



Correspondence

Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.

Interpreting the 'dry bones' prophecy

Regarding the different views on the interpretation of the 'dry bones' prophecy of Ezekiel 37 ([Feb. 2001, p. 54](#)), this is surely a prophecy of a two-stage resurrection of the nation of Israel.

Christ referred to the body politic of Israel in Matthew 24:28: "For wheresoever the *carcase* is, there will the eagles be gathered together". He is quoting from Deuteronomy 28:26: "And thy *carcase* shall be meat unto all *fowls of the air*"; and verses 48 and 49, which speak of the Roman "yoke of iron" and the Roman armies coming "as swift as the *eagle* flieth". This was fulfilled when the Roman armies came against Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

"Dry bones", as in Ezekiel's vision, are what we would expect a carcase to have become nearly 2,000 years after A.D. 70. In 1897 (which was 2,520 years from Josiah's Passover) the first Zionist conference was held in Basle. At this time Theodore Herzl wrote: "In Basle we established a Jewish state; in five years, certainly in fifty years, everybody will recognise it". About fifty years later, in 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed.

The Nazi persecution and destruction of the Jews, which commenced in the 1930s and finished at the end of World War 2, caused the Jews to go back to the Land of Promise. This fulfilled Ezekiel 37:7,8: "there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above". The word translated 'shaking' here is also translated 'earthquake'. World War 2 was a political earthquake, and the result for the Jews was that there came into existence the nation of Israel in the Land.

But the nation of Israel is a dead body, "there was no breath in them", the chapter continues. The word translated 'breath' here is *ruach*, which occurs ten times (the number of completion) in this passage (vv. 1-14), rendered 'spirit', 'wind' and 'breath', including four times in verse 9: "Then said He unto me, Prophecy unto the *wind*, prophesy, son of man, and say to the *wind*, Thus saith the Lord GOD [Yahweh]; Come from the

four *winds*, O *breath*, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live".

This verse will be fulfilled after the return of Christ, when the saints are raised and are made partakers of the Divine nature. Ezekiel, the "me" of this verse, will then have the power to "Prophecy unto the wind . . . Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live". Christ quotes this verse in Matthew 24:31: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect *from the four winds*, from one end of heaven to the other", the blowing of the trumpet being a reference back to Isaiah 18:3 and 27:13. The "they" here are the angels, led by Elijah, who will gather the elect, Israel (Isa. 45:4), from the four winds in fulfilment of Ezekiel 37:9.

Matthew 24:31 is usually applied to the saints, but the saints are already referred to in verse 30: "and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". Christ is referring here to Daniel 7:13, where the term "Son of man" includes the saints, who receive the Kingdom at this time (vv. 14,22,27). It is Christ and the saints who come "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" and are revealed to Israel; note that it is "they" who witness the coming, not "ye", which is how the saints are addressed in this prophecy. The "sign of the Son of man" is a reference to the "ensign of the people [the Jews]" of Isaiah 11:10, and the mourning is that referred to in Zechariah 12:10. Thus Matthew 24:31 is about the gathering of Israel, not the gathering of the saints to judgement, since the latter has already happened prior to the coming of the saints with Christ as "the Son of man" of verse 30. Christ is thus quoting from Ezekiel 37:9 about the gathering of the Jews.

Ezekiel 37:10 continues: "So I [Ezekiel, glorified at Christ's return] prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them [the lifeless bodies of verse 8], and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army". Verse 11 tells us, "these bones are the whole house of Israel", that is, they include the Jews of the dispersion, who have been gathered

to the land by Elijah and the angels, in accordance with Matthew 24:31. Prior to the mission of Elijah “they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts”. The prophet Zechariah tells us what will cause this: “And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD [Yahweh], two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein” (13:8). This will be when Russia with Europe will sweep down “as a cloud to cover the land” (Ezek. 38:16). It is known that over two-thirds of the Jews in the land are not religious.

Ezekiel 37:13,14 will not be fulfilled until after Christ has revealed himself to Israel: “And ye shall know that I am the LORD [Yahweh], when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put My spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD [Yahweh] have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD [Yahweh]”. “Spirit” here is *ruach* again (see above), and is clearly referring to 36:26, “a new spirit will I put within you”, that is, teaching or doctrine.

The result is stated in 37:23-27: “so shall they be My people, and I will be their God [Mighty One]. And David [My beloved] My servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd . . . My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God [Mighty One], and they shall be My people”. We long for and pray for this to become a reality.

Ted Bailey
Bristol

In the [February 2001](#) issue of *The Testimony* (p. 54) there is discussion of what our earlier brethren believed about the dry bones prophecy of Ezekiel 37 in relation to the stirrings among the Jews over returning to Palestine.* Twenty or so years ago, Brother Harold Halstead, when he was conducting *The Testimony* Book Exchange, arranged for the present writer to receive bound copies of *Glad Tidings* that had belonged to his father, John. These cover most years for the period from 1898 through to 1910.

Glad Tidings began publication about 1884, and was edited by Brother William Grant of Edinburgh, Scotland. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Brotherhood was keenly interested in the developments concerning Zionism, particularly the annual Zionist Congresses which began in 1897, Dr. Herzl’s influence, the Dreyfus affair in France, colonisation activities in Pales-

tine, and the decline of the Turkish Empire as understood to be the drying up of the River Euphrates of Revelation 16.

In an article entitled “Israel’s Resurrection”, by Brother Herbert Horsman of London, there is an account of the ‘Chovevi Zion Associations’ from all over England, Scotland and Ireland, which held a conference at the Clerkenwell Town Hall in March 1898. A resolution was moved at the conference, and adopted, which said: “That the Conference is of the opinion that the National Idea is an essential and integral part of the Zionist movement, and that it is the duty of all Jews to unite in order to secure a **legally safeguarded resettlement of the Jewish Nation in Palestine**” (emphasis as in the original). One speaker provided an update on the colonisation work already underway. Whereas in 1882 there was hardly a colonist in all of Palestine or Syria, by 1898 there were over 5,000 immigrants in twenty-seven colonies, and Jerusalem itself had 40,000 Jews.

Commenting on the prophetic significance of these developments, Brother Horsman wrote:

“Ezekiel’s vision (xxxvii) is, after 2,300 years, receiving its verification. The ‘dry bones’ of Israel have come together, they are being knit together with sinew and muscle, they are being clothed with flesh, a voice is calling to the four winds, ‘Breathe upon these slain’, AND THEY ARE ABOUT TO STAND A VAST HOST OF LIVING, AND NO LONGER A DEAD NATION. God is about to gather them on every side and bring them into their own land, and make them one nation on the mountains of Israel, and one King shall be king to them all” (emphasis as in the original).¹

Later in the same year, following the Second Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, a special number was published with an extended press run to enable wider distribution. Brother Grant explained the reason for placing emphasis in this issue on reporting the proceedings of the Congress and its prophetic significance:

“The events of the past month have been full of the deepest significance to those who are watching the signs of our times. The world is indeed in a very unsettled state . . . There are

* This letter was written prior to the writer seeing the further discussion on this topic in [April 2001 \(p. 128\)](#).

1. “Israel’s Resurrection”, *Glad Tidings*, Vol. XV, April 1898, pp. 40-41.

many signs of the coming day, but not one is more certain than the movement among the ancient people of Israel. We believe the majority of our readers will find much interest and receive great encouragement in a perusal of the report which we give this month of the Zionist Congress held recently at Basle, Switzerland. It has elbowed out some other matter, but readers who understand the significance of what is happening amidst the people of Israel will not grudge the space devoted to the report of the Congress. Any particular scheme is not of much concern to Zion's watchmen. The movement is enough to them. It is an indication to them that bone is coming to bone, that God is breathing His spirit upon them, and in due time the people will rise from their death-state and enter into the promised land a purified and enlightened nation restored to the favour of God, an object-lesson for all the nations of the earth".²

At the time, *Glad Tidings* was the principal evangelistic³ periodical of the Christadelphians.⁴ In 1898, at the same time as the magazine adopted an enlarged format, in response to an appeal to the Brotherhood it increased its circulation by 1,000 copies. The stirrings of Zionism at the close of the nineteenth century were readily identified by our brethren with Ezekiel 37 and the early stages of its fulfilment. Of this there can be no doubt.

This historical evidence of Christadelphian conviction does not answer the question with which *The Testimony* has been concerned. Were these fervent brethren misguided in their expectations? Having gone from the Jewish immigration of 5,000 that so excited them to a Jewish population numbering over 5,000,000 today, is it wise for us to question now whether Ezekiel 37 has been, in measure, fulfilled?

Of what importance is this question? Does it not have a profound bearing on our preaching proclamation and witness to the world? Have one hundred years of Christadelphian preaching work, in drawing this prophetic fulfilment to the attention of those who are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12), been in vain? If men and women were brought to the truth by this prophetic demonstration, what will happen to their faith if that conviction is now considered to be no longer valid?

Recognising the fulfilment of the dry bones prophecy in the Jews having come out of their Diaspora graves and being brought together in

their own land from north, south, east and west, gives, as Brother Grant observed, "great encouragement" to our faith. It also shapes our understanding of future events, in that there is no turning back in the prophecy of Ezekiel 37. Once assembled together from the four directions of the earth, the bones are never scattered again and lost among the nations.

In this writer's understanding, the figure of Ezekiel 37—of the opening of the graves and bones coming together as a living body—was deliberately chosen by the Spirit using the figure of the resurrection, according to the principle, "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:46). That is to say, that the natural resurrection of Israel as a nation was the great confirming sign that our Father has given of the imminence of the resurrection from the dead of the true Israel of God. Is this not precisely the point the Apostle Paul was making in Romans 11:15?—"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?".

"The receiving of them", as Ezekiel 37 and Romans 11 both teach, is a work of a time. First, there was to be an awakening among the scattered and dry bones (the rise of political Zionism in the nineteenth century); then a coming together of bones with sinews and flesh (the emergence of Israel as a nation in their own land, a body politic (Ezek. 37:14), in the middle of the twentieth century); then the pouring out of God's spirit to change their unbelieving heart from stone to flesh (36:26) coincident with the coming of the Deliverer to Zion; and, lastly, the salvation of all Israel—natural Israel converted and spiritual Israel resurrected—rejoicing under the covenant blessings of Messiah's reign from Jerusalem. This writer's appeal may be summed up:

-
2. "Editorial Notes", *ibid.*, Oct. 1898, p. 113.
 3. 'Evangelist' comes from the Greek *euaggelos*, 'good message', or, as it is also translated in the AV, 'glad tidings', from which the periodical took its name. 'Glad tidings' does not appear in the New Testament as a noun, but always as a verb, *euaggelizo*, emphasising that the message is something to be declared or made known.
 4. It was in fact produced by the Suffolk Street fellowship rather than the Central fellowship, but there was no equivalent magazine at the time within the Central fellowship.—*T.B.*

let us not lose our hope and faith on the verge of its fulfilment.

James Farrar
Hamilton, Canada

Another reader has provided an extract from *The Christadelphian Advocate* of November 1897, which reads:

“In Ezek. xxxvii, ‘The whole house of Israel’ is likened to a valley of dry bones, a fitting representation of the dissolution of their national existence. The question, ‘Can these bones live?’, was one not many years ago that would have been answered in the negative. The general public sentiment was that Israel was gone never to become a people of any note again. But within the latter part of the nineteenth century they have forced themselves to the front in every department of life. This is as it should be according to prophecy of the latter days; and it is what is prophetically called the noise and the shaking of the bones, and the bones coming together, bone to his bone, sinews and flesh being formed, preparatory to the breath of resurrected national life being breathed into them, when Israel shall ‘live and stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army’ (Ezek. xxxvii:10)”.

This is the earliest piece of Christadelphian writing referring to the ‘dry bones’ prophecy as one which commences to be fulfilled prior to Christ’s return that has come to my attention so far. Thus the assertion of a correspondent that “An examination of Christadelphian magazines from 1860 to 2000 demonstrates that every sign (however insignificant) that indicated the *gradual* return to the Holy Land was hailed as a fulfilment of Ezekiel 37” (Feb. 2001, p. 54) remains unproven. It is undoubtedly true that such signs were hailed as a fulfilment of prophecy, and evidence of the nearness of Christ’s return, but not, it would appear, specifically as a fulfilment of Ezekiel 37:1-14. As cited on that same *Testimony* page, Brother Thomas, in *Eureka*, regarded this prophecy as being post-adventual in fulfilment, and it appears that this remained the general view until the end of the nineteenth century. At that time there was an explosion of interest in Jewish matters across the various Christadelphian fellowships existing at the time as a result of the inception of the Zionist movement, which was linked to the fulfilment of the ‘dry bones’ prophecy.

Supporters of the original Christadelphian view that the ‘dry bones’ prophecy is post-adventual in fulfilment have asserted that the pre-adventual view was derived by Christadelphians at the end of the nineteenth century and beyond from non-Christadelphian sources. The first references to the new interpretation of Ezekiel 37 do not cite such sources, and I doubt that it can be shown that they did rely on the works of others. However, my attention has been drawn to the fact that one widely read nineteenth-century book on prophecy, *Light for the Last Days* by Grattan Guinness, published in 1886, refers to Ezekiel 37:1-14 beginning to be fulfilled in the formation of an organisation called the Universal Israelite Alliance, dedicated, amongst other things, to Jewish colonisation of Palestine.⁵ Earlier books on prophecy I have consulted either do not refer to this prophecy at all or do so in a way which is not specific to either a pre-adventual or post-adventual fulfilment.—*T.B.*

5. p. 193.

The sign of the Son of man in heaven

The Lord Jesus said that in the time of the end there will be a sign in the sky, “the sign of the Son of man in heaven” (Mt. 24:30), the Greek word translated ‘heaven’ here being used both for the abode of God and the celestial firmament. There are two ways of interpreting such prophecies, the figurative/metaphorical way and the literal/physical way. In the last few centuries more attention has been paid to the former method than to the latter, but I would like to share with readers a recent discovery I have made of a literal fulfilment of the prophecy.

The link between the Lord Jesus and the fish is well known. In the Gospels we read that some of the disciples of Jesus were fishermen, that Jesus fed thousands of hungry people with bread and fish miraculously multiplied, and that he caused large numbers of fish to be caught by miraculous means. Later the fish became a symbol of Christianity, because in Greek the initial letters of the statement ‘Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour’ make the Greek word for fish. There is a remarkable astronomical link with this fact, which we will now explore.

The constellations are arbitrarily divided areas of the sky in which are stars that may be