... not life, but death in life. National spirit, hope and the national identity of the exiles were lost in the years following the time of Ezekiel, circa 585 BC. ... This is the simplest, as well as the most suggestive, of Ezekiel's visions, and carries its interpretation on the face of it. The single idea which it expresses is the restoration of the Hebrew nationality through the quickening influence of the Spirit of Jehovah on the surviving members of the old house of Israel. It is not a prophecy of the resurrection of individual Israelites who have perished. The bones are "the whole house of Israel" [v.11] now in exile; they are alive as

individuals, but as members of a nation they are dead and hopeless of revival ... the grave is no more to be understood literally than the dry bones of the vision itself; both are symbols of the gloomy and despairing view which the exiles take of their own condition. The substance of the prophet's message is that the God who raises the dead and calls the things that are not as though they were is able to bring together the scattered members of the house of Israel and form them into a new people through the operation of His life-giving Spirit'.

The resurrection theme, therefore, refers to Israel in exile receiving, not physical life, but Spiritual life through the infusion of God's Holy Spirit into their nation as a whole. This took place at some time period after the House of Israel was removed from old Canaan by the Assyrians in successive waves of conquest between 732 and 676 BC. Dr Constable says,

'We know comparatively little about the history of the exiled northerners, but there is no evidence of any return. There was Jewish awareness of northern tribes in Assyria: the apocryphal book of Tobit has such a setting'.

[Note: Allen, Ezekiel chs 20-48, p. 195.]

And the *Pulpit Commentary* states that the phrase, 'we are cut off for our parts' (ch 37 v.11) is literally, 'we are cut off for ourselves', which Gesenius explains to mean, 'We are lost', taking the [Hebrew] word as a datus pleonastteus. Exiled and dispersed Israel indeed became 'lost tribes'.

Where did they go? God's people were not all exiled to one place, but originally to three widely separate locations north, east of Assyria, and in the Mideast (2 Kings ch.17 v.6). The exiles are not there today, and they did not return to Canaan. The *Pulpit Commentary* tells us that the prophecies,

'clearly presuppose a wider dispersion of Israel than had then, in Ezekiel's day, taken place and that Israel has never yet been made one nation upon the mountains of Israel, is incontestable ... Not even after the exile closed did all Israel return to Palestine'.

We are not talking about a small number of missing people. In *Commentary on Ezekiel*, Dr Peter Pett points out that Ezekiel's vision spoke of a vast army of people (ch.37 v.10) and says, 'Note

the emphasis on the many, the “huge army”. It would be important in the interpretation ...’ A Commentary on the Holy Bible (Dummelow) adds, ‘the reference is not to the graves of those actually dead, but to the heathen world as the grave of the dead nation of Israel’. The book, *Story of Celto-Saxon Israel*, by W.H. Bennett shows where in the ‘heathen world’ they went, and that ‘Israel’s grave’, was the ‘Saxon’s birthplace’. The great numbers of Israelites lost in northern Assyria explain the coincident sudden appearance of great numbers of early European tribes. In succeeding centuries the remaining elements of Ezekiel’s prophecy came to pass. The Reformation in Europe under the New Covenant was an infusion of Spiritual life into the hearts and minds of the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic and related peoples, exactly correlating to the restored national Spiritual life foreseen by Ezekiel in his vision.

The New Covenant prophesied by Ezekiel’s near-contemporary, Jeremiah, has been a source of confusion because it was to be given by the Holy Spirit to Israel, not to some supposedly non-Semitic Gentiles. Renowned expositor, Dr Thomas Constable, explained the dilemma.

‘On the surface, New Testament references to the realisation of the New Covenant in the present era are problematic, for Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of this covenant being made with Israel, not the Gentiles. Some argue that the church is the new ‘Israel’ through which the Old Testament promise is fulfilled. Others, insisting on a sharp distinction between Israel and the church, propose that the new covenant mentioned in the New Testament is distinct from the one promised in the Old Testament’.

Expository Notes, Dr Constable

Expositors feel constrained to invent a theology of two Israels or two New Covenants, ‘Dual-Covenant Theology’, with a racial salvation for the Jews in place of the prophetic infilling of the Spirit. Yet neither a second Israel, a second New Covenant, nor a racial salvation is supported by the Bible. Instead of such fanciful unscriptural ‘solutions’ that cast doubt on the truth of Divine prophecy, it can be shown that the so-called ‘Gentiles’ of Europe are in fact the descendants of the ancient House of Israel, and are therefore the proper recipients of the prophetic promises.

Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary reveals that, 'The word rendered breath ... symbolises the Holy Spirit (see Ezekiel ch.37 v.14), who brings renewal, regeneration, and rebirth (see Ezekiel ch.37 vv 6 & 9, John ch.3 vv 5-8, ch.6 v.44, ch.7 vv 37-39, ch.16 vv 5-15 & Romans ch.8 vv 9-11)'. Correctly and simply interpreted, Ezekiel's vision is not a reincarnation of the dead, but a Spiritual renewal, a national reawakening, Spiritual regeneration and rebirth of the Israel people during this present age, and corresponds with the Protestant Reformation that swept through the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic nations beginning in the European Middle Ages.
