

“Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

Hymns: #42 Standing on the Promises (BGCS) #

Readings: Ezekiel 37: 1-14; 21; Psalm 87:2 Psalm 122:6-9

We read in Ezekiel 37 “ The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.' ”

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' ” 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' ”

21 “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.

While many interpretations and applications have been made of these “dry bones” in Ezekiel, there can be little doubt that both historically and prophetically, they refer specifically to the nation of Israel and the end of her diaspora in the world. And it is for that reason that we read this passage today.

For you see, tomorrow, May 14th we commemorate the 70th anniversary of this prophecy commencing and the re-birth of the nation of Israel. It is a staggering witness to the absolute truth of God’s Word and it is the prophetic “Super Sign” of the literal and prophetic accuracy of the scriptures.

I believe one of the most convincing proofs of God’s existence, unwavering love, and future fulfilment of prophecy is the existence of the nation Israel. No other nation on earth has survived and maintained its identity as Israel has for over 4,000 years, and they have done so in spite of violent opposition, captivities, dispersions, holocausts and the constant Islamic threat to wipe them off the face of the earth. How do we account for them still being here? And how do we account for this tiny nation being the centre of the news every night and the focus of the world’s attention?

Let’s remind ourselves of some historical facts. Following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, an event that Jesus had described to His disciples on the Mount of Olives shortly before His crucifixion, the Jewish people were driven from their land and scattered across the nations of the world. This diaspora continued for 1827 years until 1897, when a Hungarian born Jew named Theodore Herzl appeared on the scene.

Herzl established the First Zionist Congress in Basel Switzerland which advocated a mass exodus of Jews out of Europe to Judenstaat (the Jewish state). He was convinced very early, that Germany was

“Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

the centre of anti-Semitism in Europe and that Jews were in danger. He said “The idea that I have developed is a very old one; it is the restoration of the Jewish State”.

He went on to say: “Therefore I believe that a wondrous generation of Jews will spring into existence. The Maccabeans will rise again. Let me repeat once more my opening words: The Jews who wish for a State will have it. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own homes. The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity.”¹

It’s not hard to hear him echoing an earlier passage in Ezekiel 36:24 “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land”.

In 1882 the Jewish population in the Land of Israel was just 24,000. But in the 21 years between Herzl’s first Zionist Congress and 1918, the Jewish population there tripled to 60,000.

You see in 1917 the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, wrote in what has become known as “The Balfour Declaration” that: “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object...” This was so like the Sovereign God using Cyrus and the numerous decrees issued by the Medo-Persian rulers to facilitate the Jews return from captivity and rebuild the alter, temple and walls of Jerusalem. Here was God sovereignly using a pagan ruler to accommodate His plans for His people.

Turn back to Isaiah 44:28 where we read a prophecy about the Medo-Persian ruler Cyrus, made 174 years before he even appeared on the scene: V. 28 “who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." 45: 1"“This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:...v. 13 “I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.”

This favouring the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people was furthered when the British were given mandate over the Land of Israel at the end of WWI when The League of Nations codified The British Mandate in 1922.

Between WWI and the beginning of WWII the Jewish population in the land of Israel grew further, reaching 174,000 in 1931. When WWII began there were approximately 9 million Jews living in Europe. The Russian Pogroms and German Holocaust saw the murder of 6 million Jews, a figure too staggering to comprehend numerically much less in terms of human life. Two thirds of the entire Jewish people were wiped out.

Following the end of WWII, on the 29th November, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel (Land); the General Assembly required the inhabitants of Eretz-Israel to take such steps as were necessary on their part for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State was irrevocable.

Thus, on May 14, 1948, 70 years ago tomorrow, the independent Nation State of Israel came into existence under David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister. For the first time in nearly 2,000 years, Israel as a nation was back and in her land. At that time the Jewish population had nearly quadrupled since 1931 to more than 700,000. Today the Jewish population of Israel is about 6.1 million and

¹ “The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Jewish State, by Theodor Herzl.”. gutenberg.org.

“Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

account for almost half of all the Jewish people worldwide. As many as Hitler exterminated from the earth, are now settled in their own land and the Aliyah or return of Jews continues every day. But this was not going to pass peacefully, for the hatred of Satan against God’s people both Jew and Christian is unrelenting.

On May 15th the very next day, five Islamic nations, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq immediately attacked and invaded Israel. But miraculously and against overwhelming odds, Israel defended herself and repelled this onslaught and secured their national independence.

19 years later in 1967, Egypt, Syria and Jordan once gain attacked Israel and were once again were soundly defeated. The IDF decimated the Egyptian and Syrian Air forces in what has come to be known as the “Six Days War”. Having gained control over the Sinai and the Golan Heights, Israel secured for the first time some semblance of a defensible border. Moreover, they were now in control of the reunified city of Jerusalem which had not been theirs since the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

6 years later, in 1973 and on the holiest day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement, Syria and Egypt launched a surprise attack. And once again, these satanically driven Islamic nations were so soundly repelled that the IDF came within 100 Km of taking the capital Cairo and 20 Km of the Syrian capital of Damascus and could easily have utterly destroyed both armies and occupied their countries. But in a gesture of desiring peace, Israel restrained and withdrew. These are all staggeringly miraculous events and seem to clearly point to God’s divine intervention against the satanic hatred against Israel. These nations and many others in the region have not changed their minds about Israel. They are all STILL committed to wiping Israel off the map and driving her into the sea as has been publically stated at the highest levels of their governments.

These historical events are unprecedented in the annals of human history. No other ethnic people or nation has been exiled and dispersed and then come back like this. No other nation has lost its language and then recovered it more than a thousand years later (Eliezer ben Yehuda- Russian born Jew and lexicographer who in the 1800’s almost single handily revived the Jewish language in its purity from the Yiddish dialect (German/Hebrew) and Ladino (Spanish/Hebrew). Ezekiel heard “a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.” Can we not hear the rattling sound of bones as the Jews are returning to their OWN land, coming up out of their graves and coming together? While we cannot say this is the final fulfilment of Ezekiel’s prophecy, neither can we deny that this much has happened, and that, according to God’s sovereign plan.

Ezekiel also “... looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.” This is Israel today. They are no longer just bones, but a healthy, vibrant and innovative land. The Negev is being transformed by irrigation, swamps have been drained and are now rich agricultural land; Israel is now a net food exporter; their technology and innovation has made them the “start-up” capital of the business world. Yet for all this, there is still no breath in them...yet! For this breath is coming, for God has said “I will put my Spirit in you (my ruach- my breath/wind) and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.” Ezekiel 37:14

When we combine these relatively recent historical events with the ancient prophecies in Ezekiel and elsewhere, it should give us great pause to contemplate the literal and certain meaning of other passages. For example Psalm 87:2 “...the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.”

The Lord “loves the gates of Zion”. He really does. There is no geographical place on this planet that so attracts the jealous love of God and His fierce determination and protection as does Zion, the city of Jerusalem. For all the prophets, Zion was the most significant of all sacred places. And of all the prophets, I believe it was Zechariah who gives us the clearest insight into the heart of God regarding the city of Jerusalem.

“Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

Zech. 1:14-15 “This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, 15 but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure.’”

Zech. 8:2-3 “This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her." 3 This is what the LORD says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."

Zech. 12: 2-3 "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. 3 On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.”

Zech. 14:3, 9, 10-11 “Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. 4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem...The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name...But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. 11 It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.

What a clear picture we see here of both the jealous heart of God for Jerusalem and His people Israel, but also the coming conflict and culmination of hatred poured out upon Zion by the nations. All one has to do is turn on the nightly news to see the gathering storm clouds of evil intent towards Israel and Jerusalem. In fact all we need to do to see into the future of Jerusalem is to read the following chapters in Ezekiel 38 and 39. For there we see a coalition of nations comprised primarily of Russia, Turkey, and Iran who are prophesied to attack Israel and Jerusalem. Who do we see deeply imbedded in the Syrian conflict just across Israel’s northern border today, in what appears to be positioning and a staging ground? Yes, Russia, Turkey and Iran are there right now and they are all very active.

So what are we as believers to think and make of all this? I believe there are three important principles we need to hang onto today as we commemorate this moment in Israel’s history:

First is the principle of blessing. God promised to Abraham in Gen. 12:3 saying “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.” Folks, this is an eternal promise and it has not been revoked. We invoke God’s blessing on ourselves when we bless Abraham and his seed, that is, the people and nation of Israel. Equally, all anti-Semitism invokes God’s curse.

Second, as Christians who have Jewish Messiah and who have been grafted into the promises made to Israel, we have a responsibility to stand with Israel. As Paul says in Romans 15:27, “For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”

Finally, we are to pray. Listen to Psalm 122:6-9 “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. 7 May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." 8 For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you." 9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.”

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. What are we actually asking God for when we “pray for the peace of Jerusalem”? We are not simply asking for a cessation of hostilities from Israel’s enemies, but we are actually praying for the return of Jesus our Savior and their as yet unrecognized Messiah. There will be no peace for Jerusalem until the feet of Jesus return to the Mount of Olives and He puts down all her enemies and establishes His Kingdom. To pray for the peace of Jerusalem means to pray for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

But as believers we are also praying for the Rapture of the Church when we pray for the peace of Jerusalem. For we know there can be no Second Coming of Yeshua Hamashiach, Jesus the Messiah,

“Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

until He first calls out His Bride in Rapture and the times of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), that is the Great Tribulation, have run their course.

Regarding the Rapture of the Church, Jesus said “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Matt. 24:36) Therefore, we clearly not to be “date setters” but we are to be “date watchers”.

Matt. 24:42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

Matt. 24:43 “But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.”

Matt. 25:13 ““Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

Mark 13:37 “What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'”

Tomorrow, you and I will be among the sole and privileged generation to be alive on the earth to witness the 70th year of Israeli statehood and her regathering as Ezekiel prophesied. It’s a significant date and a significant number, 70. For we cannot help but recall that it was after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, that God moved the heart of Cyrus to issue the decree to set the Jews free to return to their land and rebuild the temple. As we commemorate Israel’s 70th year of restored nationhood, let us bless the people of Israel; let us stand with Israel; and let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Let us pray:

Holy and Gracious Triune God of Grace, we praise you for your faithfulness and the confidence we can have in you and your every word. You have done amazing things in our generation and we marvel at how exactly you fulfil your every prophetic word. O God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as we commemorate your working in and through Israel, we take heart in your jealous heart, fierce intention and love for the gates of Zion. Father, we bless Abraham and your people Israel. As gentile believers, we humbly thank you for grafting us in to share in the nourishing sap of the olive root Israel. We do not support the root, but the root supports us. Their branches were broken off so that we could be grafted in. Though they have experienced a hardening, we know that it is only in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and then all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion”.

Father we stand with your people and pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Maranatha...come Lord Jesus Christ. We’re watching and waiting. Maranatha. In the name and authority of Jesus Christ, we pray.

Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha`olam

Barukh atah Yeshua HaMashiach

Barukh atah Ruach HaKodesh

Baruckh Haba B’shem Adonai

Shaalu Shalom Yerushalayim

Amen.