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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

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A GLORIOUS FUTURE

BY GIDEON LEVYTAM

As the tide of world opinion continues to turn against Israel, it is important for Bible-believing Christians to know why we support the Jewish State in her struggle for survival.

The *Jerusalem Post* published an article on January 10, 2009 entitled, “British Academics: ‘Israel Must Lose’ War with Hamas.” It reported that more than 300 college and university professors from all over the United Kingdom had signed a letter to London’s *Guardian* newspaper declaring that the Jewish State “must lose” its war against terrorism and Islamic extremism.

Yes, the signers are secular academics, for the most part. However, the situation is no better in the religious world—including the professing “Christian” community. The World and National Councils of Christian Churches (WCC and NCC) almost invariably side against Israel in the ongoing Middle East conflict. In North America and in Europe, most of the mainline denominations take the same stance, portraying Israel as the aggressor and the Palestinians as the victims. Even some of our evangelical

seminaries are producing graduates who subscribe to “replacement theology,” an ideology (common among amillennialists) built on the assumption that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s plan. Those who subscribe to this view believe there is no future for ethnic Israel because the Church has become “New Israel,” or the new “people of God.”

In *Israel’s Glorious Future*, my longtime friend and colleague Gideon Levytam soundly refutes these unbiblical notions about the demise of Israel as a nation. He writes with the passion of a native Israeli believer (born in Jerusalem) whose very heartbeat is for the salvation of Israel and the Jewish people. This excerpt from Gideon’s booklet is only the beginning of a new perspective you’ll gain on Ezekiel 37.

Gideon’s voice is one that is sorely needed in our generation. I hope we are listening.

Dr. Gary Hedrick,
CJFM President

The book of the Prophet Ezekiel

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God Has a Distinct Plan For the Nation of Israel

In the Bible, the people of Israel are called “the Chosen People.” Even though they were no better than any other nation, God chose them for a purpose. If you make a parallel to that from a New Testament perspective, you will see that you and I, who are believers in Lord Yeshua the Messiah in this present age, have also been chosen by God before the foundation of the world. God has a plan and a purpose for the Church, His heavenly company, as well. Right now, the heavenly company—the Church—and the earthly company—the nation of Israel—are both in this world. There are approximately 14 million Jewish people in the world today, and it makes one wonder what is going to happen to this small nation. The vast majority of its people are still in unbelief, but nevertheless God has a plan for this nation.

We believe that the rapture of the Church is next on the Lord’s agenda. It may happen at any time—even right now as you are reading these words. As soon as the Lord takes the Church to be with Him, He will begin His direct dealing with the people of Israel. If we believe that the Lord can come at any time to take us—the heavenly company—to be with Him, we must also believe that He has a plan for the nation of Israel—His earthly people. We cannot only believe what applies to us, and set aside what God has for the people of *Israel* in the coming days. We must be consistent and faithful to both lines of truth.

We know from our people’s history that Israel, as a nation, has been scattered; but one day they will be reunited and restored to their Promised Land. We see this clearly from the Word of God in Ezekiel 37.

In Verses 1-14, we read that Ezekiel had been given a vision from God about the future of the people of Israel. Here the author, inspired by the Spirit of God, does not deal with the question of resurrection, but rather with that of restoration. Yes, we know that there is bodily resurrection—that every believer is going to be raised from the dead and will be in the presence of the Lord.

Remember what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17:

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in [Messiah] will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

There is a bodily resurrection, and every believer will be raised from the dead. In fact, even unbelievers will be resurrected, but they will be cast into the Lake of Fire. The subject of Ezekiel 37, however, is not the resurrection but the restoration of the nation of Israel and gathering them back into the Promised Land.

Vision in the Spiritual Realm

“The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ So I answered, ‘O Lord GOD, You know’” (Ezek. 32:1-3).

Let’s look at this vision in more detail. Note that in Verse 1, Ezekiel was carried in the Spirit by the Lord. From the earlier part of the book, we know that Ezekiel was in Babylon. He was taken into the Babylonian captivity along with the rest of his nation.

“Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1).

Verse 3 of Ezekiel 1 tells us that Ezekiel was a priest. Being among the captives,

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he experienced the same sorrows and sufferings as the rest of Israel. Ezekiel was physically in Babylon, but in the power of the Holy Spirit, he was carried away in a vision to a sight of future events in Israel's history. It is very similar to what happened to the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation. While John was on the island of Patmos, located in the Aegean Sea and part of present-day Greece, he received a vision from God about future events.

Revelation 1:9-10 says, "I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of [Yeshua the Messiah], was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus [Messiah]. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet."

John, whose Hebrew name is *Yochanan*, was one of Yeshua's disciples. At the time of the revelation, he was in exile, just like Ezekiel, and both of them received a vision regarding future events. Ezekiel's vision was about Israel's future, and John's vision was about the Church Age, the future of Israel, and ultimately the end times. Both men were carried by the Holy Spirit of God so that God could show them something unique. What a privilege it was for these two men to receive such a revelation! It was so unique, that God placed it in the Canon of Scripture; and today you and I can rely on what God said to these two people.

What did God show Ezekiel? Ezekiel 37:1 says that the hand of the Lord set him down "... in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones." The Hebrew word for "valley" is *beek-ah*. The valley was full of bones, reminding me of experiences I had as an Israeli soldier during the Yom Kippur War. When the peace treaty with Egypt was signed, other soldiers and I were sent by our commander to search the Sinai desert for bodies of Israeli and Egyptian soldiers so that they might have a place of burial. This was not a pleasant sight to see. Human remains speak of death—something that no longer has any hope or future.

From the text, we know that this valley of bones represents the nation of Israel. When Ezekiel was in Babylonian captivity along with the rest of

the nation, the city of Jerusalem had been burned and the Temple had been destroyed. The Lord gave Ezekiel a vision about the future of Israel, but He began by showing him a valley of bones stretching as far as the eye could see.

During the history of the nation of Israel there were many times when things seemed hopeless because of the Jewish people's sufferings and sorrows. It looked as if Israel was dead, and humanly speaking, it seemed as though there was no future for this people. Verse 2 tells us that not only were the bones scattered (a reference to the dispersion of the people of Israel), but that they were very dry, which means that this nation was no longer living.

In Deuteronomy 4:23, 25-27 we read: "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and . . . provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you."

God told Israel, even before they entered the land of Canaan, that He himself would scatter them among the heathen, if upon entering the Promised Land, they would forget the Lord and live like the nations around them. We should not be surprised to see Jewish people scattered all over the world today. There is even a plant called "Wandering Jew." The Jewish people are dispersed, on the one hand, because of God's judgment, and on the other hand, because of the hatred of the nations around them. The Lord said it would happen even before Israel entered into their land! **God is holy and righteous, and sometimes He has to discipline His people.** Even though Jewish communities in every country are small, God has preserved them throughout the centuries.



Deuteronomy 28:58-65 tells us that God's judgment would fall upon the Jewish people if they failed to keep His commands. Among other punishments, God declared that the Chosen People would ". . . be plucked from off the land which you go to possess. Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, . . . And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place . . ." (Deut. 28:63-65).

God's Discipline

God is a loving God, but He is also holy and righteous. Sometimes He has to discipline the people He loves. This discipline may seem harsh to us, and yet He has the right to impose it. I would like to remind you that it is the same with the Church of Lord Jesus the Messiah. God disciplines those He loves, just like a father would discipline his own children. So the dispersion of Israel, the scattered bones in Ezekiel's vision, was God's discipline of His own people. It is sad to realize that a nation, which had been

delivered by blood from Egyptian captivity and brought into the Promised Land, did not take long to disobey God. He had to judge His own chosen nation and scatter them. Today, there are Jewish people in every corner of the world. If you remember, the Assyrians came and took the northern tribes to the north, then the Babylonians came and took the southern tribes to Babylon. Currently, the nation of Israel is scattered all over the world. This is exactly what God showed Ezekiel in Chapter 37 in the valley of the dry bones.

Can Israel Truly Be Restored?

Another point that I would like to make based on Verse 2 is not only that there were many bones, but they were very *dry*. This suggests that many years passed by, and the bones got drier and drier. To the human eye it seems that there is no more hope for this nation. But it is not so with God. He has a plan and a purpose for the nation of Israel. In Verse 3, God asks Ezekiel the following question,

"... *Son of man, can these bones live?...*" Humanly speaking, it is impossible for dry, scattered bones to come back to life, but notice Ezekiel's answer to God's question: "... *O Lord GOD, You know.*"

We know that many people throughout history thought there was no future for the nation of Israel. Yet, the state of Israel has been in existence again since 1948. No nation has ever suffered like the people of Israel, and no nation has been scattered as the people of Israel have been for so many generations. The question is this: Can Israel ever be restored, gathered back to the Land, and to the Lord himself? I would like to emphasize again that the subject here is **not** resurrection. We know from other passages that bodily resurrection of every person will happen, but the subject is whether or not Israel, as a nation, can ever be restored to God and gathered back in their land. You and I, having the complete canon of Scripture, can say a definite "yes" to this question. Ezekiel replied: "... *O Lord GOD, You know.*" And God does know!



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God Answers His Own Questions

In Verses 4, 5, and 6 of the same chapter, God himself answers the question He had asked Ezekiel earlier. *“Again He said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.’””*

First of all, in Verse 4, God is commanding Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. It sounds a little strange. To “prophesy” means to speak forth the Word of God. Sometimes we, as believers, are so dead and dry spiritually, and our hearts are so hardened, that we don’t grasp the Word of God being preached to us. Here Ezekiel is asked to prophesy to dead bones! The dry bones represent the nation of Israel, and God is telling Ezekiel to speak to them and say, “Hear the Word of the Lord!”

There are two things I would like you to remember:

1. Scattered Israel *is* going to hear the Word of the Lord.
2. Jewish people always have a built-in desire for the Land of Israel, for the city of Jerusalem, for Zion, and the Promised Land. They hold on to the fact that they are Jewish and have a longing for the homeland.

You may remember the song “*Hatikva*” (or “The Hope”), which is Israel’s national anthem. In English the words of this song translate:

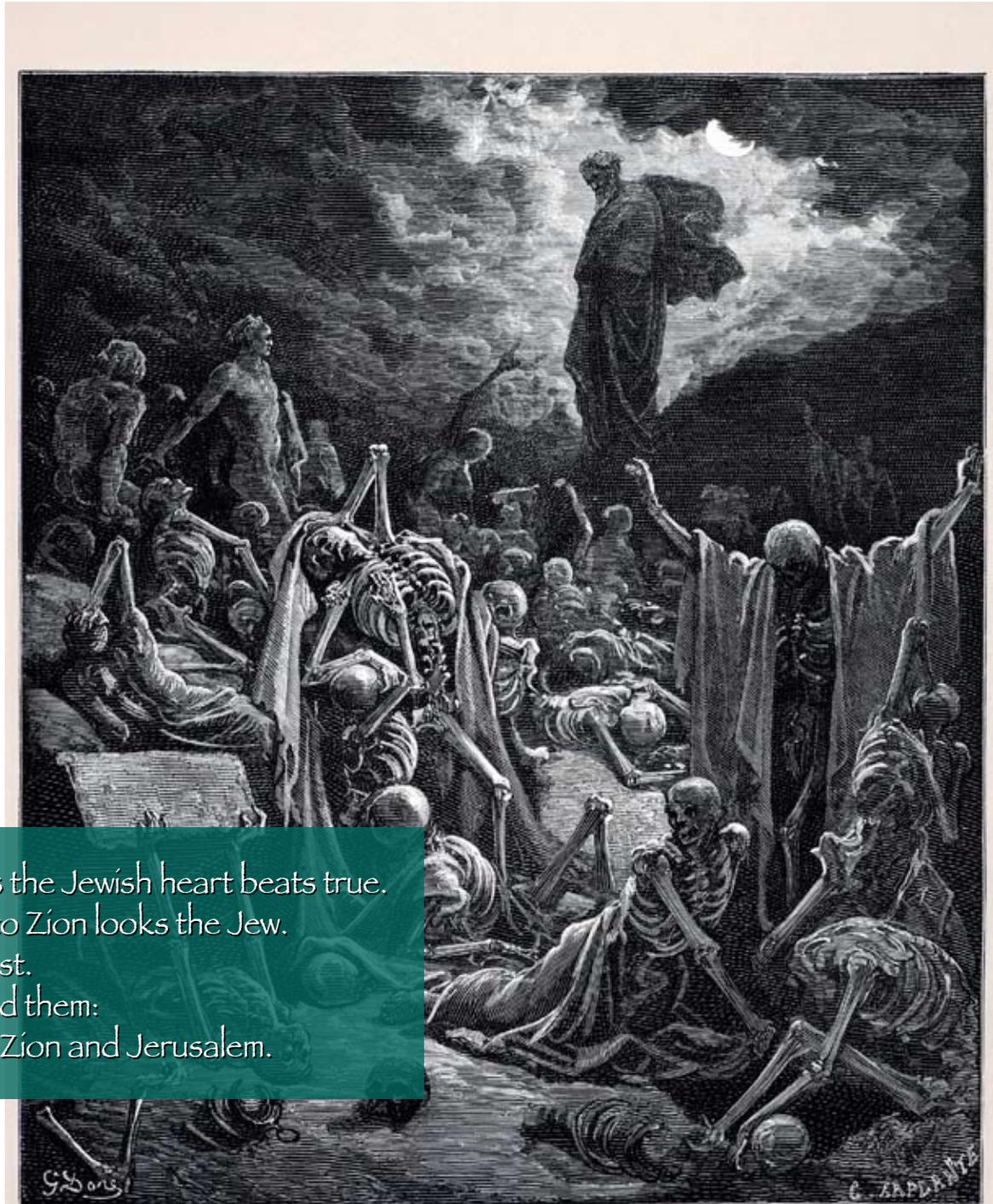
So long as still within our breasts the Jewish heart beats true.
So long as still toward the east, to Zion looks the Jew.
So long our hopes are not yet lost.
Two thousand years we cherished them:
To live in freedom in the Land of Zion and Jerusalem.

For 2,000 years, Israel was scattered all over the world, and yet, the Jewish heart still beats for the Land of Israel. God produces a desire in the Jewish people’s hearts to link with the Land of Israel. I cannot explain why or how it happens. Ezekiel 37:4 explains it best. Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy to dry bones so that they would hear the Word of the Lord.

That means God still has a plan and a purpose for the people of Israel even though “they are scattered and very dry” today. You and I have to pray that God will bring about His plan for Israel, as well as for us who are a part of the heavenly company of Lord Jesus the Messiah.

In Verse 5, Ezekiel speaks for God and relays God’s promises to the dry bones: *“Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live.’”*

God is speaking to the very dry and scattered bones (i.e., to Israel) in the time of Israel’s dispersion and spiritual death. If God says that He will do something, we can be sure that it is going to happen just as He said. Many Christians love the promises of God for themselves. Sadly, sometimes they forget about the promises of God to Israel. Israel did exactly the same thing at the Church’s beginning. They were concerned about God’s promises to them, and did not often think about the nations around them.



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Spiritual and Physical Restoration Will Be In Stages

In Verse 6, God gives us the process of Israel's restoration. It is not going to happen all at once. Ezekiel 37:6 mentions a six-stage process: *"I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD."*

The nation of Israel's restoration is a stage-by-stage process. First of all, the fibrous cords joining muscles to bones will be laid. Next, the flesh will cover the bones and the sinews. Then, the skin will be put on. God will put breath into them. And finally, they (the bones: Israel) will live and know the Lord.

It is sad that many of our Jewish people do not acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many call themselves Zionists, but set God aside. We must be biblical Zionists who wait for Zion's restoration—when God will come and take His rightful place there. God's intention is for Israel to be *regathered* to the Land, and also to *know the Lord*, so that this restoration culminates in the Messianic Age.

Even the physical regathering of the people of Israel to the Land will be in stages. First of all, they will be regathered—still in unbelief. The second stage will be the Tribulation Period (see Revelation 12:1-9). Satan is going to be cast down to earth. What do you think he is going to do while here? He is going to spend all his time and energy persecuting the "woman" of Revelation 12—who is none other than Israel. He is going to do his best to destroy the nation of Israel because he does not want them to say: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." He does not want them to accept the Messiah. He will seek to destroy every Hebrew during the Tribulation. That is why I believe God is going to prepare a place for the Jewish people in the region of ancient Bozra and the well-known city of Petra, where He will preserve them until the end of the Tribulation (see Revelation 12:6; Isaiah 63:1; and Micah 2:12). And then Israel is going to say, "*Baruch HaBa B'Shem Adonai*" ("Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord"). They will accept the Messiah at the end of the Tribulation Period.

Currently, an approximate one-third of the world's Jewish population lives in the Land, and the vast majority

of them have not yet accepted Yeshua the Messiah. Physical regathering is not the ultimate goal in God's plan for the nation of Israel. Notice what is said at the end of Ezekiel 37:6, *"... and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD."* God wants not only to regather Israel physically, but He is also talking about a spiritual revival of the nation. This will lead to the Messianic Age, when the Messiah is going to rule over Israel.

The Restoration Comes Amid Sorrows and Trials

In Verses 7-10 we read about Israel's actual restoration. In Verse 7, Ezekiel is prophesying according to the Word of the Lord, *"So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone."*

The word for "noise" in Hebrew is "*kol*," and the word for "rattling" is "*raash*." It implies an earthquake of sorts. Ezekiel is prophesying in obedience to God's word. As a result of this noise and shaking, bones came together. This is the first stage in the nation of Israel's restoration. It begins with noise and shaking, which are not merely sounds, but tragic experiences in the history of the people of Israel since their dispersion.

Our people were not in the Land for nearly 2,000 years. Just think of all the events in the life of Israel during the past millennia. First of all, the 10 northern tribes were taken captive by the Assyrians. Later, the two southern tribes—Judah and Benjamin—were taken captive by the Babylonians. Then came the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Even though there were many Jewish people in the Land during the Roman rule, they were under tremendous persecution. We all know what happened in AD 70, when more than one million Jewish people were murdered.

Even professing Christians persecuted Jewish people through the centuries. We all know about the Spanish Inquisition, when they burned Jewish people in synagogues and then went on to "worship" Jesus in their churches. I don't need to tell you about Russian Tzars and Germany's Hitler. Israel did not become a state again without a lot of noise and shaking. In Verse 7 we see the nation of Israel beginning the process of physical restoration. Later, it will also happen spiritually. This process involves a lot



of problems, sorrows, and trials—a lot of "*kol*" and "*raash*." It is a real turmoil!

In Verse 8, Ezekiel sees beyond that. He sees complete restoration of the bodies, i.e., the nation: *"Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them."*

Here Ezekiel sees the nation of Israel regathered, but as it says at the end of Verse 8, *"... there was no breath in them."* It is a gathered nation without life. The regathering of Israel is a real miracle, nonetheless. Israel is a nation filled with miracles. It is amazing that this nation has been revived again, and this was done only by divine design. God is the only one who is able to preserve the people of Israel and keep them for Himself.



the Day of Atonement. What is the difference between them? Here is what Leviticus 23:23-24 has to say: *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.’”*

This is the Feast of Trumpets. Then ten days later comes the next Feast: *“Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD”* (v. 27).

The Feast of Trumpets always has to do with the calling of the nation of Israel, and regathering them to the Land. That’s why the trumpet calls. When they come back to the Land, however, the people are still in unbelief. That’s why the Feast of Atonement comes after the Feast of Trumpets. It is not enough to be merely gathered physically; there must also be spiritual regeneration. The people will have to mourn and confess their sins, but *first* they have to be regathered physically. In Ezekiel 37:8, the Prophet sees a complete physical restoration of the nation of Israel, but they are still dead spiritually. He saw them physically complete—but without breath. The word for “breath” in Hebrew is *“ruach”*—the same word used for the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God will eventually blow life into them.

Lifeless Israel Awaiting Regeneration by the Holy Spirit

It is not only necessary for Israel to have the Spirit of God, but it is necessary for you and me as well. If we don’t have the Holy Spirit of God within us, we are not really children of God. We may go to meetings, sit in pews, or even sing worship songs. We are lifeless if we do not have the Holy Spirit of God. We are dead in trespasses and sins, as Ephesians 2 tells us.

In the same way, Israel needs to receive life. God does not want Israel just to have a piece of land without having a relationship with Him. When we look at the nation of Israel today, the truth of Ezekiel 37:8 is right before us: There is a restoration, but we are still waiting for the regeneration. If the spiritual regeneration had already happened, the Messiah would be reigning, Israel would be established, and there would be no wars.

There is, however, no regeneration yet. Israel has been restored to their Land in preparation for another dispersion that will take place during the Tribulation. Only after the Tribulation will there be a second regathering, and spiritual regeneration.

The Bible tells us that a troublous time, such as has never been before, is still ahead. Ezekiel 20:33-38 says the following: *“‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”*

God is going to restore the people of Israel, but He is also going to sift them, test them, and make them go through a time of trial. He is going to deal with them in order to refine them and restore them back to Himself. In Ezekiel 37:9-10, the Prophet received a word from the Lord: *“Also He said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.’”* So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.”

God wants these dead bones to come to life, and that’s why He told Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind, to the breath (or *“ruach”* in Hebrew) to come and revive these slain bodies. This represents to us the final restoration of Israel as a nation. Ezekiel does not speak here about physical resurrection, but about the spiritual revival and regathering of the nation. The plural pronoun “they” as well as the phrase “an exceedingly great army” suggest a multitude of people. The word “army” is sometimes used to describe the nation of Israel as they left Egypt. It does not necessarily mean a military, but a large company of people. This is

Ezekiel 37 and the Feasts of Leviticus 23

What we read in Ezekiel goes back to God’s commands to Moses regarding the Seven Feasts of the Lord recorded in Leviticus 23.

Altogether, there are seven feasts given to Israel by the Lord. Four of them are spring feasts: *Pesach* (Passover), *Hag HaSukkot* (Feast of the Unleavened Bread), *Hag HaBikkurim* (Feast of the Firstfruits, which speaks about the Resurrection), and *Shavuot* (Pentecost). The rest are fall feasts: *Rosh HaShana* or *Yom Truah* (the Feast of Trumpets), *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), and the final one—the Feast of *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles).

Notice that the first fall feast is the Feast of Trumpets and the second is

the longing of Yeshua the Messiah's heart to see Israel regathered and restored spiritually.

Remember what He said in the Gospel of Luke 13:34? "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . ! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!"

Do you remember how He wept over the city and how He wanted to restore Israel, but the nation did not accept Him in His first coming? That's why they have been scattered all over the world. Yet, even in dispersion, God used the Jewish people to bring blessings to the world. Even though the nation itself did not accept the Messiah, the first individuals who did were Hebrews in the Land of Israel.

To them, He gave the message to go out into all the world and preach the Gospel, to teach, and to make disciples. They went, and for the last 2,000 years, millions have come to know Him and have become part of the Body of Messiah. This is all because God used the first believers in the first century to present the Gospel to the world.

Note what God told Israel in Deuteronomy 30:1-8 as a prophecy, long before the dispersion: "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where

the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you.

"If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live. Also the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today."

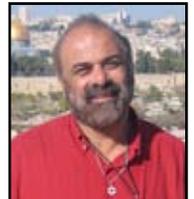
God is going to restore Israel, and He will circumcise their hearts. This speaks of a true repentance, similar to what happens when a person comes to know the Lord, confesses that he is a sinner who deserves to be punished, and is thankful to God for sending His Son to die for him on the tree. This is

the circumcision of the heart that is still in the future for Israel as a nation. It will happen after the Tribulation Period, after Israel has been driven away from the Land and pursued by the Antichrist and his armies. Israel will be at their wit's end. They will no longer have any military power; there will be no support from other nations; and the whole world will be gathered against the Jewish people. Israel will realize that their only way out is **up**. Then they will look to the One who died for them on the tree.

As Zechariah 12:10 says, ". . . they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him, as one grieves for a firstborn." That will be the true *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. They will begin to mourn; every family apart, every head of the family apart; everyone individually will mourn and confess that Yeshua is the Messiah.

When this happens, they will receive life from the Messiah Yeshua, and then they will stand on their feet as an exceedingly great army, as declared in Ezekiel 37:10.

Gideon Levytam is director of international ministries for CJFM.



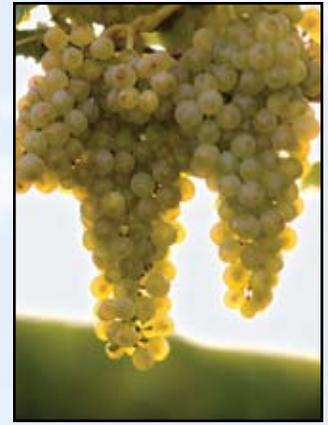
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A detailed look at Ezekiel and his prophecy of Yeshua and God's plan for the nation of Israel. Gideon takes you through the Scripture to see exactly how this ancient prophet heard God's Word and His promises to the people of Israel.



By Violette Berger

Fruit from the Harvest



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No Greater Blessing

CJFM Missionary Richard Toviah (Phoenix) never could have imagined the scenario that transpired at home simply from watching a movie with his five-year-old daughter, Rachel. Only God could have orchestrated it! When one of the movie's main characters suddenly glowed like the sun, Richard felt compelled to stop the movie. He explained to Rachel that in Heaven, Jesus and those who believe in Him as Lord and Savior will glow even brighter than the character in the movie. As his daughter's eyes grew bigger, Richard was led to share the Gospel in the way a five-year-old would understand.

Seeing that Rachel had listened intently, Richard asked her if she wanted to pray and receive the gift of salvation that he had just described. She eagerly said, "Yes." This little girl understood that all of her sins would be forgiven, and that she would be in Heaven with Jesus forever. Richard writes, "There were tears in my eyes and a smile on Rachel's face as she took that step of faith and prayed so earnestly with me to receive Jesus as her Savior and Messiah. Praise the Lord!"

Richard recently spoke in a small church near the Arizona-California border. The title of his message was "Remember Lot's Wife: What's Her Name." His teaching delved deep into Lot's life and experiences in Sodom and Gomorrah, comparing the days of Noah and Lot with the days we are living in—just before the Coming of the Son of Man (see Luke 17:20). At the service's conclusion, Richard gave an invitation and three teenagers and two adults prayed with him to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Richard recalls, "Just as the two angels held Lot's hand to lead him out of Sodom, these five individuals allowed Jesus to hold their hands, leading them from death to life. Praise the Lord!"

A Great Miracle Happened Here

Brian Zuckerman, CJFM missionary (Las Vegas), also relates a series of events that only God could orchestrate. A local nursing home, which has several Jewish residents, requested that *Hanukkah* be observed. However, the home was unable to find a rabbi who was willing to come and conduct the service. Somehow, Brian was eventually contacted. As he began to deliver his *Hanukkah* message, he focused his teaching on Yeshua (Jesus), "as in every message in the Bible, Jesus is at the center. This is especially true when it comes to the feasts, which all point to Him." At the completion of his message, Brian again went over the Gospel message and presented an invitation to repent and receive the Lord.

Brian writes, "One person answered the invitation—the woman who works for the nursing home and organizes the events and the room. Since that day, I have been visiting the home twice

a month. And the woman, who made a confession of faith on that first day, ensures that the room is packed with people. God is truly blessing this ministry. Every time I have gone there, someone has answered the invitation."

On one occasion, Brian had the opportunity to share one-on-one with "Sam," an unsaved Jewish man, who had suffered multiple strokes and had not only lost his sight, but was missing both eyes. Following their discussion, Sam made a confession of faith and prayed with Brian. Sam placed his trust in Yeshua, his Jewish Messiah—God had opened the eyes to Sam's heart!

Who Has Believed the Rabbi's Report?

On a recent train journey, **Rabbi Joseph Azriel, CJFM missionary (California)**, was quite surprised to see an Orthodox man openly reading a copy of the New Testament. Immediately, Rabbi Joseph, who holds credentials as an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, sat down next to the gentleman. Embarrassed, nervous, and fearful of a rabbi's criticism at having been caught reading the New Testament, the man said, "Who believes such rubbish?" Rabbi Joseph answered, "I do!"

Shocked and curious as to how an Orthodox rabbi came to believe in Yeshua, the man listened as Rabbi Joseph eagerly shared his conclusions from the Scriptures. Their discussion and study lasted throughout the long train trip. The man wept with fear, realizing the cost of such a decision, but nevertheless confessed, "My dear rabbi, you have convinced me." He had boarded the train just perusing the New Testament—but departed, with joy, *believing* the new life he has through Yeshua.

The World Loves a Parade

Living in New Orleans, **Michelle Beadle, CJFM missionary**, had the unique opportunity to distribute tracts before the first parade of the Mardi Gras season started. As the crowds assembled, she distributed 500 tracts along the parade route. Some people asked her what the tract was about. Michelle responded by saying, "To answer your question, I need to ask you a question that you may think a bit odd. Who do you think Jesus is?"

The answers she received were either "I don't know" or "the Son of God." Michelle had the privilege of sharing the Gospel with four people, two of whom prayed with her to receive Jesus into their hearts.

"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

The Believers' Tribulation

The pre-Trib Rapture, safe from tribulation?

Remember televangelist and prosperity preacher Jim Bakker, who was convicted of fraud and conspiracy in the late 1980's? During a later interview from prison, the repentant pastor is quoted as saying, "It's time that the call from the pulpit be changed from 'who wants a life of pleasure and good things, new homes, cars, and material possessions' to 'who will come forward to accept Jesus Christ and the fellowship of his suffering'" (see www.letusreason.org).

Third in a Three-Part Series

Why—in a series on the pre-Tribulation Rapture—would we talk about a “prosperity preacher?” Let me ask you this: When was the last time you heard an altar call asking repentant sinners to come forward to share in *the fellowship of the Lord's suffering*? When was the last time you heard your minister, or *any* minister, talk about the believer's responsibility to share in His suffering? We tend to avoid the subject of suffering, don't we? As evangelicals, we may not overtly preach and teach the prosperity gospel, but we do like our creature comforts, and I suspect we would strongly protest if anyone suggested we forego those comforts. But we do ourselves—and new Christians—a great disservice if we believe and teach that our lives will be blessed with comfort and ease until our Lord returns.

In discussions of the Rapture, pre-Tribulationists are often accused of being “escapists.” That is, formulating and embracing a pre-Tribulation view simply because we want to avoid trials and escape suffering. Nothing could be further from the truth. As we demonstrated in previous installments of this series, the pre-Trib Rapture doctrine is not a matter of wishful thinking created to minimize suffering for the believer. It is a biblical doctrine—designed by God to bring hope and comfort to the Church.

Because there is so much disagreement among believers about the end times, and particularly about the Rapture, many Christians avoid discussing the doctrine at all. However, ignoring

a teaching does not invalidate it, or lessen its effect on our lives. Doctrine is not designed to be merely an intellectual exercise. One way or the other, it will impact our lives and influence our behavior.

No one demonstrates the cause and effect principle of doctrine more than the Apostle Paul. Like a mathematician laying out a geometry proof, Paul starts with a theorem—a given—and then draws conclusions from it. He often begins his writings with a doctrinal truth, explaining what God has done—or will do—for us, and then proceeds to explain what our response should be. You see him use such parallels as “because, then,” or “since, therefore.” When we understand what God has done (or will do) for us, our lives should change accordingly.

The teaching of the Rapture, and the expectation of Messiah's imminent return should motivate us to live righteous and holy lives, focused on proclaiming the Gospel. We can rightly look to the Rapture as our time of deliverance from God's wrath and the Tribulation to come. In another respect, the Rapture will also be our time of deliverance from the tribulation of this life. Yes, believers *will* have tribulation in this life. But exactly what kind of tribulation will we endure?

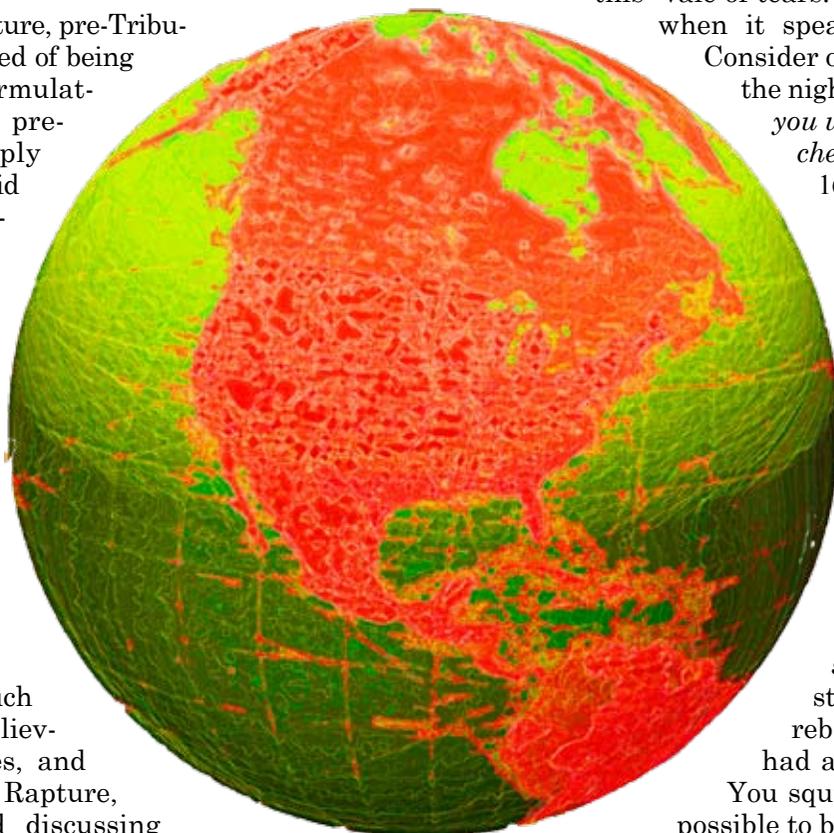
Most of us tend to think of tribulation as the minor (and sometimes major) disappointments, inconveniences, and trials of life—things such as physical or emotional suffering, sickness, economic setbacks, betrayals, unfaithful spouses, or wayward children—the types of things that beset all men in this “vale of tears.” But is this what the Bible means when it speaks of the believer's tribulation?

Consider our Lord's words to His disciples on the night before His death: “. . . *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). The word used for tribulation here is the Greek word, *thlipsis*.

That word can also be translated, “affliction,” “anguish,” “trouble,” or “persecution.” Was Jesus talking about the common trials and difficulties of life? That may have been part of it. But perhaps, He was also referring to something else.

One clue may be found in Paul's second letter to Timothy: “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in [Messiah] Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12). Godly lives stand in stark contrast to a world in rebellion against God. Have you ever had a bright light shined in your eyes?

You squint, turn away, and do everything possible to block the light. Likewise, those who live in the darkness of sin find it painful to have the



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brightness of God's truth shined on them. They want the light to go away. They want *us* to go away. And the further into darkness mankind descends, the more intense will be their efforts to dim God's light. For that very reason, believers who seek to live godly lives will be the targets of increased hostility, and persecution because of their faith.

Scripture also tells us that the preaching of the cross will bring persecution. Human beings would much rather believe that their own works and merit can earn them a place in Heaven. They don't want to hear about their need for a savior. In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul said, "*And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased*" (Gal. 5:11). Paul was stoned at Lystra because he continued preaching the unpopular message that both Jew and Gentile have a sin problem, and neither can redeem themselves.

Paul was not surprised by the vicious attack against him. Dr. Luke tells us that after the attack, Paul preached the Gospel in neighboring Derbe, and then returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, "*strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'*" (Acts 14:22). No doubt the believers (including Luke himself) were quite distressed by what had just happened to Paul. But the Apostle told them not to be upset; that these things were to be

expected. It was an inevitable part of the believer's journey. And he told them not to let such persecution and tribulation get them down, but rather they must stay strong and keep the faith.

The biblical theme of tribulation and suffering for our faith is found throughout the New Testament, but particularly in Hebrews 11. The beginning of the chapter regales us with the stories of God's Old Testament saints whose faith enabled them to conquer and triumph over tribulation. Very encouraging, isn't it? But then, we come to those nameless saints at the end of the chapter, who didn't fare so well. Those dear souls endured not only economic deprivation, but numerous forms of torture—whipping, imprisonment, stoning, being sawn in two, and being killed by the sword—all because they refused to renounce their faith in the risen Messiah, and pay homage to pagan gods.

Have you ever stopped to imagine yourself in their situation? How long would you or I be willing to resist? Or have we already renounced our faith by making daily compromises? Are we already paying homage to our world's gods? Where do we draw the line in the sand? Certainly these first-century believers must have been tempted to yield to the agony of torture; to have their pain ended by saying or doing whatever it was the tormentors wanted. What grace God must have given them. Although the Bible does not give us their names, it honors them as heroes of the faith—men and women of whom the world was not worthy.

Thank God, such torture and tribulation have not been our fate in the western world. Not yet, anyway. But we must not delude ourselves. Persecution and tribulation do not belong only to the first century, or to third-world countries. For generations, Americans have been blessed with a society that has supported biblical values, or at least paid lip service to the sovereignty of God. That, unfortunately, is no longer the case. Believers are threatened with lawsuits for all sorts of religious expression—for displaying their Bibles on their desks at work, or for praying in the name of Jesus at public events. A Tennessee elementary school recently demanded that the words, "In God We Trust" be removed from a poster made by students. The national motto was included on a hand-written poster inviting classmates to the annual "See You at the Pole" before-school prayer event.

Your job as a schoolteacher, scientist, or college professor could be in jeopardy if you were to hold a rational discussion on the weaknesses of Darwinism and evolution. Fines for "hate speech" are already in the works to silence those who simply articulate biblical morality. While some wish to define this entire battle as a battle for religious liberty (and in some regards, it is)—this is, at its very core, a battle between good and evil, between the forces of light and darkness. We must never forget that spiritual dimension.

Sadly, many who wear the cloak of religion are on the wrong side of this battle. We should not be surprised. Paul warned the

young pastor Timothy: *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”* (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

We must not be lulled to sleep, like that hapless frog in the soon-to-be boiling water. We dare not think that we can avoid the battle and simply slide through life, enjoying our Lord’s favor, and all our earthly comforts until the Rapture delivers us. It’s time for us to develop what Scottish missionary and Olympic runner Eric Liddell reportedly called “muscular Christianity.”

The Prophet Jeremiah spoke to this need for “muscles” when he addressed a similar issue in Chapter 12: *“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, In which you trusted, they wearied you, Then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?”* (v.5).

The battle for the truth of the Gospel is only going to grow more intense. If we hem and haw, compromising on the “less important” issues now, and refuse to take a stand on clear biblical teaching, how firmly will we stand when faced with the absolute heart of the Gospel? What’s at stake is not only the truth of God’s word, but also the Gospel’s ability to have free reign. We *will* suffer persecution for living a godly life. And we *will* be assailed for preaching

that the vicarious death and resurrection of Messiah is the *only* way for man to be made right with God. But is it God’s truth—or isn’t it?

The battle for the truth of the Gospel is only going to grow more intense. If we hem and haw, compromising on the “less important” issues now . . . how firmly will we stand when faced with the absolute heart of the Gospel?

Perhaps we’ve bought into the argument that living in a multi-cultural society requires us to be tolerant, and avoid things that are offensive to others. But we are not the first believers to confront such a dilemma. Yes, we are called to live in peace with all men, and to be good citizens—obeying those whom God has placed over us. But we must always give *first* allegiance to God’s word. We must not have any gods before Him—not the god of convenience, or social acceptance, or family peace, or even the god of country. Scripture records for us the example of the Apostles who, rebuked for preaching the Gospel (again) in the Temple courts, answered, “. . . *We ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29).

Over the centuries, believers have endured economic deprivation, been pulled limb from limb, boiled in oil, burned at the stake, and tortured in other unspeakable ways. But as horrible as all those things were, they will pale in comparison to what the unbelieving world will face in the coming Tribulation. The prospect of their suffering and impending doom should motivate us afresh to carry the Gospel to our neighbors, and to every corner of the globe. No tribulation that a believer will face in this life can measure up to the horror of the Tribulation of the last days. And, as horrific as the suffering of believers has been—and may yet be—what’s coming to the unsaved world is going to be much *worse* (see our Lord’s words in Matthew 24:21).

And so, when our Lord speaks of a Tribulation greater than any person has ever experienced, we know that such a time will be terrible indeed—but even *that* will be nothing compared to the eternal suffering that will follow. In view of such suffering to come, how can we not have compassion for the lost? How can we not do everything possible to bring the Good News to every unsaved man, woman, and child?

Until our Lord returns and delivers us from the tribulations of this life, may God give us a fearlessness, a sense of purpose and power similar to that which the Spirit gave Peter and John. After having been imprisoned, and beaten for preaching the Gospel they, “. . . *departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the [Messiah]*” (Acts 5:41-42).



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Weathering the Storm

Concerned about facing increased tribulation? Here are suggestions to help you weather the coming storm:

Know and Memorize Scriptures: In the battle of good versus evil, the devil will always try to misrepresent and undermine the truth. His attacks are relentless. United States Treasury agents learn to recognize counterfeit money by studying real currency. In similar manner, we can recognize deception and error by being anchored in the truth. With God's word hidden in our hearts, the Spirit will not only

gentleness and respect. Think through common objections ahead of time, that the matter may be more readily settled in your own heart. God's spirit will supply the words you need (see Matthew 10:19-20). And remember, God can turn a man's enemy into his friend, as well as into a brother in the faith. Who would have thought Saul would become Paul?



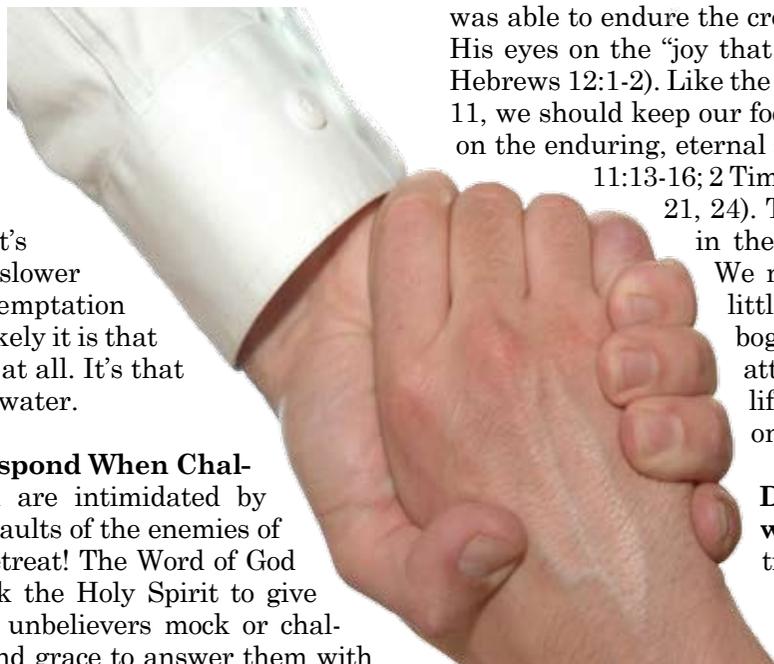
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Jesus was able to endure the cross and shame by keeping His eyes on the “joy that was set before Him.”

keep us from sin and error, but will embolden our witness. In some countries, having a Bible is illegal, but no one can ever take from you what has been memorized and written upon your heart.

Build Your Spiritual Muscles Now: How's your spiritual life currently? Are you walking according to God's word, or have you become comfortable with “small sins?” Do you look more and more like Jesus, or more and more like the world? Develop your spiritual muscles now by seeking the Lord's grace to forsake sin, and live in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we strip ourselves of that which weighs us down, we will be better prepared to face the difficult challenges ahead. It's been said, that the slower we are to resist temptation and evil, the less likely it is that we will ever resist at all. It's that frog in the boiling water.

Know How to Respond When Challenged: We often are intimidated by the unexpected assaults of the enemies of Jesus. But don't retreat! The Word of God is our weapon. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom when unbelievers mock or challenge your faith, and grace to answer them with

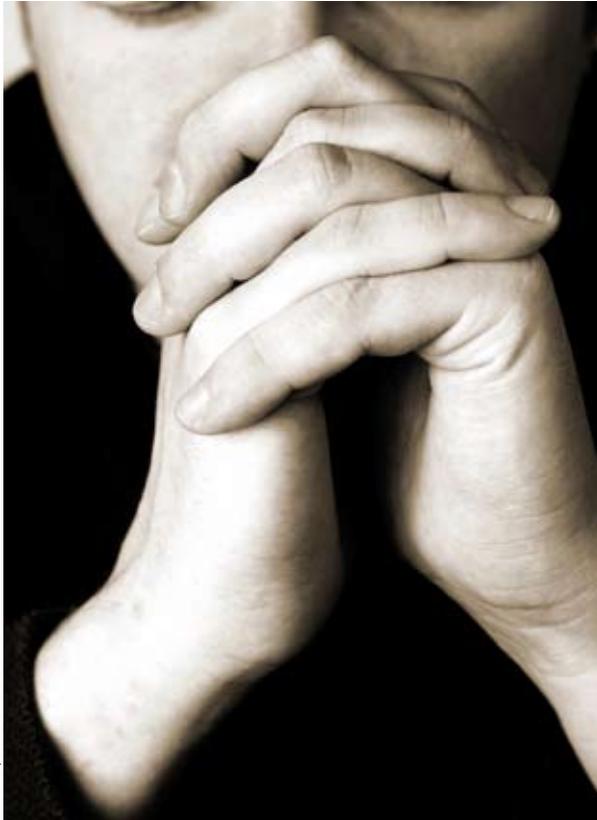


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Let Your Voice Be Heard: When the opportunity presents itself, let your voice be heard on moral issues confronting our society, and take a stand for righteousness. This is one of the reasons the Church remains in this world—we are called to be salt and light, so that the goodness of our lives may cause others to see God and glorify Him (see Matthew 5:13-16). Don't become disheartened by opposition—expect it. “*For consider Him [Jesus] who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin*” (Heb. 12:3-4).

Keep Your Focus on Things Eternal: Although we are commanded to be salt and light in this world, we are also urged to keep our eye on things eternal. We are to avoid getting weighed down and entangled by the affairs of this life. Scripture tells us that Jesus was able to endure the cross and shame by keeping His eyes on the “joy that was set before Him” (see Hebrews 12:1-2). Like the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, we should keep our focus, not on this world, but on the enduring, eternal city to come (see Hebrews 11:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:1-12; Matthew 6:19-21, 24). This life is relatively short in the grand scheme of things. We need to hold everything a little more loosely, and not get bogged down with either the attractions or setbacks of this life. We are to keep our eyes on the prize!

Develop Stronger Bonds with Other Believers: As times become more difficult, believers will need each other's encouragement and support even more.



Consider Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—young Jewish men who together walked fearlessly into the fiery furnace, convinced that God could deliver them—but willing to die if He didn't. *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”* (Heb. 10:24-25; see also, Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Pray for our Leaders and Lawmakers: God commands us to pray for those in authority over us, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness (see 1 Timothy 2:1-3). God's spirit is not limited by the size of someone's voice mail, email box, or time. We can communicate with our leaders on the deepest level by praying for them, and praying for their decisions. Despite what many men think, it is not they, but God who rules over the affairs of men. Consider Nebuchadnezzar, that great and powerful ruler of ancient Babylon. When God was finished with him, Nebuchadnezzar could do nothing but humbly confess that the Most High alone rules over the affairs of men (see Daniel 4).

Let God Be Glorified Through Tribulations: “If none of God's saints were poor and tried, we should not know half so well the consolations of divine grace.” – Spurgeon.

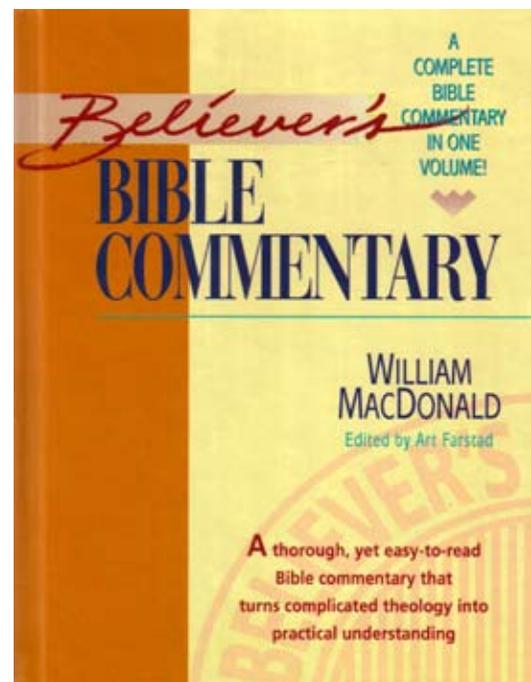
Renowned 19th-century British preacher Charles Spurgeon also had this to say on the subject of a Christian's tribulations: “He who would glorify his

Do you look more like Jesus or more like the world? Develop your spiritual muscles now by seeking the Lord's grace to forsake sin, and live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God must set his account upon meeting with many trials. No man can be illustrious before the Lord unless his conflicts be many. If then, yours be a much-tried path, rejoice in it, because you will better show forth the all-sufficient grace of God. As for His failing you, never dream of it—hate the thought. The God who has been sufficient until now, should be trusted to the end.”

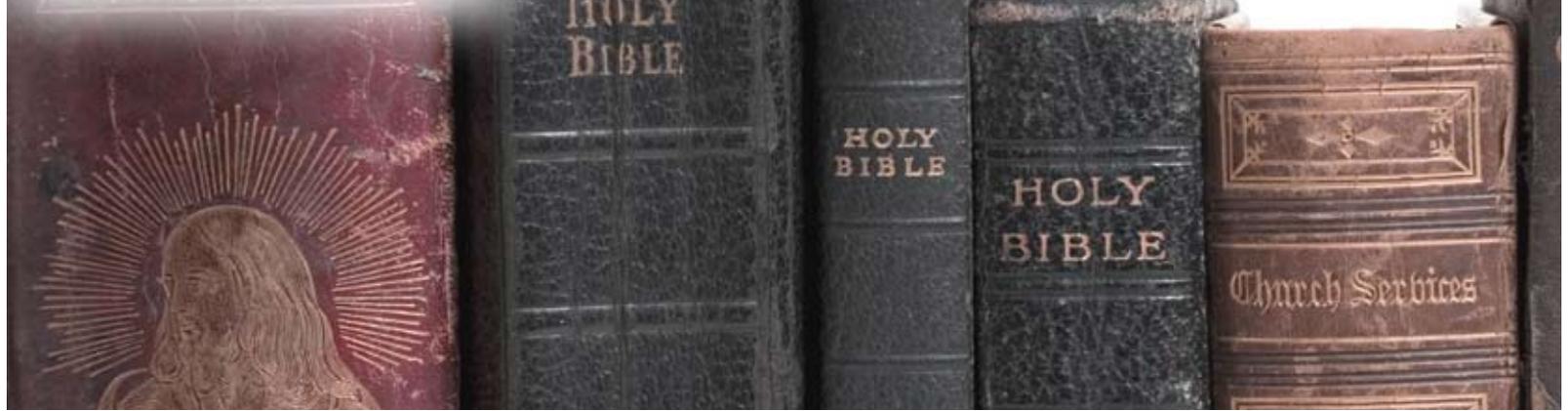
The purpose of the *Believer's Bible Commentary* “is to give the average Christian reader a basic knowledge of what the Holy Bible is all about . . . to stimulate such a love and taste for the Bible that the believer will want to delve more deeply into their inexhaustible treasures.”

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Bible Questions AND Answers

By DR. GARY HEDRICK



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QUESTION: *Our Bible class at church has been studying prophecy. We're trying to determine, as closely as possible without setting exact dates, when we might expect the Millennium to begin. Our calculations began with the Jewish calendar because it reckons time from the Creation of Adam and Eve. But someone pointed out that the current Jewish calendar is 200 years off due to a "lost" period between Ezra and Nehemiah when records were not kept—a sort of Jewish "Dark Ages." So we need a little guidance. Should we subtract 200 years from the current Jewish year to make the calendar more accurate?*

ANSWER: Actually, the figure that has been suggested is 250 years—not 200 years—and you would add (not subtract) 250 years if you were compensating for 250 "lost" years. However, most Jewish scholars agree that the period of time in question is more like 54 years rather than 250 years. Here is what the editorial staff of *Encyclopaedia Judaica* says ("Chronology, Traditional Jewish Chronography"):

The earliest Jewish chronological works that counted the years from the Creation have not survived. Of the work by the Alexandrian Jew Demetrius (third century B.C.E.), which deduced Jewish historical dates from the Bible, only a few fragments are extant. In the Book of Jubilees, events from the Creation to the Exodus are dated by the cycles of jubilee and sabbatical years, i.e., cycles of 49 and seven years. Scholars differ as to the date and origin of Jubilees. . . . The Era of the Creation in this work is probably only hypothetical.

The earliest and most important of all the Jewish chronological works extant is the *Seder Olam*, which, according to talmudic tradition, was compiled by Yosef Halafta in the second century CE. The author, whose date is unknown, was possibly the first to use the rabbinic "Era of the Creation." His chronology extends from the Creation to the period of Bar Kokhba, i.e., to the days of the Roman emperor Hadrian; but the period from Nehemiah to Bar Kokhba (i.e., from Artaxerxes to Hadrian) is compressed into one single chapter. The Persian phase shrinks to only 54 years (the variant reckoning of 250 years is corrupt, see *Seder Olam*).

However, even making an adjustment of 54 years will not provide a realistic benchmark for the dating of prophetic events. There have been many adjustments in the Jewish calendar over the years, including the insertion of an intercalary month every few years to ensure the feasts always take place at the same time every year. (Imagine celebrating *Hanukkah* in the summertime, or Passover in the Fall!)

Historically, you're not alone in your curiosity about when the Kingdom will arrive. The Lord himself mentioned it in the Disciples' Prayer ("Your kingdom come" see Matthew 6:10). There were many eschatological theories among the ancient rabbis, and they often contradicted each other. One view was that the world will exist for 6,000 years—2,000 years of desolation, 2,000 years of Torah, and 2,000 years of the messianic age (see Sanhedrin 97a—b; Avodah Zarah 9a). If this is true, then we would be in

the messianic age right now, so the rabbis have a variety of explanations as to why we're not. Then the Talmud says, "And the Holy One, Blessed Be He, will renew his world only after 7,000 years" (Sanhedrin 97b).

This rabbinic framework for prophecy is remarkably similar to what the New Testament teaches. The NT explains that the messianic era (or what many of us know as the Kingdom Age, or Millennium) will last for 1,000 (rather than 2,000) years (see Revelation 20:6-7). So there will be 6,000 years of human history followed by the Messiah's intervention at His Second Coming and His institution of the Messianic Kingdom for an additional 1,000 years. These 7,000 years will be followed by the Eternal State, or what the NT describes as the "New Heaven and New Earth" (see Revelation 21:1). Evidently, it will be a rearrangement (or to use the rabbis' term, a "renewal") of the created universe down to the molecular level (see 2 Peter 3:10-12). Everything will be transformed.

We have good reason to believe that we may, indeed, be the terminal generation. The prophetic signs and trends enumerated in the Bible, as well as the ebb and flow of history itself, certainly support such a conclusion. Nonetheless, we do not know precisely when the Lord will return and the Millennium will begin. All we can say for certain is that it will happen.

I've always thought it's interesting that when the disciples asked the Lord if He

continued on page 16

was going to set up the Kingdom in the first century, He told them not to worry about it because the timing of future prophetic events belongs only to God (see Acts 1:7). In the very next verse, He admonished them to get busy evangelizing the world (see Acts 1:8)! It's like He was saying our time and energy should be focused on reaching people with the Good News of the Messiah rather than on trying to calculate when certain prophetic events will occur. Leave the timing to God—we have work to do!

QUESTION: *I heard a preacher say at a revival meeting that anyone who rejects Jesus in this dispensation will not be able to receive Him during the Tribulation Period. Is this true?*

ANSWER: It depends on what he means by the term “reject.” If he is referring to someone who hears and understands the Gospel, and then willfully and deliberately rejects the offer of salvation, then yes, I would say he's making a valid point. I don't think the Rapture, or even the events of the seven-year Tribulation will convince someone who is so hardened against the Gospel that they would willfully turn away from the love and grace of God.

I'm afraid that we often underestimate the power of persistent unbelief. One of the most remarkable verses in the entire Bible is Matthew 28:17: “*When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.*” This scene took place just before the Lord's Ascension back to Heaven before a group of onlookers in the very presence of the resurrected Messiah—but Matthew says that some of them were still skeptical. How is this possible? The evidence was right there in front of them—they could see Him with their own eyes; yet these skeptics refused to believe in Him. Most of us would say that this defies all reason and rationality. But it shows us a very simple truth: namely, if someone doesn't want to believe in the Lord Jesus, there's no amount of evidence or argumentation that will change that person's mind. It's like that old saying: “A person convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”

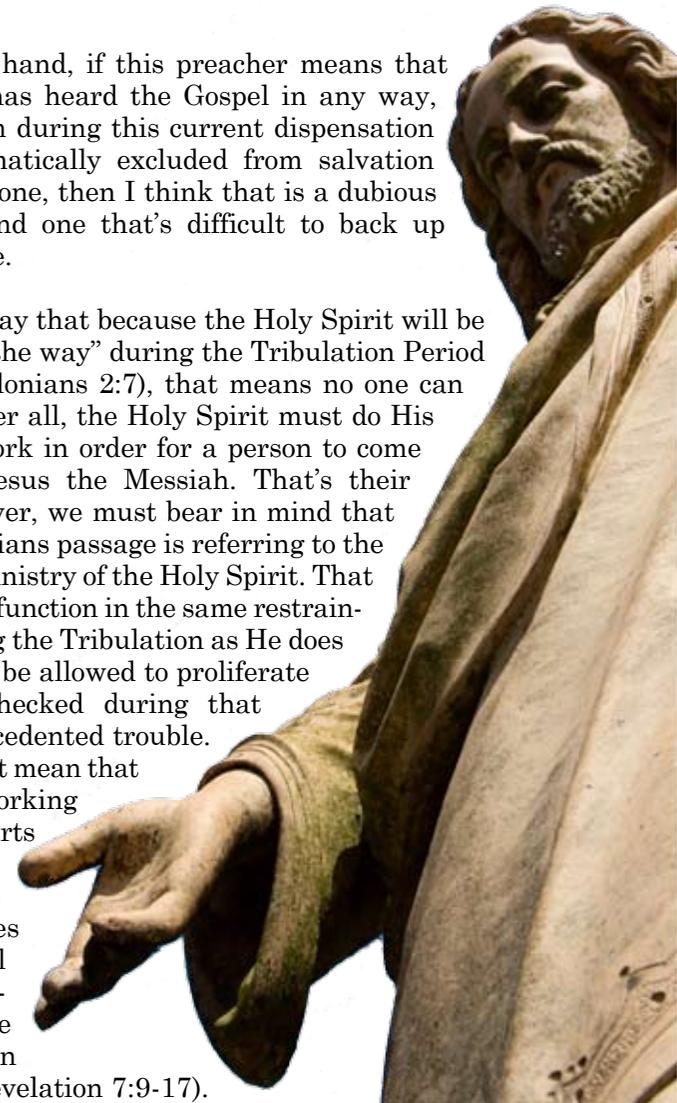
So I'm inclined to agree with this preacher's general premise. If someone willfully and stubbornly rejects the Gospel before the Rapture, it's doubtful that he would ever be convinced otherwise afterward.

On the other hand, if this preacher means that anyone who has heard the Gospel in any way, shape, or form during this current dispensation will be automatically excluded from salvation after we are gone, then I think that is a dubious conclusion—and one that's difficult to back up with Scripture.

Some people say that because the Holy Spirit will be “taken out of the way” during the Tribulation Period (see 2 Thessalonians 2:7), that means no one can be saved—after all, the Holy Spirit must do His quickening work in order for a person to come to faith in Jesus the Messiah. That's their theory. However, we must bear in mind that the Thessalonians passage is referring to the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is, He will not function in the same restraining role during the Tribulation as He does now. Evil will be allowed to proliferate virtually unchecked during that time of unprecedented trouble. But this cannot mean that He won't be working in people's hearts at all because the Bible says that multitudes of people will become believers during the Tribulation Period (see Revelation 7:9-17).

But again, the point remains that anyone who presumes upon God's grace could be treading on very dangerous ground.

Some people say, “That Jesus stuff is fine; but it's not for me. Maybe I'll change my mind someday, but not now.” These folks need to understand that it is dangerous to harden one's heart and turn away the Holy Spirit. When we hear and understand the Gospel, the time to respond is now, not later. The writer of Hebrews warns that today—not tomorrow, the next day, or the day after that—is the day of salvation: “. . . *Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts*” (Heb. 4:7).



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IN THIS ISSUE

A Glorious Future
by Gideon Levytam
Page 1

Fruit from the Harvest
by Violette Berger
Page 9

**Bible Questions
and Answers**
by Dr. Gary Hedrick
Page 15

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