

4. *What is the eschatological perspective regarding the Promised Land? When will the full recovery of the Land take place? What stages toward that will occur, if any?*

It has been established through previous papers and discussion that because of passages such as Genesis 12:6-7 and 13:17, the Land of Canaan was to be entrusted to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their national homeland and the place where God would establish His dwelling on earth. Question 4 focuses on the *future* of the Promised Land. We will approach this question in the following manner:

- I. Our Method of Interpretation
- II. Biblical Evidence for the Future of the Promised Land
- III. A Summary

I. Our Method of Interpretation

First and foremost, before we set forth biblical data on the subject of the eschatology of the Land, we need to clarify the method we use in interpreting such data. Our hermeneutics on the subject will make a huge difference in the conclusions we draw from the biblical information.

To be succinct, we are employing a literal method to interpret the eschatological passages about the Land of Israel. In Jewish terms, we are using the *p'shat* level of interpretation. We think that there is sound biblical reason to do so. Our evidence is drawn largely from the way in which the Bible itself seems to interpret prophecy. Let us look at two examples to see this phenomenon.

First, in Genesis 15:13-16, God told Abraham:

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.

There are several pieces to this prophecy:

A. Strangers in Exile

God said that the descendants of Abraham would be "strangers in a land that is not theirs." In Exodus 22:21 (22:20 in Hebrew), after the Exodus, God described the Israelites whom He had just redeemed from Egyptian slavery as "strangers" living in a land that was not theirs (Egypt) The Torah employs the same Hebrew term for "stranger" that was used in Genesis 15:13 (*ger*, גֵּר).

B. Oppression

Secondly, God informed Abraham "they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." This indicates that a good portion of that predicted exile would be spent in oppression and enslavement for four hundred years. The fulfilment of this prophecy is in Exodus 12:40-41, where we read:

Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.

The fulfilment in Exodus says that Israel remained in Egypt 430 years. The time difference between the prophecy in Genesis and the fulfilment in Exodus (400 years in Genesis 15 as opposed to 430 years in Exodus) is probably due to the fact that the exile was longer than the oppression. Once again, it is quite a literal fulfilment.

C. Judgment and Supply

Next, God said that although Israel would serve this foreign people, nevertheless, when Israel would be brought out, "I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions." The judgment came in several ways, among which were the plagues. Then, when Israel was brought out from Egypt, Exodus 12:35-36 says,

Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the Lord had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Thus, in accordance with God's word to Abraham in Genesis 15, Israel literally came out of Egypt "with many possessions."

D. The Return to Canaan

Finally, Israel was to "return here," meaning, to the Land of Canaan — which they did. Moreover, the timing of their return was to be when "the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." The term "Amorite" is sometimes used as a collective noun for all of the people groups that lived in the ancient Land of Canaan. Most scholars of the ancient Near East agree that their worship of Baal with all of its rituals, made them into one of the most wicked of all of the peoples of the ancient Near East. When Israel began to take possession of the Promised Land for their inheritance, one of the things that God was doing was using Israel as a tool of judgement against these idolaters.

Thus, we can see that the multi-faceted prophecy in Genesis 15 to Abraham was fulfilled in a most literal fashion.

Let us explore another example. In Isaiah 9:1-6 (8:23-9:5 in Hebrew) the Lord promised:

But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.

How was this promise fulfilled? Was it fulfilled literally or allegorically? Let us look at its fulfilment as Matthew 4:12-17 records it.

A. Walking in Darkness

Note, first, according to Matthew 4:12, the early part of Yeshua's ministry was spent in the Galilee. In fact, Matthew 4:23 records Yeshua "was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." What is significant about this? Galilee was one of the early strongholds of idolatry in ancient Israel. Indeed, by the time of Yeshua the people of Galilee had been walking in deep darkness for hundreds of years! Consequently, the Galilee was the part of the Land that was hit first with the disciplinary hand of God's judgment, the onslaught of the ancient Assyrians. Hence, the Galileans, indeed, were part of the "people who were walking in darkness" and who were sitting in the land and shadow of death.

B. "The light will shine on them."

In contrast to the deep darkness that would cover the Land, Isaiah predicted that a great light would shine on them. At this point, admittedly, the prophecy takes on somewhat of a spiritual or figurative sense. However, that is true both for the actual prophecy and, consequently, for its fulfilment. In other words, Isaiah predicted that the same people who walked in darkness would see a great light. We are to understand from both Isaiah and Matthew that there were no streetlights and the people did not need torches all of the time. No, literal physical light is not in view here. The literalness of the prophecy is that whatever Isaiah predicted would be fulfilled in the exact same way. The darkness and light refer to spiritual darkness and light. Matthew's fulfilment indicates the same thing.

C. The Galilee

Thirdly, Isaiah predicts that this spiritual light would shine particularly in the Galilee. Matthew indicates that because of Yeshua's ministry the fulfilment is exactly literally as Isaiah promised. Yeshua began His earthly ministry in the Galilee. Because of that, they were

among the first in Israel to see "a great light" and it was among the Galileans that "a light dawned."

D. Zebulun, Naphtali, and the Way of the Sea

How do we know that Isaiah was referring to the Galilee? For one thing both he and Matthew specifically tell us so. However, Isaiah provides some important details. He says that it would be the people of the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali who would experience such great light. The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali are right in the heart of the Galilee. In fact, most biblical geographers place Yeshua's two homes in the Galilee in these tribal locations: Nazareth is in Zebulun and Capernaum is in Naphtali.

Moreover, Isaiah informs us that the light will come "by the way of the Sea." In Hebrew this expression is *derech haYam* (דרך הים). This term is clearly a reference to the well-known ancient international coastal highway which connected Egypt and points south with Turkey, Mesopotamia, and points north and east. The Romans called it the *Via Maris*. This Latin term means exactly the same as the ancient Hebrew name, *Derek haYam*: The Way of the Sea. It so happens that Yeshua's centre of ministry in the Galilee, Capernaum, was located right on the important ancient trade route.

Thus, we can easily observe that Isaiah's prophecy about the location of and nature of the Messiah's ministry was interpreted quite literally by Matthew.

The point we are attempting to establish is that biblical prophecy, for the most part, is to be interpreted in a literal manner, not allegorically. Thus, when the Bible speaks about the future of Israel, we have very good reasons to understand it literally, unless the text of the Bible clearly tells us not to do so. When the Scriptures discuss the future of the Land of Israel, we do not have licence to interpret such references to apply in a spiritual way to The Church. Since we are utilizing a literal method of interpretation, then what do the Scriptures teach about the future of the Promised Land?

II. Biblical Evidence for the Future of the Promised Land

There are a number of future prophecies concerning the Promised Land. The difficulty, then, is not in locating these prophecies, but, rather, in attempting to ascertain *when* would they be fulfilled? In other words, do the prophecies apply to the time of Israel's return from the Babylonian exile, to our present moment, or to some date yet in our future? The answer to this question can only be determined by the context and content of each specific prophecy.

Since there is a vast amount of material to study, we will only examine those passages that, in our opinion, clearly speak of the future from our time. Moreover because of the abundance of such material, we will limit our example to just a few representative ones.

A. Deuteronomy 30:1-10

This section was written by Moshe when the children of Israel were on the east bank of the Jordan River, on the plains of Moav, about to cross over and to begin their conquest of the Land. It was recorded in approximately 1405-1406 BCE.

These words follow the section of Deuteronomy often referred to as "Blessings" and "Curses," where God was informing Israel of the consequences for covenant faithfulness and covenant unfaithfulness. To summarize that important section, the Holy One said that if Israel would be faithful to the Covenant, God would bless them by providing food, water, safety, and security in their Land. If they become unfaithful God warned them that He would discipline them. At first, the discipline would come rather mildly. However, if unfaithfulness continued, the problems for Israel would become more severe until, finally, God would take them from the Land.

It is at this point where many thinkers make a huge mistake. They have asserted that Israel's sin became so great that God eventually broke covenant with them, as they broke covenant with Him. These theologians say that part of God's breaking covenant with Israel involved Israel forfeiting any present or future rights to the Land of Promise. However, the very fact that the Jewish people have encountered very serious troubles over the course of history is itself evidence that the covenant is still in effect. These difficulties are part of God's covenant promise to them.

At first glance, it appears that these thinkers might be correct. Even a brief glance at Israel's history, both biblical and extra-biblical history reveals that, indeed, if there is one thing that has characterized the chosen people of God it is covenant unfaithfulness. As a result, for about 2,700 years, the descendants of Jacob have been living in varying degrees of exile.

However, this is where the revelation of Deuteronomy 30 comes in. In this chapter, God spoke to Moses by using a form of the verb *lashuv* (לשוב) at least seven times in these 10 verses. *Lashuv* can be translated "repent," "return," or "restore," depending on the context. Accordingly, these verses record three or four things that God promises to restore to Israel: their relationship with God, their Land, and their relationship to the Covenant. We will only examine the first two of these restorations.

1. A Return to their Own Minds! (30:1)

The first restoration, may, at first, seem rather strange. We read in 30:1 in Hebrew: *v'chshevota el-lvavekha* (וְהִשְׁבֵּתָ אֶל-לְבָבְךָ). This expression translates literally as, “an he restores you to your minds.” It seems that all of Israel’s experiences would drive them to be a people who, to a great extent, would not be themselves as God intended them to be. That is, in reality, what happens to people who are unfaithful to God. Here in this passage of restoration, the first thing God promises is that as a result of thinking about their experience3s, God would restore this people to their right minds as a nation.

2. A Return to God (30:1-3)

Secondly, in 30:1-3, God promised that He would bring Israel back to Himself. This return would not be a return to Jewish religious orthodoxy, as we see happening in great numbers today among the Jewish people. Rather, verses 3 and 6 specifically indicate that this spiritual revival would involve the people experiencing a new birth.

In verse 3, the Lord says that He will again have “compassion” on them. The word translated “have compassion” is from a Hebrew root related to the word for :womb.” Moreover, it is a verb; an action is being expressed. What action? It seems from the language employed here that some day God would cause them to be “re-enwomed,” to coin an expression! That is language that speaks of a new birth! In the Torah, when a male child is born, he is instructed to be circumcised on the eighth day. That is exactly what we find in this passage. We read in 30:6 that after they will experience a new birth, they will be circumcised. This is obviously "new creation" language. According to Colossians 2:10-12, only those who believe in Yeshua would be spiritually circumcised. Thus, the predicted spiritual revival in Deuteronomy 30:1-2 involved the people of Israel coming back to God through faith in His Anointed One, Yeshua.

Has this happened yet? Yes and No. Yes, in the sense that there, indeed, have been a few periods of significant true revival in Israel's history. In addition, in every generation there is also a remnant of faith. Yet, Deuteronomy 30 seems to be predicting a major all-encompassing revival, which does not appear to have happened yet. However, this first return is not really the focus or this paper. It is the second prediction that concerns us at this time.

3. A Return to the Land (30:3-5)

Deuteronomy 30:3-5 says,

...then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The Lord your

God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

Note, first, that according to this promise, the children of Israel would be scattered by God. He would be the One who would send Israel out of the land. However, also note that this would not be a permanent condition. The God who scattered them is the same God who would return them from that diaspora.

Secondly, the passage indicates that this exile would not merely be a local, Mesopotamian or Near Eastern exile. Rather, it indicates that the conditions would arise that they might be scattered to "the ends of the earth." After this, God would bring them back. One might argue that this refers to the Babylonian exile and return. However, that exile was too localized to qualify for an "ends of the earth" exile. Moreover, history indicates that, in reality, the majority of Israelites did not return from Babylon. Indeed, for over 1000 years the Babylonian Jewish community was strong and healthy and eventually overshadowed the Israel ("Palestinian") Jewish community in importance, scholarship, and influence.

Thirdly, Moshe is promising that when God brings Israel back, it would be to the "land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it..." When the returnees arrived back to the Land following the Babylonian exile (c.a. 515 BCE and onward), they *did* have a great measure of freedom, but, in reality, they did not totally possess the Land. Instead, they were subjects of the Persian King and paid tribute to him. Following that, the Greeks arrived and the Israelites served them and their successors, the Selucids and Ptolemeys. For a brief period, from about 164 BCE to 63 BCE, Israel was a free and independent state under the Hashmonean rule. However, that came to an abrupt end when Pompeii and the Romans arrived. The Romans were the dominators of Israel for several centuries. When Rome weakened and fell, it was the Byzantines that ruled. Following that in successive order we have: the Muslims, the Crusaders, Mamelukes, the Turks, and finally, the British.

Thus, while there has always been a continuing Israelite presence in the Land since they first arrived thousands of years ago, following the Babylonian exile, one would be very hard pressed to say that Israel "possessed" the Land — until 1948. However, even now, the modern state of Israel firmly possesses only a fraction of the amount of territory their forefathers possessed. This is because of the conflict concerning the very heartland of Israel itself, Judea and Samaria. Moreover, Israel certainly does not possess the entire Land that God promised to their forefathers (see previous papers).

There is one more factor to consider before we state whether Deuteronomy 30:3-5 is fulfilled. We need to examine the population

figures of the Jewish people. As we write this essay, there are approximately 6,000,000 Jewish people living in the Land of Israel. That figure is quite miraculous when one considers the history of Jewish return over the past 100 years. Indeed, the descendants of Jacob could write volumes concerning the hardships they have faced both in leaving their former places of exile, along their journey to the Promised Land, and in maintaining life in the Land — especially surviving several wars with neighbouring nations who have outnumbered them. However, as great as the number 6,000,000 is, the reality is that presently more Jewish people still live outside of the Land than in the Land.

Now, we might ask the question: is Deuteronomy 30:3-5 and the promised return to the Land fulfilled today with the modern state of Israel in existence? The answer is both "yes" and "no." We can say, "yes" because today there is a free and independent Jewish state. In addition, as Deuteronomy 30:9 states, "Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground... ." A good argument can be made to say this modern Israel is, indeed, prospering — perhaps even more than their forefathers prospered.

Nevertheless, we would still have to answer our question with a resounding "no!" The thrust of this magnificently prophetic passage is that we still await the glorious fulfilments of these promises when all of the restoration would be permanent. That will happen when all, if not the vast majority, of the children of Israel, return in security and blessing to the Promised Land.

B. Isaiah

There are several important prophetic passages from the prophet Isaiah that we need to examine. Let us explore only two of them.

1. Isaiah 11:10-16

It is unmistakable from verses 1-10 that this passage is a Messianic prophecy. It is speaking of a glorious future when the Messiah will be on earth, ruling with firmness, wisdom, and love and creating a world with no external danger.

Immediately following those predictions we read about two additional major events that will happen to the people of the world. First, verse 10 tells us, "Then, in that day the nations will seek to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious." Messiah will come, who according to Isaiah 2:1-4 and Zechariah 14, will be reigning from a literal Jerusalem.

Secondly, according to verse 11, Messiah will also call the descendants of Jacob to Him. Notice how the text words this event:

"Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Patros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamat, and from the islands of the sea." There are several points here that have direct bearing on the topic of this essay.

First, the prophecy indicates that in the days of Messiah's glorious reign, there will still be a remnant of the children of Israel scattered among the nations. It says that they will be in such places as "Assyria, Egypt, Patros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamat, and from the islands of the sea." This tells us that not only will the children of Israel survive millennia of exile, but that, in fact, the exile will continue to endure until the Messiah returns. Isaiah speaks of a "remnant" that will return. This leaves room for the idea that perhaps some will have already returned to the Land.

Secondly, this prophecy indicates that the remnant will return to The Land of Promise. We read in verse 12: "And [He will] assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." What can the text mean other than the banished ones are those who would be banished from the Land? In addition, what else can the text mean when we are told that the ones who would be gathered would be dispersed from the Land and that they would, therefore, be gathered back to the Land? If we understand such words as "Assyria, Egypt, Patros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamat, and from the islands of the sea" in a literal way then we can only conclude that it is back to a literal land that these people would be gathered.

Thirdly, this re-gathering would be in the future of both Isaiah's day and ours. It is not the return from Babylonian exile that is in view. This is indicated by the words "a second time" in 11:11. The first return would most certainly be considered the return from Babylonian exile, signified by the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple. The second return could only be in reference to a future re-gathering of all of the exiles, complete with securing the city of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. The people of Israel cannot be considered to be at home unless they have a secure capital to govern them and a secure Temple with God's presence among them. Both of these will be in the future, but they *will* happen!

Fourthly, the Holy One will cause tumultuous events to occur to facilitate this return, as recorded in 11:13-16:

- a. Israel will be united. (v. 13)
- b. A united Israel will defeat their ancient enemies (the descendants of them), the Philistines, the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Egyptians. (v. 14-15)

c. God will create supernatural events to occur that will enable His remnant to return. (v. 15-16)

Finally, the passage indicates that this future permanent return to the Land by the people of Israel will be an accomplishment solely of the Lord. We are told that Messiah will be the rallying point. In verses 10-12 Isaiah says that Messiah will "stand as a signal for the peoples" and "He will lift up a standard for the nations." The words translated "signal" and "standard" are the same Hebrew term: *nes* (נֵס). Yeshua will emerge as an unmistakable signal personally standing up as a great signpost "to direct refugees to Zion."¹

Moreover, the text indicates that it will be the Lord who "will again recover" the exiles, and Who will lift up a standard" for the peoples, and Who will utterly destroy" the hindrance to Israel's return (11:11-12, 15).

Thus, Isaiah 11 is a major prophetic passage that speaks of a literal, future, and permanent return of the children of Israel to the Land of Israel.

2. Isaiah 60

This glorious prophetic passage mentions several points in reference to the future permanent promised return of Israel to the Land of Promise, specifically to Jerusalem. So magnificent are the promises that one might be tempted to understand the entire passage in a spiritual or allegorical way, thinking, perhaps, that these things cannot possibly be fulfilled in a literal way. However, the specific prophetic details do not permit such an understanding. What is predicted?

- a. 60:1-2 — The glory of the Lord will shine upon the people of Israel, calling their attention.
- b. 60:3 — Nations will also be attracted that that Light of the Lord.
- c. 60:4-5 — The remnant of the Israelites, especially their children will be gathered.
- d. 60:5-6 — Israel will receive the wealth of the nations.
- e. 60:7 — The nations will bring sacrifices to the Temple.
- f. 60:10 — Foreigners will help to rebuild their cities ("walls").
- g. 60:12 — Nations that will not serve Israel "will be utterly ruined."
- h. 60:15 — "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated

¹ *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (abridged), Based on A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907. Digitized and abridged as a part of the Princeton Theological Seminary Hebrew Lexicon Project under the direction of Dr. J. M. Roberts. Used by permission. Electronic text corrected, formatted, and hypertexted by OakTree Software, Inc. This electronic adaptation ©2001 OakTree Software, Inc. Version 3.0.

With no one passing through,
I will make you an everlasting pride,
A joy from generation to generation."

- i. 60:18 — "Violence will not be heard again in your land,
Nor devastation or destruction within your borders;
But you will call your walls salvation, and your gates
praise."
- j. 60:21 — "Then all your people *will be* righteous;
They will possess the land forever..."

What do we have here that is pertinent to our discussion? Among a host of important items, we have a prophecy that informs us of a glorious future for the people of Israel. They will be brought back, even by ship, to a restored Jerusalem — a Jerusalem whose walls have been restored by the nations of the world. Moreover, though once forsaken, the Land (specifically Jerusalem) would be a source of pride for its inhabitants "from generation to generation." Finally, the returned exiles would be made righteous by the Lord and "possess the land forever."

This passage simply makes no sense to understand it on a spiritual level. It defies any allegorical sense. It only makes sense on a literal level.

C. Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of the Temple, the exile of the Israelites/Judeans to Babylon, and the return of that exile. However there are times when the language that he employs to describe the return from exile simply cannot be applied to merely the return from Babylon. Indeed, there are significant predictions of a, yet, future and permanent restoration of the children of Israel to the Land. Where are these passages?

1. Jeremiah 23:7-8

"Therefore behold, *the* days are coming," declares the Lord, "when they will no longer say, 'As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the Lord lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from *the* north land and from all the countries where I had driven them.' Then they will live on their own soil."

This passage says several things of interest to us. First, we are told that redeeming event will occur that will far overshadow the exodus from Egyptian slavery. The exodus from Egypt was one of Israel's most defining moments, witnessed by the frequency by which it is mentioned in the Scriptures, as well as the prominent place it occupies in the lives of Jewish people to this day.

Jeremiah says that one day another momentous exodus would occur when the "north" and "all the countries from which I have driven

them" will give up the dispersed exiles of Israel. There is no place in history where such an event ever took place. Such an exodus partially occurred when Israel became a state and received millions of incoming exiles. However, as we have previously discussed, most of the descendants of Jacob to this day live elsewhere besides in Israel. We still await the fulfilment of this prophecy.

Secondly, Jeremiah tells us that when this future exodus transpires, "They will live on their own soil." Moreover, according to Jeremiah 31:8, "A great company, they will return here." "Their own soil," can mean nothing other than the Promised Land. The "here" to which a great company will return, obviously means the place from which Jeremiah spoke — the land of Israel.

2. Jeremiah 31:8-12

Notice the language Jeremiah employs in this passage to describe this future return of Israel to the Land. We have already noted how a great company will come back to their land. Then, Jeremiah says that they would come back with great emotion (v. 9). In addition, God would physically make their return possible by removing any possible obstacle (v. 9). Why would God do so? Because, God says, "I am a father to Israel." This hardly speaks of replacement or abandonment! Next, the Scripture says, among other great events and emotions involved with those events, "They will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion" (Jeremiah 31:12). The only reasonable way to understand these predictions is to see them on a literal level.

Finally, the passage is sealed with the tone of permanency when Jeremiah says, "And they will never languish again."

D. Ezekiel 36

This is a major passage describing the future of the land and people of Israel. It is too large for a detailed exposition of it. We shall merely summarize the main points that concern this essay.

First, Ezekiel is describing a time when the Land of Israel would be desecrated by the nations of the world. One might say that this is describing the time of the exile to Babylon. However, the language of the text does not permit such a limited interpretation, especially as it describes what God would do to rescue Israel and her land.

Secondly, Ezekiel speaks of a return of the people of Israel to take possession of their Land of inheritance. For example, Ezekiel 36:12 says, "Yes, I will cause men — My people Israel — to walk on you [the Land of Israel] and possess you, so that you will become their inheritance and never again bereave them of children. In addition, 36:13 indicates that the Land will become extremely productive: "I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations" (Ezekiel 36:30).

Beyond these things, however, Ezekiel specifically predicts that God would cleanse Israel of their sin, the iniquity that caused their dispersion, and He will "cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt" (36:33). Moreover, "The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by" (v. 34). Why would this be so? It is because "I {the Lord} will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land" (Ezekiel 36:24).

It is becoming quite evident that, if we apply a literal method of biblical interpretation, the evidence for a future return of the people of Israel to the land of Israel is overwhelming. We could cite many other passages with the same themes as those above. Let us conclude, however, with one passage from Acts 1:6-8

E. Acts 1:6-8

Shortly before Yeshua returned to His Father in heaven, He gathered His students to impart some final instructions to them and to field any questions they might have for Him.

We might ask ourselves, if we had this kind of meeting with our Messiah, what questions would we ask Him? The questions would reflect those things that are important to us. What did Yeshua's students ask Him? We are told in Acts 1:6 that they wanted to know, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

They were interested in three things. First, they wanted to know about the Kingdom. To which kingdom were they referring? Were they

talking about the Kingdom of God, a spiritual kingdom? On the other hand, were they referring to a literal physical kingdom that existed under David and Solomon? If it was a spiritual kingdom that captivated their interest, they would not have asked if it would be *restored* to Israel. This is because Israel never was that spiritual kingdom which God desired for them. Hence, it would have been inappropriate for the disciples to speak in terms of a *restoration* of such a spiritual kingdom. This is something they would most certainly have realized after having spent the best part of 3 years with their Rabbi, who taught much about the Kingdom of Heaven. Rather, it seems reasonable to suggest that the kingdom they had in mind was an earthly kingdom, complete with a king and a territory. This leads us to the second point.

They also spoke of a restoration. In verse 6, the word translated "restoring" is the Greek term *apokathistaneis*, ἀποκαθιστάνεις, from the word ἀποκαθίστημι. This verb usually means, "to change to an earlier good state or condition, to restore, re-establish" or "to return someone to a former place or relationship, to bring back, give back, to restore."² This speaks of something that once was, has gone away, and will be brought back. What in the historical experience of the people who were conversing with Yeshua can this be? The most reasonable answer would be to suggest that they were asking the Lord when the glorious kingdom of David and Solomon would come back to the people of Israel. Thus, these Jewish disciples wanted to know when their own people Israel would be restored to the kind of kingdom provided by David and Solomon. Included in that kingdom, of course, would be the expanded borders of the Land of Israel.

Finally, they were interested in the timing of that restoration. When would this return to the Davidic kingdom happen? It is here where we are provided with a most interesting answer from Yeshua. If only a spiritual kingdom were in view, this is where Yeshua would have voiced that. He could have said to them something like: "My students, don't you know by now that I am not going to restore a mere earthly kingdom to you or to your people? After all, the covenant between Me and them has been broken forever. I am not interested in earthly kingdoms. My kingdom is only a spiritual kingdom."

However, Yeshua said none of that. He did not rebuke them for their question or the implications and assumptions behind their question.

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This is a good indication that their national and territorial hopes would some day become realized. All Yeshua said to them is that the timing for the restoration of all of these things is up to God and is not to be communicated at this time to them. That is all. For, we read in 1:7, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority."

III. Summary

What can we say about these things? It seems that when we speak about matters concerning the future of the people and the land of Israel, it is critical that we are consistent to apply the literal method of biblical interpretation, unless the context indicates otherwise. We have seen that this is the usual manner by which Scripture interprets itself.

When we apply the correct hermeneutic to future prophecy, we see that there is overwhelming evidence from the Bible to indicate that there will be a future time on earth when the Messiah will be physically present among us, reigning from Jerusalem. From there He will call back the physical descendants of Israel to the land that God promised by covenant oath to their forefathers.

Until that time of the millennial kingdom, there might be periods when these prophecies might be partially fulfilled, such as our present day. However, these partial fulfillments are merely forerunners to the great and glorious restorations that God has planned for His chosen nation Israel.