

## Israel's Restoration And The Zeitgeist Of Zeal

Charles Whitaker

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Please, turn to Psalm 74. I have heard that a good conversationalist listens more than he talks, asks questions as often as he makes statements. And, one of those questions, asked of people we do not know particularly well, is that American colloquialism, “What do you do?” Inelegant as it is, it remains a good icebreaker. Well, just what does God do? What is His work?

**Psalm 74:12** (CJB) God has been my king from earliest times, acting to save throughout all the earth.

That is the way the *Complete Jewish Bible* puts it. The *New King James Version* says God is working salvation. God's ultimate aim is to bring people to *spiritual* salvation. That involves creating something *new*, a new creation, finally *changing* a person from corruptible to incorruptible, as the apostle Paul maintains at I Corinthians 15:52-53.

But, along the way to the new is the *rehabilitation*, the *restoration*, the *renewal*, of the old. God does that too. He restores and He repairs. The apostle Peter makes general reference to God's critical work of restoration at Acts 3:21, where he says that Christ remains in heaven “until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

God is deeply concerned about His restoration efforts. Those efforts have been a subject of prophecy from the beginning, perhaps because restoration of this or that, renewal every now and again, is absolutely essential, lest human nature corrupt civilization and the environment so much, so fast, as to make life unlivable long, long before the Father is ready to dispatch Christ to clean up the mess once and for all. An example is God's sending Elijah, in the person of John the Baptist, to “restore all things,” as Christ puts it at Matthew 17:11.

The concept of “interim fixes,” of restoration to keep things moving along, is not foreign to us. We maintain an old car, as an example, maybe for years, fixing it with duct tape and rubber bands, and paperclip, to ensure that it will get us to work long enough for us to save enough money to buy a new vehicle. So, in the beginning, God restored the earth; He changed chaos to creation, ending *tohu* and *bohu*. In doing so, He built a fantastic environment suitable for sustaining physical life, all this to facilitate His work of creating a spirit lifeform in His image, in His likeness. Our old car is a temporary one; we look forward to its replacement. Likewise, God's renovated creation is temporary, groaning in anticipation of a new one which will endure forever.

Let us look at God's prophesied work of regathering and restoring Israel in the years after Christ's return. Along the way, we shall see that God is a master delegator, sharing work responsibilities—and rewards—with others. We shall see, as well, how important the gospel is to the execution of God's plan. And finally, we shall see that, when God restores, He adds value. That is, He *adds* something to the restored object which was not there before. As when we restore an old house, installing a 200-amp electrical service, something that old place, built in, say, 1900, had never seen before, so Christ will add something new, and of great value, to the Israel He restores. First, some comments by way of definition.

By “regathering,” I mean God’s determined action to search out the lands of Israel’s enemies in order to find and to return scattered Israelites to the Land of Promise, not to the land of their exile, that is, to Canada, Australia, etc. The prophet Isaiah writes of this time:

**Isaiah 11:11** It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt. .

..

**Isaiah 11:16** There will be a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt.

Of this regathering, the prophet Jeremiah writes,

**Jeremiah 16:14-15** “Therefore behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that it shall no more be said, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers.

God clearly spells out the boundaries of that land in his conversation with Abram at Genesis 15:18: “[F]rom the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.”

By “restoring” or the noun “restoration,” I mean the actions God takes to bring the people of Israel back into His favor. Restoration includes, but is not limited to, returning Israel to be the head of the world’s nations. At one level, restoration is a single act, performed on the Day of Atonement when God forgives Israel’s sin. But it is also a *process* of gradually increasing Israel’s wealth and prestige among the nations. Of the single act of atonement, you may want to gloss Zechariah 3:9, where God asserts “I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” Of the longer-term process of restoration, God, mentioning His goodness and His severity, speaks:

**Isaiah 60:10-11** The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have had mercy on you. Therefore your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings in procession.

It is important to remember that restoration *follows* punishment. I shall read from *New English Translation*’s paraphrase of Jeremiah 16:18, where the prophet quotes God as saying, “Before I restore them I will punish them in full for their sins and the wrongs they have done.” Hold on to that propositional phrase *in full*. I shall touch on it later.

In summation, we can look at regathering and restoration as the last two steps of the scattering-regathering-restoration process. While regathering links closely with restoration in time and in concept, strictly speaking, however, regathering and restoration are not synonymous.

These preliminaries finished, we can dig in. Please, turn to Jeremiah 30. This is the “Jacob’s trouble” chapter. God is speaking:

**Jeremiah 30:5-7** ‘We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with

his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.'

Though the term "Jacob's trouble" appears nowhere else in God's Word. We all recognize that references to a period of tribulation for Israel, in punishment for her sins, abound in both Testaments. Let us focus on the context of this passage:

**Jeremiah 30:3** 'For behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah,' says the Lord. 'And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.'

Absent from this passage is any explicit reference to the year of the Lord, the return of Christ, or the resurrection of the righteous. When *we* think of the time of Jacob's trouble, that is where *our* minds tend to focus, for we know that redemption is not far away for us who, as Paul puts it at Romans 8: 23, "have the first fruits of the Spirit." And, that way of thinking is all right. Of course, it is.

But, it is important to realize that God's focus is *different* here. He initiates His discussion of the time He calls Jacob's trouble by forthrightly asserting His plan—indeed, His promise—to regather and then to restore Israel, punishing gentile nations in the process. Notice a bit further down.

**Jeremiah 30:8-9** 'For it shall come to pass in that day,' says the Lord of hosts, 'that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.'

**Jeremiah 30:23-24** Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will consider it.

It is the latter days and hence it is also appropriate that we consider the time of Jacob's trouble in the context in which God sets it, that is, in the setting of His determined purpose to restore national Israel.

Before we leave Jeremiah 30, let us address the really relevant question: "What triggers this severe punishment from God?" In verse 15, God says He punishes Israel "Because of the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased." Let us pretend God keeps a sin-gauge near Him. You know, like a rain-gauge, but measuring the prevalence of sins—how fast they accumulate, the rate of sinning, we could say. (To keep the analogy going, we could say that God dumps it out once a year—on Atonement—and starts over again.) In America's past, the sin-gauge certainly accumulated some sins, but not a lot. For example, the Puritans who settled at Plymouth in 1620 were God-fearing in the extreme. Yet, their sins of Sabbath-breaking and eating unclean meats (and others, of course) certainly found their way into God's sin-gauge, did they not! Over the years, the rate of sinning accelerated. The gauge filled faster with each succeeding year.

But, we all recognize that, during the decade of the 1960s and beyond, the rate of accumulation *markedly* increased, the result of Americans' rethinking and redefinition of their concepts of gender, of marriage, and of family. Abortions increased, as did fornication, which is among the young today the norm rather than the exception. Standards of sexual responsibility vastly changed, and thievery

and prevarication have become wholesale. Murder and violence soon will be. As a result of *all* this, we can surmise that God's sin-gauge now fills up to the brim by April. The iniquities of Americans in aggregate are approaching the state of being *full*. They are increasing. It is the gauge's fast fill-up rate which impels God to punish Israel.

Along that line, please, turn to Leviticus 26. Here, God reveals that He corrects Israel for her sins repeatedly, attempting to reverse Israel's sin rate—trying to brake the acceleration of the incidence of sin—and I mean gross sin.

**Leviticus 26:15-16** If you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart.

**Leviticus 26:18-19** And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze.

If we were to read the whole chapter, we would see that this pattern of sin, followed by punishment, sin, followed by punishment, sin, followed by punishment continues, iteration after iteration, the punishments becoming successively more rigorous. The last iteration appears at verse 43: "The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its [land] sabbaths while it lies desolate without them." God's final solution, if you will, is scattering. The land vomits out its people, as God warned it would in Leviticus 20:22, the result of "increased" sins, her "multitude" of sins.

Please, turn to Deuteronomy 30. At this point, I want to look in some detail at the first major discussion of God's commitment to regather scattered Israel and to restore backsliding Israel. It is in Moab, as the people stand poised to enter the Promised Land after almost four decades of wandering, that Moses introduces the concept of a *future* restoration. No discussion of the regathering and restoration of Israel is complete without a rehearsal of this passage. We shall spend a bit of time here, wandering about from passage to passage.

(As an important matter of context, I want to mention that this discourse took place shortly after, perhaps just a day or two after, Moses enumerated the blessings and the curses at Deuteronomy 28.)

**Deuteronomy 30:1-3** "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."

Note that Moses clarifies that his audience is "you and your children." He understands that he is addressing not only those standing before Him that day on the east side of the Jordan River, but all the descendants of the children of Israel as well. This prophecy pertains to Israel today.

Now, let us look at verse 1 in more detail. There, at the beginning of his comments, Moses establishes context: Everything he has to say in the whole chapter relates to a time when Israelites

come to *consider* the things that have happened to them, “the blessing and the curse which I have set before you.” In the time of Jacob’s trouble, the folk of Israel will reflect, he says, upon both—the blessings and the curses. Importantly, it is not just the agony involved in the curses which Israelites will consider in their captivity, but it will be the blessings as well. Israelites—perhaps your neighbors—will reflect upon the blessings of liberty, prosperity, and peace they enjoyed in the lands of their exile for decades, generation after generation, comparing those blessings against the curses of disease, deprivation, slavery, death, and scattering they are experiencing wholesale in the land of their enemies.

That is one of the reasons God today has so prospered Israel in this time of her seemingly boundless decadence, despite her high indebtedness, despite her de-industrialization, and despite the unprecedented prevalence of her peoples’ failing health. It appears to us an unseasonal prosperity, out of sync with the depth of America’s current depravity. Why is the prosperity here right now? Well, during the tribulation, God wants to ensure that the blessings enjoyed by this *last* generation of Americans stand out in their minds from the curses they experience in the tribulation—and stand out in all the starker relief, as day differs from night, light from dark.

So, God will use both—the opposites of blessing and curse—to send Israelites a message. In Isaiah 10:22, God makes an important point in this regard. Breaking into the verse: “The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.”

The destruction God has decreed for Israel will be like an overwhelming flood, uniquely vast and deep. Overpowering. Inescapable. Unstoppable. But, it will be in *righteousness*. It will be just. Isaiah is saying here that God will fulfill *all* righteousness, the blessings *and* the curses of Deuteronomy 28. This is really just another way of saying He is faithful to the terms of the covenant—*all aspects of the covenant*, positive and negative. As I stressed before, God says the punishment will be “in full.” But, the blessings afterward will be beyond belief.

In Matthew 3:15 Christ tells John the Baptist that it is proper for him, John, to baptize Christ in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” That means that Christ does not take half measures, but fully loves and obeys God. He takes action to meet God’s standards of justice while, at the same time, acting in mercy. He does *everything* right, punishing in justice, healing in mercy. In the context of my comments today about His end-time dealings with national Israel, He makes this principle explicit in Jeremiah 31:10: where He says, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.” (Hold on to that noun *shepherd*. We shall come back to it.)

Some of you certainly know where I am headed. God’s scattering and then His gathering is yet another application of, respectively, His severity *and* His goodness. Interestingly, Paul enunciates the concept of God’s goodness and severity in the same passage where he writes of God’s restoring Israel, Romans 11:19-27.

**Deuteronomy 30:5-6** “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.”

Not only does Moses aver that God will return scattered Israel to the Land of Promise—He makes that clear—but he also asserts that God will “prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.”

In that word *more* lies the concept of “value add,” which I mentioned earlier. It appears right here in this premier discussion of Israel’s regathering and restoration. “More” involves more than just greater prosperity and fecundity than ever before. For, in the same breath, Moses says God will “circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants” to the end that they will *live*, being able to love and serve God completely. This is, of course, an oblique, an indirect reference to the giving of the Holy Spirit, something God did not give to the ancient Israelites.

To see that more clearly, please turn to Deuteronomy 10, the Scripture’s first reference to circumcision of the heart. At Deuteronomy 10, Moses defines, in *behavioral* terms, what circumcision of the heart is really all about. We shall get a running start at verse 15:

**Deuteronomy 10:15-18** “The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.

How does one circumcised of heart behave? Well, he disavows stubborn rebellion, figuratively referenced here as being stiff-necked. He takes on the characteristics of God: Being impartial, taking no bribes, caring for the fatherless, the widows, and strangers. He lives what Mr. Armstrong called the “give way of life.” Paraphrasing Moses’ comment back there in Deuteronomy 30:6, those circumcised of heart are able to love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul.

I want to take this opportunity to remind you that the apostle Paul links circumcision of the heart with *spiritual regeneration*. He does that at Romans 2:29. “[H]e is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter.” We need God’s Spirit in order to obey the spirit of the law. In broaching the matter of circumcision of the heart in Deuteronomy 10 and in Deuteronomy 30, Moses introduces, yes, indeed, through the back door, but, still, it is there, what is undoubtedly the most *important* aspect of God’s restoration of Israel. In Ezekiel 37, God more explicitly defines that crucial aspect.

**Ezekiel 37:21-22** “Then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: “Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. . . .

**Ezekiel 37:24** David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them.

**Ezekiel 37:26-27** Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed, I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

A page back, in Ezekiel 36, God is even more explicit about this new aspect restored Israel will enjoy, the value God will *add* to Israel. He begins the passage in the same way He began

Deuteronomy 30:5, that is, by connecting the value add with His *regathering* of the people. Why? Because regathering is absolutely essential as a first step, yet it is only that, only a prelude to something even greater. In Ezekiel 36:26-27, God says He “ will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

About 15 times, and usually through the prophet Jeremiah, God refers to Israel as backsliding. With the restoration, those days of backsliding will be over *forever*. God will establish His covenant of peace with them, the New Covenant, thereby enabling their *faithfulness*, something that was missing in ancient Israel, and is very much so in modern Israel. The giving of the Holy Spirit, the inclusion of national Israel on a person-by-person basis into the New Covenant, is paramount, ensuring that Israel will never again backslide, never again incur the wrath of God. That is why the words *forever* or *everlasting* appear so frequently in these passages. As God asserts in Isaiah 54:10, though the mountains and hills remove, His covenant of peace will remain with Israel.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 30, where we left off.

**Deuteronomy 30:7** “Also the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you.”

In applying the curses of Deuteronomy 28 to Gentile nations, God will curtail and restrict their influence, as He increases the wealth, power, and prestige of Israel. As we shall see later, He is positioning Israel for a hugely important work.

Please, turn to Isaiah 27, as I draw a number of these thoughts together. This passage is reminiscent of the vineyard passage of Isaiah 5:1-7, a historical view of Israel. Presented here, though, is a prophetic view.

**Isaiah 27:2-4** (Contemporary English Version) At that time you must sing about a fruitful vineyard. I, the Lord, will protect it and always keep it watered. I will guard it day and night to keep it from harm. I am no longer angry. But if it produces thorns, I will go to war against it and burn it to the ground.

God reiterates here that He does not change; He has not grown soft. Should Israel rebel in the future, He will punish her.

**Isaiah 27:5** (CEV) Yet if the vineyard depends on me for protection, it will become my friend and be at peace with me.

*Peace* is the operative word here; a reference to the peace which comes with the New Covenant, that covenant of peace, as we saw earlier.

**Isaiah 27:6** (CEV) Someday Israel will take root like a vine. It will blossom and bear fruit that covers the earth.

Hold on to that one. We shall focus on that same verse later, looking at its spiritual application, the worldwide result, or fruit, of Israel's core work.

**Isaiah 27:7** (CEV) I, the Lord, didn't punish and kill the people of Israel as fiercely as I punished and killed their enemies. I carefully measured out Israel's punishment.

Verse 4 tells us that God has spent His anger. Now, God displays the compassion we associate with the regathering and restoration. At the same time, He will turn His anger on the nations which so terrifically mistreated Israel. The prophets, especially Isaiah, mention this sort of retribution against Israel's enemies any number of times. For example, at Isaiah 10, God tells of His anger at Assyria, the people who conquered and deported ten-tribed Israel.

Back to Deuteronomy 30 one more time. Moses continues his prophecy:

**Deuteronomy 30:8-10** "And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today. The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand [Hold on to that one. The work that Israel does for God will be effective, fruitful.], in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

In verse 10, that little word *if* appears twice; Moses introduces a condition. Whether an Israelite enjoys the benefits of the New Covenant depends on his repentance and obedience. It is conditional. That should not be a surprise to us, for it is nothing new. That is how it is with us today. Christ does not change; He will not preach "by faith alone" to national Israel any more than He does to us. That is simply not a true representation of His gospel, which in fact requires our belief, yes, but also our *obedience*, as Paul clarifies at II Corinthians 9:13. By putting our faith into obedient action, we enliven our faith, as James reiterates at James 2.

Please, turn to Ezekiel 20, where we shall see that those Israelites who rebel will not enter the Promised Land. Yes, rebellion will remain in the hearts of some Israelites even after God frees them from the unspeakable rigors of their tribulations with great wonders. In this passage, He affirms His resolve to regather Israel, while He rejects those Israelites who rebel.

**Ezekiel 20:34-35** (ESV) "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face."

The reference is to God's dealing with Israel at Mount Sinai. At Deuteronomy 5:4, God says He "talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire."

**Ezekiel 20:36** (ESV) "As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord God."

Older versions have it that God will "plead" with the people. The Hebrew word, however, is a commonly used verb meaning "to judge" and is so translated in any number of modern versions.

In their comments about this verse, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown cite Numbers 14:21-29. That is the scripture about the spies' rebellion, the peoples' refusal to enter the land, and God's judgment that He

would not grant entry to those over the age of 20. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, and a number of other commentators, including E. W. Bullinger, find correspondence, that is, parallels, between the way Christ *will* deal with regathered Israel at His return and the way He *dealt* with the children of Israel after the Exodus.

In that historical event, God led the people out of Egypt, a land of captivity, with signs and wonders, with “an outstretched arm,” that last term appearing about eight times in the Old Testament in reference to God’s work in the period of the Exodus. But, for all that display of power on their behalf, the people obstinately remained rebellious. God did not permit the rebels among them to enter the Land of Promise. Of the two million or so people who walked out of Egypt, only Joshua and Celeb entered the Promised Land, because, as Numbers 32:12 puts it, only they “wholly followed the Lord.”

Incidentally, the formula “wholly followed the Lord”—in all its variants—appears any number of times in the Old Testament. The New Testament equivalent to it appears, interestingly, in Revelation 14:4, which describes the 144,000 as those who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” The two formulas describe the same behavior: If you “wholly follow the Lord,” you are following Him “wherever He goes.” That fact should tell us something about the 144,000.

God will lead the people out of the nations and assemble them in a staging area somewhere *outside* the land, a place He calls “the wilderness of the peoples,” and there He will judge them. Notice what God does to the rebels at that time:

**Ezekiel 20:38** (ESV) “I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me. I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel.”

*God simply will not tolerate rebellion in His holy mountain; He is deeply concerned that Israel become, and remain, a holy people to Himself, ready, willing, and able to carry out His will. That comment segues into the question, “How does national Israel fit into God’s work, His plan to bring salvation worldwide?” as I mentioned by quoting Psalm 74:12.*

Please turn to Ezekiel 48, where we shall focus on verses 30-35, which map the twelve gates of what is simply called “the city” in verse 30 to Israel’s twelve tribes. It is clear from Ezekiel 40:2 that “the city” is in the “land of Israel.” Crucial to my point is the fact that Ezekiel describes much of the city from its *inside*. You can confirm that in Ezekiel 43; The whole chapter makes it unambiguously clear that the prophet is located inside the city. The prophet’s point-of-view is from inside.

**Ezekiel 48:30-31** These are the exits of the city. On the north side, measuring four thousand five hundred cubits (the gates of the city shall be named after the tribes of Israel).

You all recognize, of course, the link here with Revelation 21:12-13, which describes the New Jerusalem as having twelve gates, each gate named after one of the twelve tribes, three gates to each side of the square city.

Back in Ezekiel 48, we shall not discuss verses 32-34, which lists the gates for the remaining nine tribes. Verse 35, the last verse in the Book of Ezekiel, indicates the city’s name: THE LORD IS THERE (Yahweh Shammah).

A fairly standard Hebrew noun for *gate* appears 17 times in verses 31-34. It simply means “gate.” In verse 30, the noun *exits*, which some translations also render as *gate*, is a *different* Hebrew word. The English gerund phrase “a going out” pretty much defines it. Other English equivalences include “outlets,” “border,” “boundary,” “termination,” “extremity,” “end,” “limit,” and even “source.” It appears only 23 times in the Old Testament, mostly in the books of Numbers and Joshua, where it is generally translated “goings forth” or “goings out” in the *King James Version*. It refers to a place of termination or limit. Hence, it often means “boundary” or “border.”

However, in verse 30, the noun *border* does not quite tell the whole story.

To gain clarity, we need to look at the metaphorical meanings of this word, the one translated *exits*. There are two examples, we shall look at only one of them. Please, turn to Proverbs 4, where this same word carries the metaphorical (or poetic) meaning of *springs* (as, springs of water) or *sources* (as the outflowing of a spring). You get the picture here: The spring is the end, the termination, of the source of water. That source might be an underground river miles away or hundreds of feet deep. You do not see it or even know where it is. You just know it is there.

**Proverbs 4:23** (*New American Standard Bible*) Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

I believe the word *exits* in Ezekiel 48:30 carries this metaphoric meaning. Remember, the point of view remains from inside the city; the prophet sees the gates from the inside. Hence, he sees them as exits, not entrances. He sees them as escapes from the walls, the limits of the city. Going out of a gate, you leave the city. Like a spring of water, the opening in the ground is the place from which the water exits, issuing forth over the face of the earth.

Keeping all that in mind, remember that several scriptures about Israel’s regathering describe Christ as a shepherd. Earlier, I read two of them: Jeremiah 31:10 and Ezekiel 37:24. Three other such references are Isaiah 40:10-11, Isaiah 49:9-10, and Micah 2:12-13.

Question: Where does your mind go when it casts about for New Testament scriptures about shepherds? Probably, John 10. Notice specifically,

**John 10:1-5** (*International Standard Version*) Truly, I tell all of you emphatically, the person who doesn’t enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. It’s to Him the gatekeeper opens the gate, and it’s His voice the sheep hear. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has driven out all His own, He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow Him because they recognize His voice. They’ll never follow a stranger.

(Hold on to that verb *follow*.)

We understand that this passage has spiritual meaning, rightly applying it to Christ’s relationship with us. He is our good Shepherd. He leads; we follow Him. But, does it have another level of meaning? Is this passage, with its reference to going out a gate, also talking about Christ’s work with physical Israelites in the Millennium and beyond? Quite probably so.

(I want to briefly mention that, later in the passage, at verse 9, Christ does mention *entering* the gate through Him, the result being salvation. You may want to compare this verse with Revelation 22:14, which refers to those who are blessed *entering* through the gates of the New Jerusalem.)

But, I want to focus on John 10:3; He leads the sheep *out*. The sheepfold therefore cannot represent the church, regardless of the understanding of any number of commentators, because Christ does not lead His people out of the church or out of a relationship with Him or away from God. That is clear. Is the sheepfold, at least at one level, the land of Israel or nation of Israel?

Maybe I am easily entertained, but to me there exists an uncanny correspondence between John 10:16 and Ezekiel 37:22 and 24. Notice,

**John 10:16** “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

The term “I must bring” is certainly a reference to Israel’s regathering and possibly her restoration.

Compare John 10:16 with Ezekiel 37:22 and then 24. You can make the connections between the nouns *flock*, *fold*, and *nation*. This is Ezekiel’s prophecy about God’s reuniting Judah and Israel into one nation, as it was in the days of David. Verse 22: “and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations.” and verse 24: “David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd.” All Israel: One flock, one shepherd.

If we accept that the *flock* and *fold* of John 10 map to the united *nation* of Israel prophesied in Ezekiel 37, we are still left to ask, why in the world would Christ lead His people away from the Promised Land, away from Israel, or away its capital city, Jerusalem? Out of the fold, as John 10:3 mentions. After all, He had just gathered them there. Or we could just as easily ask, why did God inspire Ezekiel, at the very end of the book, to see the gates as exits, as ways out?

In the context of my comments today about God’s work with a restored Israel in the Millennium and in the White Throne Period, Christ might have excellent reason to lead people out of the land or out of Jerusalem. Why is that?

Psalms 74:12, where we started today, says that God works salvation *all* over the earth. Not just in Jerusalem. Not just in the Land of Promise, but, in due course, everywhere. The apostle Paul, writing at Romans 1:16, asserts that “the gospel ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Salvation. Everywhere. Everyone. What is the model or pattern established in the New Testament for the preaching of that gospel? The Book of Acts is clear.

1. The model calls for *people* to do the preaching. When Christ called Peter and Andrew to be disciples, as recorded in Matthew 4:18-19, He told them they would become “fishers of men” if they *followed* Him. (Remember, how the sheep follow the Shepherd in John 10?) While we recognize that Revelation 14:6 mentions an angel preaching the “everlasting gospel,” we also know that, historically, it has been God’s people who preach the gospel, who are fishers. And, indeed, even before His ministry ended, Christ had sent His disciples out to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God into Galilee (Matthew 10:7).

1. Corollary one of this point is that the preachers are not novices, but well-trained over a period of time.
2. Corollary two is that they do not work as loners, but work in teams or at least in pairs, as Paul, Timothy, Barnabas, Luke, or Priscilla and Aquilla. Peter apparently traveled with his wife.

2. The model calls for the preachers to go *out* to the people: they were not to bus people into Jerusalem so they can preach to them there. You all know Matthew 28:19, the so-called “Great Commission.” I shall read from *The Voice*: “Go out and make disciples in all the nations.” You all could cite actually tens of examples of the apostles and evangelists (like Phillip) doing just that, particularly in the book of Acts. Tradition hints that the apostles traveled far and wide. Peter apparently worked in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” Those regions are in northern Asia Minor, *separate* from the southern area where Paul worked.

3. The model calls for God-ordained territories. God assigned each apostle a specific territory, as it were. Acts 16:6-10 relates how the Spirit, that is, Christ, did not permit Paul and Timothy to go to Phrygia, Galatia, and Bithynia. Why? They are all regions in the northern area of Asia Minor, where Peter was working (or was slated by God to work in the future). Instead, through a vision, Paul came to understand that God wanted him to go west into Macedonia and Greece, carrying the gospel into Southern Europe.

In II Corinthians 10:13-16, Paul speaks of his sphere of influence, a region, appointed to him by God. He says he does not want to interfere in the affairs of another apostle who worked in another sphere of influence. They had their territories.

Before I begin to tie this all together, I want to pause to remind you that Christ established a close connection between His disciples and the twelve tribes. You will find that at Matthew 19:28, where He told them that, again, explicitly, if they *followed* Him, they would sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes. Keep that in mind as you consider the twelve gates, one for each tribe.

The picture which emerges looks something like this: In the Millennial Israel, there will eventually come to be a number of men who, with their wives, have God’s Holy Spirit. We are talking about physical people. Christ will lead them out of Jerusalem, out of the Land, just as He led the apostles and the evangelists centuries before, leading them to points east, west, north, and south, over the face of the earth.

Following the model, these people will not be novices. (We shall do the training, I would surmise.) It will take time to get people up to speed, a fact which indicates that God will not send these people out in year-one of the Millennium. More typically, the sending out of these people might start out as a trickle, but it will be one of those “small things” that we dare not despise. The trickle in time will likely become a torrent.

There will be two reasons why Christ will lead these people out.

1. To preach the gospel to the Gentiles. I personally believe this will be a thrust not only in the White Throne Period, but also in the Millennium, especially as Israel’s prosperity and influence grows, and Gentile peoples come to recognize Israel as a blessed people—a holy nation. God will make Israel an

example of what happens when people disobey Him, as well as when they obey Him, as I mentioned before. Israel will be a beacon, a city on a hill. The gospel these people preach will be the same one we preach today—the “everlasting gospel.” There is only one.

2. To minister to Israelites who reside outside the land. God promises Israel vast population growth. As the Millennium moves along and population grows, Israelites will need more land. Christ will apportion sections of the earth *outside* the Land of Promise to Israelites. This seems to be the thrust of Isaiah 49:19-21. Notice also,

**Zechariah 10:9** “I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries.”

In context, God is referring to Israelites who are *not* apostate, but loyal to God, even though far away. *Sow* here is not the verb typically used in reference to the scattering of Israel in punishment, as at Jeremiah 31:10, which we looked at earlier. Rather, it is frequently used positively. Its first use is in Genesis 1:11 in reference to herbs *yielding* seeds, this in the context of God’s “very good” creation. Another good example is at its fourth occurrence, Genesis 26:12: “Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him.” This verb generally refers to the blessing of fertility rather than the curse of scattering. Appearing 56 times in the Old Testament, this verb for *sow* never once refers to the scattering of Israel by God in punishment.

In Zechariah 10:9, I believe God is saying He will send Israelites to areas outside the Land of Promise, sow them, perhaps in areas in North America, after these areas have kept the land sabbaths. It appears that God will divide the earth into twelve territories, one for each tribe. It makes sense that He will sow Manassites in the section of the earth He has apportioned to Joseph; He will sow Benjamites in the section apportioned to Benjamin, and so on. That is the pattern. Figuratively, if not actually, each gate will lead into one of these sections.

(Conjecturally, Satan’s counterfeit of this pattern might be his alleged division of the earth into ten parts, as some conspiracy theorists aver.)

Likewise, in the second resurrection, God will probably situate resurrected Israelites in areas corresponding to their tribe. Gadites will live in the area apportioned to the tribe of Gad, resurrected Danites in the area apportioned to the tribe of Dan, and so on. As in all His churches today, God is not the God of confusion; Christ’s rule will be orderly.

Please, turn to Acts 28. So, Christ will lead these men and women out to preach the gospel to Gentiles *and* to minister to the many Israelites who find their homes *outside* the Promised Land proper. All these preachers and teachers will have their assigned territories, just as ministers do today, just as the apostles did. It is no wonder then that the book of Acts lacks a final “Amen.” The preaching and the teaching are not over yet.

But, I want you to take note of the concluding words of the book of Acts:

**Acts 28:30-31** Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

The noun *confidence* there carries the idea of “openly,” “freely,” “boldly.” No one stopped or hindered Paul. Ironically, the apostle, though physically fettered, had more freedom in a Gentile city, in Rome, to preach and teach than He did in Jerusalem. I believe these two verses are transition verses, that Luke is describing the *environment* in which these Israelite preachers and teachers will do their work in the World Tomorrow—a milieu without hinderance. Why will they be so unhindered?

Because we shall be there with them, as guides and trainers. We shall ensure that nothing, nothing, shall hinder them in their work: Not technological limitations, not foul weather, not shipwrecks (of which Paul survived at least four), not the likes of Alexander the coppersmith, who did Paul “much harm” as he says at II Timothy 4:14. And, make no mistake about it: There will still be plenty of people with run-amok carnal nature in those days, easy fodder for Satan once he gets his parole from the Bottomless Pit.

Isaiah 30:21 indicates we shall tell these physical servants of God, “This is the way, walk in it.” This means more than telling them not to walk into someone else’s territory—though it probably means that as well. That noun *way* there is the Hebrew word for *road* or *path*. It first appears in Genesis 3:24, where Christ assigned Cherubim each with a whirling sword to guard the way, that is, the road, to the Tree of Life, to protect it.

What exactly is this road to salvation, this path to the Tree of Life? It is the gospel of the Kingdom of God; it is God’s power to salvation. Ours will be the important task to guard that gospel, allowing nothing to stand in the way of its preaching nor permitting its contamination in any way whatsoever. For, we know that the clock is running, the consummation of all things will be drawing nigh. God has ordained that the gospel go out to the entire world and go out right. We shall work to ensure that the results of the teaching and preaching, that is, the fruit of Judah and of Israel, will fill the earth, as we saw earlier at Isaiah 27:6.

In the worldwide execution of that preaching and teaching, *all* the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. That is why God is so keenly committed to restoring national Israel to a state of *faithfulness* to Him and to a prestigious position among the nations. *Israel has the invaluable important role of carrying the gospel, God’s power of salvation, to the whole world.*

In our day, God has used the converted people of the world’s most prominent nation, the United States, to carry the gospel to much of the world. In the World Tomorrow, He will use converted Israelites, leading them out from the foremost of the world’s nations, from Israel, to carry the gospel to *all* nations, to all the people who have ever lived. It will be a huge undertaking. And, when that gospel of the Kingdom has been preached in all the world, then, as Christ promised at Matthew 24:14, “the end will come.”

Speaking of end, please turn to Isaiah 2 as the final scripture. Here, we find an important dualism: Going out and coming in; exiting and entering.

**Isaiah 2:3** Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.”

In John 12:32, Christ said He would “draw all peoples” to Himself. He is referring to the attraction part, the entry part: People entering Yahweh Shamma, the city where Christ is, people committed to

living God's way of life. But, how did they learn about that way of life? Come to know that it even existed? Come to know that there was hope for them?

Well, let us continue in the verse to the exiting part of the dualism. It is the "goings out" of Israelites to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the multiple billions of people alive at that time, and to teach them the whole counsel of God (that is, "the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ," as we saw at Acts 28:31). The last couplet of verse 3 says it all:

**Isaiah 2:3** For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Many hearing my voice today know all about the zeal for the gospel these Israelite preachers and teachers will someday experience. It is a zeal which issues from Christ Himself, as He assiduously works to do His Father's will. In the 1950s, 60s, and even into the 70s—and of course, to some extent to this very day—hopefully, many in God's church loved, and love, the gospel, recognizing it to be exactly what Paul claimed it to be: The dynamo, the power of God to bring salvation to Israelite and Gentile alike, the good news offering hope. It is the *only* genuine good news.

While we, imperfect as we are, were not consumed with zeal to the same extent as Christ was, still, we prayed and we fasted and we gave and we served and we sacrificed for the furtherance of the gospel. Surely, we were not always wise; I remember some who mortgaged their homes in the mid-70s, thinking Christ would come soon. They later had financial difficulties. Yes, zeal, but not always according to knowledge.

But, we tried to follow the instructions of Mr. Herbert Armstrong. The furtherance of the gospel was a major, major priority in our lives—and still is. Some of you know of what I speak. If you have a good attitude, you remember those days as *good* days, not perfect, but good. At that time, we lived in, indeed, we delighted in, a *zeitgeist* of zeal. For instance, I remember some home-schooling parents who taught their children geography by following the travels of Mr. Armstrong on a map. You see, everything revolved around the gospel. We do not want that zeal to wane.

Zeal was all around then, among many at least. Say what you will to about the old church, zeal was part of its culture for years—not everyone, of course, but for many.

Multiply the zeal we experience a thousand times, maybe more, and you will get some idea how significant the zeal for the gospel will be in the Millennium, for all who are then under the New Covenant. The gospel of the Kingdom of God will be the centerpiece—it will be the focus—of Israelite civilization and culture, driving life for all who are under the New Covenant, the foundation of education, the arts and technology, of all endeavor. We, then as spirit beings, shall work to keep that zeal alive and spreading in the World Tomorrow.