

THE VISION OF DRY BONES.

AUG. 13. – EZEK. 37:1-14.

"I will put my spirit within you." – Ezek. 36:27.

THE SCRIPTURE of this lesson is frequently more or less of a confusion to the Lord's people, even after they have learned with considerable clearness what the Apostle Paul so positively declares – that the body sown in corruption, planted in death, is not the body which shall be in the resurrection; that the bones, sinews and flesh which go to corruption have nothing whatever to do with the resurrection body, which the Lord will provide. In examining this subject heretofore we have seen that the Apostle's statement is not only backed by his inspiration, but also that it is reasonable, logical: that one atom of matter is no more valuable or necessary than another in the great work of restitution which shall be accomplished in the world's resurrection. We have seen that the human body in corruption becomes food for plant life, producing apples, acorns, etc., which in turn become food for man and the lower animals, so that the atoms of matter composing a human body are continually changing, and in centuries would pass through many changes. We have seen, too, that this process of change progresses while we still live, so that science declares that a complete change in the human organism is effected every seven years. The atoms of matter which compose a man's body at the moment of his death are no more precious, valuable or necessary to the future body than were the atoms sloughed off through the natural channels during previous years. The important thing, the thing which God has promised shall have a resurrection, is the being, the soul: that in the resurrection God will give it a body as pleaseth him – to each kind of seed his own kind of body – to the natural man a natural, human body, through restitution; to the new creature in Christ a new spiritual body, according to divine promise.

The passage of Scripture under consideration was addressed by the Lord through the Prophet to fleshly Israel, then in captivity in Babylon. The dry bones represented the Israelites themselves. As a people they had lost heart, lost hope, and said, "Our strength is dried, and our hope is lost, we are cut off from our parts" – from all tribal and national union. If they looked at their present condition, they were strangers in a strange land, foreigners, without opportunity for patriotic feelings; if they looked backward, and remembered divine intervention on their behalf, their deliverance from Egypt, their favor as a nation under David and Solomon, etc., they could think of these only as by-gones, lost blessings and opportunities; if they looked forward, they could see no possible hope of their ever again becoming a nation; and as for all the great expectations which they had once entertained respecting their nation, as God's favored people, and the heir of the promises made to Abraham, that they should rule and bless all the families of the earth – these hopes were dead, they were gone, they could have nothing of this kind in the future. The condition of Israel, scattered throughout Babylonia, was indeed well illustrated by the dry bones of the vision.

The hand (power) of the Lord was upon Ezekiel, causing him to see this vision – he was not literally transported to any literal valley of dry bones. In the vision he was caused to pass amongst the dry bones, that he might get a full view of the situation, as they lay strewn all over the valley, very dry. Then the Lord's explanation comes, that these dry bones are, or represent, the whole house of Israel. They did not represent merely the two tribes which went last into captivity, nor merely the ten tribes which went earlier, but the whole house of Israel, the twelve tribes. They were no longer to be considered as two distinct nations, as they had considered themselves for the preceding four hundred years. They were to understand that in divine providence they were henceforth a reunited nation, and the reunion is pictured in this same chapter (vss. 15-22) by the miraculous uniting of two sticks into one in the hand of the Prophet.

And it was so: from the time Cyrus gave his decree that all the children of Israel should go free, and might return, if they chose, to their own land, the division into two nations was no longer recognized. The people that returned, tho chiefly of the tribe of Judah, represented all of the various tribes who had faith in the Lord's promises, and desired to return to Palestine. The name, Israel, was applied to the returned and restored people, not only for the more than five centuries preceding our Lord's first advent, but also they were so recognized by our Lord in all of his ministry, and by the apostles in all of their writings, which constitute the New Testament. There are no ten lost tribes which some well-meaning but deluded people continually refer to, and seem to rest their hopes in, as instead of the hope set before us in the Gospel.

The Lord propounds the question, Is it possible that any vitality could ever come into these dry bones? – Is there hope for the scattered people of Israel who not only in heart but in voice said, We are scattered, and no longer a homogeneous people, we are mixed and blended with our captors, who are heathen, in business, social and marriage relationships – there is no hope of a restored nation of Israel?

The Prophet, with quick confidence in the Almighty, refers the question back to God, as suggesting that any hope there could possibly be of a reorganization of Israel must come from God – could be looked for from no other quarter.

The Lord directed Ezekiel to prophesy, that is, to declare the divine message, and the divine message was a foretelling of the things which would, under divine providence, come to pass. The message to be declared was that God had the power and would exercise it, by which these who were dead, and dried as respected their national hopes, would be gradually revived, would gradually become one homogeneous people, a nation in their own land. It would not be done suddenly, but gradually, and that through attention to the divine message, which the Prophet was delivering. First the dried and

hopeless ones would come together, then they would begin to unite one to the other, and gradually assume a national existence, and finally would be infused with the spirit of the Lord, as the breath or energy of national life, begotten of faith in the promises, and would stand again a nation.

The people's hopes, which were thus dead, were represented by the Lord as buried in the various provinces of Babylonia, and hence this figure is combined with the figure of the dry bones, and the Lord sends the message, "Behold, O my people, I will open your [R2505 : page 191] graves, and cause you to come out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel, and ye shall know that I am the Lord." As a further part of this symbolic picture the Prophet is in vision shown the process by which the dry bones would be gathered, reorganized and revived. He says there was "a noise and a shaking." The *Revised Version*, apparently with propriety, renders this, "thunder and an earthquake." Following this demonstration the bones came together.

Undoubtedly one thing which contributed to Israel's despair was the mightiness of the empire which had taken them captive. Babylonia at that time was the most gigantic empire ever known amongst men. Her overthrow seemed impossible, and escape from her power not to be thought of. The thunder and great earthquake of the figure doubtless represented the commotions incident to the fall of Babylon and the [R2506 : page 191] transfer of the empire to the Medes and Persians. As a result of this the hopes of Israel in the divine promises began to revive, and shortly they were delivered.

While recognizing this primary fulfilment of the prophecy, we are not to forget the secondary fulfilment on a much larger scale, which is in progress at the present time. The withered hopes of Israel, scattered throughout the provinces of Babylonia, cut off from their parts, from one another, from tribal union and from national cohesion, was only a foreshadowing of the more general scattering of that nation among all the nations of the civilized world (mystic Babylon) during this Gospel

age. With the vast majority all hopes of the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise had died, had withered away, and had no more vitality than a dry bone. But now, in the end of this Gospel age, the due time has come for these dry bones, scattered all over mystic Babylon, to be gathered part to part, rehabilitated and revived with hope in the promises made to the fathers. The great noise is the "seventh trumpet," which has begun to sound; the earthquake is the coming great revolution in which mystic Babylon will fall before the great Prince whom Cyrus in a measure prefigured. Meantime, as we look at the dry bones of Israel, we perceive that they already are in movement, that they are already drawing near one to another, and organizing as "Zionists," with a view to national reorganization and a return to the land of promise. Probably the hopes of the Israelites began to revive as soon as they learned that the army of Cyrus had begun the conquest of Babylon, and so now the hopes of Israel are reviving as they witness the march of events, and realize that a great day of trouble is coming upon the nations of Christendom. Their hopes will more and more go out toward Palestine and national reorganization, as the troubles of the day of wrath draw near.

A lesson might also be drawn from this Scripture for Spiritual Israelites. We are to remember that Spiritual Israel also was permitted to go down into Babylon – to be swallowed up of worldliness, as represented in our Lord's parable of the wheat-field, choked by the "tares." The field has really become a tare-field, altho nominally called a wheat-field, because the promises are to the "wheat." For centuries the "Gospel of the Kingdom," which our Lord declared was the good seed which he sowed (Matt. 13:37-42), has been lost sight of, and Kingdom hopes have lost their vitality, and the many promises of the Scriptures, relating to the Kingdom of God, joint-heirship with Christ and a future blessing of the world, have become dead hopes, dead promises; and so far as these promises are concerned Spiritual Israel has been cut off from its parts and mixed with the Babylonians, and has become interested in the hopes of Babylon rather than in the

kingdom of God, in which all the original hopes and promises centered and flourished.

But now, in the end of this age, the time has come for God to call his people out of Babylon, and the voice of a greater than Cyrus is heard by those who have ears to hear, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen!... Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." (Rev. 18:2-4.) In connection with this message there is a commotion amongst the dry bones, amongst those who are Israelites indeed, whose hopes in the Kingdom had perished, and the Kingdom hopes are revived and the promises of God as related thereto are becoming more distinct. Nevertheless, we are not to expect that the "tare" class, the Babylonians, are represented in the movement of the dry bones, but merely the truly consecrated Israelites indeed. The Babylonians would be interested on the other side of the question – interested in perpetuating the greatness of Babylon, and in continuing the bondage of the true Israelites.

Nor do the Kingdom hopes relate merely to the living. The organization of the Lord's faithful will not only include the gathering of the living, but also the gathering of all the members of the body of Christ, for "the dead in Christ shall rise first, and [then] we which are alive and remain shall be caught away together with them, to a meeting of the Lord in the air" – in spiritual power. So many as are able to do so should apply to themselves this feature of this lesson and exert themselves to be of those who shall now shortly be organized as the "Body of Christ," "the Seed of Abraham," the Kingdom of God, to bless the world.
