

Prophecy Fulfilled: The Re-Gathering of Israel

by Don Preston

So That Israel Is Gathered to Him Isaiah 49:5

The Re-Gathering of Israel: Prophecy Fulfilled!

The subject of the re-gathering of Israel is one that garners a great deal of interest and debate in evangelical circles. Zionists tell us that the re-gathering to the literal land of Israel began in 1948, and that event was in fact the "Super Sign of The End" (Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *Charting the End Times*, Harvest House, Eugene, Ore.,). In fact, however, the events of 1948 and following have *nothing* to do with the fulfillment of prophecy. See my *Israel 1948: Countdown to No Where*, available on my websites, for a full discussion of this.

The purpose of this article is to examine just a few of the OT prophecies of the re-gathering in light of the New Testament interpretation of those prophecies. What becomes abundantly clear when we allow the New Testament, Spirit inspired writers, to speak, is we soon discover that they understood that those Old Covenant promises were being fulfilled spiritually in Christ.

Setting the Stage

It needs to be clearly understood that Jesus came to fulfill the OT promises of the gathering of Israel. Paul tells us that Jesus became the servant to the circumcision to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Romans 15:8). Jesus himself said repeatedly that he was sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Likewise, John tells us that Jesus' ministry was "that he might gather together (*sunagage*) in one the children of God who were scattered abroad" (John 11:52). In one of Jesus' last expressions of his ministry, Jesus lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets and kills those sent to you. How often I wanted to gather (*episunagagein*) your children together, as a hen gathers (*episunagei*) her chicks under her wings, but you would not" (Matthew 23:37).

Just from this small sampling of texts, it is undeniably true that Jesus came to re-gather the lost sheep of Israel. The *nature* of that re-gathering is of course the centerpiece of modern eschatological discussions and debates. But let's allow the Bible to settle that debate by examining some key "re-gathering" prophecies.

Isaiah 11:12

"And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble (*sunazei*, LXX) the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."

This Messianic prophecy is highly significant for it focuses on Christ and his work to gather Israel "the second time" from the four winds. The gathering would result in the lamb and wolf laying down together (v. 6), and the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord (v. 9). The Gentiles would then seek the Lord (v. 10), when Ephraim and Judah were re-united (12-13). There are several constituent elements of this great prophecy that the New Testament writers comment upon, and what they have to say is important.

As Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, wrote to the church at Rome, he had been compelled to address the Gentiles who were arguing that Israel had already been cut off. Paul reminded them that their own salvation was dependent on the consummation of God's promises to Israel, and those promises remained valid (Romans 11:15-28). The apostle concluded his discussion of the salvation of Israel by citing several Old Testament prophecies, not only of Israel's re-gathering, but of the calling of the Gentiles that was dependent on that re-gathering.

Notice what Paul does in Romans 15:7f: He calls for unity in the body because of the work of Christ, first of all to confirm the promises made to the Fathers (v. 7-8).

Not only did Jesus confirm those promises, but because of that, the Gentiles could now praise the Lord and call on His name (v. 9-11).

Notice now that Paul quotes Isaiah 11:11 verbatim in v. 12. Why does he do this?

Paul cites Isaiah because Isaiah foretold the raising of the ensign, when Israel would be re-gathered and the nations would likewise be called to serve and worship the God of Israel. To put it another way:

The ensign (Messiah) would be raised to re-gather Israel and call the Gentiles. Christ as Messiah had been raised up and the Gentiles were calling on the Lord. Therefore, Israel had been / was being re-gathered.

It is indisputably true that Paul is appealing to Isaiah's prophecy for his Gentile mission. It is irrefutably true that Isaiah foretold the salvation of the Gentiles "in that day" when Israel would be re-gathered (Isaiah 11:10, 11), i.e. when Messiah was raised. These facts are undeniable.

Paul was not proclaiming a failed messiah or a postponed mission. Paul was citing one of the foundational re-gathering prophecies and saying that his ministry to the Gentiles was a proof positive that Isaiah was being fulfilled. This serves as *prima facie* demonstration that Isaiah's prediction of the re-gathering of Israel was a spiritual re-gathering, not a geographical one.

Isaiah 40:10-11

"Behold, the Lord shall come with a strong hand and His arm shall rule for Him, Behold, His reward is with him and His work before Him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

It will be noticed that in this "gathering" (*sunazei*) prophecy, judgment is inextricably linked with that motif. This passage cannot be speaking of the Incarnation of Jesus for it is patently a judgment / rewarding prophecy. Jesus' Incarnate appearing was when he was revealed as the Suffering Servant, not the judge. Of course, that said, it does not negate the fact that Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10). In other passages that anticipated the judgment, Jesus is spoken of as the Chief Shepherd (cf. Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:1-3). As the good shepherd, Jesus would lead Israel and the nations to living waters (Revelation 7:14f), and the living waters would be in the New Creation after judgment (Revelation 22).

The motif of judgment found in Isaiah 40 is reiterated by Jesus. Notice Matthew 16:27-28: **"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. 28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."**

Here, Jesus all but quotes Isaiah 40 (and Isaiah 62:10f), and places that judgment appearing firmly within his generation. (It should likewise be noted that the gathering / salvation of Isaiah 62 would be the re-marriage of Israel (v. 2-5). Jesus emphatically posited this event in the context of the judgment of Judah (the harlot) in Matthew 22:1-7).

So, Isaiah foretold the re-gathering of Israel by the great Shepherd, at the judgment coming of Messiah, when he would reward his servants. Jesus' in Matthew 16:27-28 posits that rewarding / gathering at the time of his parousia in the first century.

Isaiah 43:5f

"Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him."

This fascinating text is found in the context of YHVH's promise to redeem Israel. Notice that He said He would gather Israel from the four corners of the earth. Jesus alludes directly to this prophecy in Matthew 8:11f: **"And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

Notice the seeming paradox of Jesus' statement. On the one hand, the promised gathering of Isaiah would take place. The promised Messianic Banquet (cf. Isaiah 65:13f), would take place, which means resurrection. However, the blessed event would also occur when **"the sons of the kingdom will be cast out."** How can this be? How could God both re-gather and cast out at the same time?

A full discussion of these two seemingly contradictory themes is beyond the scope of this brief article. However, let me just briefly say that we have here the implicit concept of the salvation of the remnant, at the time of the casting out of

the nation. This concept is found throughout the entirety of the Old Testament prophetic corpus. YHVH never promised to save the entire corporate body of Israel. It was ever and always the corporate body of the *righteous remnant* that would enter the kingdom (cf. Isaiah 65:8-19).

The one thing that is clear in all of this is that the gathering, the redemption, promised in Isaiah and cited by Jesus is that it would take place when the sons of the kingdom were cast out. In the parallel text of Luke 13, this is made even clearer than in Matthew:

"But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. 28 There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. 29 And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God."

Paul also believed that the reception of the inheritance would be when the sons of the kingdom, Old Covenant Israel after the flesh, would be cast out. In Galatians 4 Paul discusses the two covenants and covenant people. He says that because Old Covenant Israel was persecuting the children of promise, i.e. the followers of Christ, they were to be cast out, and "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." Very clearly, the reception of the inheritance of Galatians 4 is the Messianic Banquet in the kingdom of Matthew 8. Thus, again, we have the salvation of the righteous remnant, and the casting out of the corporate majority.

When one couples Isaiah 40:11 with this prophecy, it becomes very apparent that the gathering / salvation of Israel would occur at the coming of the Messiah in judgment, and this would be when Messiah came in judgment of Old Covenant Israel. That is when the sons of the kingdom were cast out.

Isaiah 49:5

"And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered (*sunagagein*) to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength), And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. 7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. 8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages."

Volumes could be written on this one marvelous prophecy! Take note of some of the salient points, however:

The servant of YHVH would re-gather (*sunagagein*) Israel. The referent to the tribes of Jacob and the preserved of Israel lets us know that the re-gathering of the 12 tribes is in view here. This is not just the promise to restore / re-gather the ten tribes, or to restore Judah. This is the last days restoration of the twelve tribes under Messiah!

The re-gathering / restoration of Israel would be too small a work for him, however. Messiah would also shine on the Gentiles manifesting the glory of YHVH to them.

Messiah would make— he would be— God's covenant for the people (v. 6).

This promised restoration / re-gathering of Israel, and the bringing in of the Gentiles, would be, **"In an acceptable time, and in a day of salvation"** (v. 8).

Notice that Israel's restoration and the restoration of the "earth" (Hebrew- *eretz*), would be when the New Covenant was made for the people. Hebrews tells us that Jesus was, when Hebrews was written, **"the surety (*egguous*, meaning *guarantee*) of a new covenant"** (Hebrews 7:22). Now since Messiah was to make the New Covenant, when Israel was restored / re-gathered, and since Christ was, when Hebrews was written, revealing and guaranteeing the New Covenant, then it follows, inexorably, that the promised re-gathering / restoration was taking place! Let's take a closer look now at Jesus' ministry and the promise of Isaiah.

As we have seen, Isaiah foretold that the Servant of YHVH would gather (*sunagago*) the tribes of Jacob (49:5).

The NT bears witness that Jesus came to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15), and to "gather together (sunagage), the children of God scattered abroad" (John 11:52).

Jesus himself said that he came to gather (*episunagagee*) Israel (Matthew 23:37). Israel rejected that offer, however.

As a result of that rejection, the Old Temple, the old gathering place, would be left desolate (Matthew 23:38), and the gospel would then be preached into all the world (Matthew 24:14). At the end of the age– the end of the age represented by the Old Temple– Christ would come:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together (*episunagagee*) his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Christ was going to gather the *elect* (the righteous remnant) in spite of the rejection by the many! And, just as Isaiah 40 depicts the gathering at the judgment coming of the Messiah, Jesus posits the gathering at the time of the judgment against the old "*sunagagee*" (assembly). And he said it would occur in his generation (Matthew 24:34).

Before we delve any deeper into Isaiah 49 and the NT commentary on it, let's take a look at another key OT prophecy of the restoration of Israel. We will then tie Isaiah 49 and this prophecy together.

Ezekiel 37:25-27 "And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Just as Isaiah 49, Ezekiel foretold the restoration of the tribes of Israel, the restoration to the Land, the making of a New Covenant. He then adds the promise of the Messianic Tabernacle / Temple. Now, since Isaiah posited the restoration of Israel, the New Covenant and the Land promises in "the acceptable time, the day of salvation," it therefore follows that those identical constituent elements in Ezekiel 37 likewise belong to "the acceptable time, the day of salvation." To put it another way:

The restoration of Israel would be in "the acceptable time, the day of salvation" (Isaiah 49). But, the Messianic Temple / Tabernacle would be established when Israel was restored (Ezekiel 37).

Therefore, the Messianic Temple / Tabernacle would be established in "the acceptable time, the day of salvation."

This is inescapably true. You cannot posit the identical subjects, elements, motifs and themes at different times. The passages are clearly parallel and foretold the salvation / restoration / re-gathering of Israel. Let's take a look now at what Paul had to say about both Isaiah 49 and Ezekiel 37.

Remember that Paul preached and taught *nothing* but the hope of Israel found in Moses and the prophets. And in one remarkable context, Paul quotes both Isaiah and Ezekiel in such a way as to leave no doubt about how he viewed those prophecies. They were being fulfilled in the body of Christ. To help us with this, take note that in 2 Corinthians 3-6 Paul discusses Ezekiel 37 in-depth. In fact, it is my contention that 2 Corinthians 3-7 comprise Paul's inspired *Midrash*–commentary– on Ezekiel 37 and the promised restoration.

Ezekiel 37 foretold the New Covenant; Paul discusses the New Covenant. Ezekiel promised the out-pouring of the Spirit. Paul discusses the work of the Spirit in delivering the New Covenant. Ezekiel spoke of the resurrection. Paul speaks of the transition from the ministration of death to the ministration of life. Ezekiel spoke of the Messianic Tabernacle, and Paul spoke of the Temple of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And he then makes an astounding statement: "You are the temple of God, as it is written..." (2 Corinthians 6:16). Paul, writing to the church at Corinth said they were what Ezekiel 37 foretold!

It must not be forgotten that the church at Corinth was established in the synagogue. The ones who turned to Christ were not only children of God by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), but they were also of the bloodline of Abraham. They were the righteous remnant!

To put it another way, Peter said that the Jews that did not obey Jesus as Messiah and follow him, would be "utterly destroyed out from among the people" (Acts 3:23, my translation). This means that the blood line Jews that followed Jesus as Messiah were the true seed of Israel and were inheritors of the promises. They were the righteous remnant. This is why Paul could say: "Israel has not obtained that which he sought, but the elect has obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Romans 11:7—See my six lesson series on Romans 11:7 available on this site). As promised in the Old Testament, the righteous remnant was receiving the promises. This is why Paul could say that the church in Corinth was the promised Messianic Tabernacle promised in Ezekiel.

There really is no escaping the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16. Paul is unequivocal and emphatic: "You are the temple of God, as it is written" cannot be construed to mean that the church was *not* what was promised. And Paul had plenty of words at his disposal to say that the church was a foretaste of what was promised, but he did not use any of those words. And, since in the millennial scheme of things the church is nothing even closely resembling what was promised, it cannot be argued that Paul was saying, "you are something like what was promised."

So, Paul's emphatic declaration, "you are the temple of God, as it is written" demands that the re-gathering / restoration / salvation of Israel was underway. *You can't have a temple without a "land."* And in Jewish thought, you can't have a temple without a city, the city of Jerusalem. This is why Paul taught that the church is also the "Heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:21f), the "Jerusalem that is above" (Galatians 4), etc.. So, for Paul to assert the *spiritual reality* of the Messianic Temple and the New Jerusalem forces us to re-examine the idea of "the land." But that is beyond the scope of this article.

Paul is not through discussing the hope of Israel in 2 Corinthians 6. It should be noted at this time that in chapter 5:18f Paul discusses "the ministry of reconciliation" that had been given to him. Should we see Paul's discussion of this topic simply within the generic context of reconciling all men to himself? Or should we see this within the framework of the restoration of Israel, that would *lead to* the reconciliation of man to God? It seems to me that the latter is by far the more accurate position.

We need to turn back to Isaiah 49 to properly grasp the power of Paul's discussion in Corinthians. Remember that in that prophecy, (v. 5f), Messiah would not only save the twelve tribes of Israel, he would share that salvation with the nations! Would not the salvation of the twelve tribes be a ministry of reconciliation? And, would not the offering of salvation to the *goyim* (the Gentiles) on an equality with the tribes of Jacob not be an *incredible* ministry of reconciliation? To break down the barriers between Judah and Ephraim would itself be a remarkable reconciliation, and this is precisely what the prophets foretold: "The envy of Ephraim shall depart and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off. Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim" (Isaiah 11:13). Here is reconciliation! And how much more so is this true of the reconciliation of Gentiles to the twelve tribes?

With this in mind, consider once again the make-up of the church at Corinth. It was established in the synagogue, so, as noted, comprised the faithful remnant of Israel. But it also included the *helenas*, the Greeks (Acts 18:4; cf. John 7:35). These are not simply hellenized Jews (*i.e. the hellenistes*, cf. Acts 6, 9). They are in the truest sense Gentiles. So, in the church at Corinth we find the very kind of "reconciliation" foretold by Isaiah 49. The "Jews" of the diaspora were being reconciled to one another in Christ, and the Gentiles were likewise being reconciled. What a powerful, powerful picture of the grace of Christ!

But of course, all was not well in the church. The Judaizers were at work. Likewise, the Jewish attitudes toward eating of meats sacrificed to idols, practiced by the Gentile members, was causing strife and conflict. Many of the old animosities and prejudices were re-surfacing. That eclectic group needed to be reminded of the grace of Christ, the ministry of reconciliation that had brought them together. Read now Paul's words:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation). (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:1-2).

What an incredible text! Paul calls on them to not make light of the gospel of grace that had brought them together into one body. And how does he do this? He cites, *verbatim*, Isaiah 49:8!

Isaiah foretold that in the days of the Messiah, YHVH would reconcile the twelve tribes. He would reconcile the Gentiles. All of this would be in "the acceptable time, the day of salvation." And Paul is emphatic, "*now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation." There could hardly be a more powerful expression of prophecy fulfilled than this, and the implications are profound!

The time of Israel's re-gathering and salvation would be in the acceptable time, the day of salvation (Isaiah 49).

But, Paul said, "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. " The predicted time was present in his day and in his ministry (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

Therefore, the time of Israel's re-gathering and salvation was present in Paul's day and in his ministry.

(It is critical to note that the time of Israel's salvation is also the time of the *resurrection* (Isaiah 25:8-9). Thus, for Paul to affirm that the day of salvation anticipated by Isaiah was present is a powerful statement that the time of the resurrection had arrived. See my *We Shall Meet Him In The Air* for a lengthy discussion of Isaiah 49. That book is available on this website).

So, there can be no doubt. Isaiah foretold the re-gathering of the twelve tribes and the salvation of the Gentiles in the acceptable time, the day of salvation. Paul affirmed, through inspiration of the Spirit, that the predicted time had come, and that ministry of reconciliation to bring Judah and Israel, along with the Gentiles, to YHVH was being fulfilled in the body of Christ! (See Ephesians 1:9f).

Summary

In this brief excursus we have examined several of the key OT prophecies of the re-gathering of Israel. We have seen that the promised re-gathering would be when the ensign of Messiah would be raised, and the nations would come to him. Paul affirms that Christ was that ensign, and that Israel and the nations were being called to Christ as promised.

We have seen that the consummation of the in-gathering would be at the judgment coming of Messiah, and that Jesus said-- citing Isaiah-- that his coming was to be in his generation.

We have seen that the promised re-gathering of Israel from the four winds would also be when "the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out." We have shown that Jesus posited that re-gathering from the four winds was to be in his generation.

We have seen that two of the key re-gathering prophecies, Isaiah 49 and Ezekiel 37, are specifically quoted by Paul as being fulfilled in Christ and the church, as the righteous remnant of Israel joined with the *goyim*, the Gentiles, to form one new man in Messiah.

The only conclusion that one can draw from Paul's citation of Ezekiel and Isaiah 49 is that the fulfillment of these prophecies was taking place in the first century. Paul gives not one single hint that he was citing those prophecies in any other sense than that of fulfillment. He does not say that what was happening in his day was the sign of what would one day, by and by, take place. He did not indicate that the church was typological of a yet future fulfillment of those prophecies. He most assuredly did not say that virtually nothing foretold by those prophecies was being fulfilled. Instead, he says "you are the temple of God, as it is written" and, "now is the accepted time; behold, today is the day of salvation."

Paul's emphatic and undeniable statements force us to re-evaluate modern Zionistic concepts of the "re-gathering" of the so-called "lost tribes" of Israel. Paul had not, and never did abandon his "one hope" which was the hope of Israel (Ephesians 4:4f; Acts 28:20f). The gospel and the one hope that he taught, he taught from the Old Testament prophets (Romans 16:25f). This means that when Paul cited the OT prophecies of the re-gathering / restoration of Israel that was to take place in the last days, and he says that those promises were being fulfilled in the righteous remnant being called into Christ, that through the Spirit, Paul was revealing *the true meaning* of those Old Covenant promises. And for Paul, that fulfillment had nothing to do with being re-gathered into a geo-centric locale, into a physical city, focused on a pure blood line nation. 1948 therefore had *nothing* to do with the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. The promises were being fulfilled spiritually in Christ and his church.