

THE KISS OF THE SOIL

MY DEAR FRIENDS, in this the tenth message in this current series we continue careful examination of the Divine prophecies through the prophet Ezekiel.

In my last message I gave you three peeps into Israel's prophesied future prosperity.

Allow me to refresh your memory. We found promised in that book, the Bible, a monarchical prosperity under a Divinely-bestowed Shepherd Prince; secondly, a material prosperity under a Divinely-inaugurated supernatural productiveness; and thirdly, a manifold prosperity under a Divinely-initiated spiritual palengensis.

Our peep into the theme of the coming Shepherd Prince was packed with interest for us all — this I know; we shall find the remaining two features equally absorbing.

Over on the western edge of Asia there is a land, a precious land, a promised land; it is also a very ancient land. It was known of old as ארץ כנען, “the land of Canaan.”

The word כנען is derived from a verb meaning “to be bowed down,” “to be low”; hence כנען really means “lowland,” although there are many elevated places throughout the country of Israel.

Canaan was its name in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and this land, flowing with milk and honey, was included in the total grant unconditionally bestowed upon Abraham and his selected descendants, the Jewish people, the people of Israel, by the Divine gift of the Eternal God of the Universe.

During the monarchical period of Israel's history it became known as ארץ ישראל, “the land of Israel,” and this is the title our prophet Ezekiel delights to employ.

Much later in history, the Romans gave the land the name Palestine, a name which has clung to the Holy Land until recent days when, on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed and, technically, Palestine ceased to be, and Ezekiel's favourite title ארץ ישראל, “land of Israel,” once more became the melodious designation of the land of milk and honey.

Impressive, is it not, that Ezekiel's cherished appellation should reappear in these very times when, as I believe, Ezekiel's prophecies are pertinent?

The State of Israel was admitted as a member of the United Nations on May 11, 1949.

Israel, as it is today (1958),* is only 260 miles long and 70 miles across at its widest point, and it comprises about 8,100 square miles — somewhere about the size of New Jersey.

Although this area is admittedly small, it possesses variety and sharp contrast in a most marked degree.

By their distinctive characteristics, several regions claim and receive individual recognition; there are the Maritime and Coastal Plains, the Valley of Jezreel, the Judean Hills, the Galilee area, the amazing Jordan Valley, and the equally amazing Negev.

Phenomenal contrasts and gradations in climate, coupled with an unusual fertility of soil have made possible the cultivation of a wide variety of crops with prodigious harvests.

I think you will be interested to know that the isothermal line of mean annual temperature of Jerusalem passes through California and Alabama and, according to Dr. Barclay, there is a close analogy in temperature and the periodicity of the seasons between Israel and California.

This, then, is the bountiful land, soaked and saturated in sacred scene and circumstance, regarding which we read that

“The Eternal spoke unto Moses saying, ‘Send you men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel!’ ... So they went up and searched the land ... And they ... cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bore it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.” (Numbers 13)

Yes, even in those ancient days it was a land flowing with milk and honey; but more than this, it was a land singled out by Divine selection for special solicitude.

In these days we hear much of the word “security” and I guess security is something for which we all long: but how little we realize that security was just the very benefaction that God gave to Israel. Listen to these words of the Eternal to Israel His people:

“If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.” (Leviticus 26:3-5)

Sorrowfully, we acknowledge our failure to appreciate and appropriate this Divine provision and, as we have seen in past messages, the predicted גלות, Dispersion, Diaspora, scattering among the nations, fell upon us.

Israel suffered, that we know; and so did the land! That same 26th chapter of Vayikra (Leviticus) from which I have just quoted also contains these words:

“And I will scatter you among the nations . . . and your land shall be desolate . . . ” (v 33)

The land desolate! Weary century succeeded weary century during which the land, parted from Israel her lover, sat indolent and dejected, wailing her threnody in listless languor.

In the year 1697 of the Common Era, Henry Maundrel described the land as being “nothing but bare rocks,” whilst Dr. Olin refers to “bare rocks where formerly were vineyards and cornfields.”

But, my friends, the prophets of Israel were granted a view of Israel’s material prosperity in that very same land of Israel under a Divinely–inaugurated supernatural productiveness.

Listen to these glowing words of the prophet ישעיהו, Isaiah:

“You shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall your land any more be termed Desolate: but you shall be called חפציבה, and thy land בעולה: for the Eternal delights in you, and your land shall be married.” (Isaiah 62:4)

Our prophet Ezekiel catches up the glad refrain:

“And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden ...” (Ezekiel 36:35)

My friends, as I stood upon the heights of Nazareth, in Eretz Yisrael, and my eyes swept the green glory of the Emek Jezreel as it is today, I would need those very words to convey to your minds something of the metamorphosis that has occurred already in the Promised Land.

Five major waves of homing exiles reached the land once desolate; 35,000 during 1919 to 1923; 82,000 during 1924 through 1931; the third wave from 1932 to the outbreak of World War II brought another 225,000; then the fourth wave consisted of at least another 110,000.

The fifth wave lapped the shores of Israel the day the State of Israel achieved independence. As speedily as the end of 1950 more than 510,000 newcomers had arrived in this fifth movement.

As the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea kissed the shores of Israel, God draped the blue with the white fringe of snow–soft foam in natural display of Israel’s national colours — blue and white — to welcome the returning ones.

The drooping, widowed soil raised parchment face and hollow eyes as she heard the first faint footfall of returning Israel; she rewarded their glad reunion with a fervent fruitfulness that changed the drab and dismal scene into multi–coloured and entrancing vistas of fecund beauty that spilled a perfumed fragrance into the animated air of Israel.

But I am persuaded that even the transformation of today is not the fullness of fulfilment of the Ezekiel prediction; the present fruitfulness is mostly the product of human effort, very worthy and very loving human effort but, nevertheless, mostly human effort.

When, however, God Himself directly and purposively woos the soil of Israel, harvests copious, prolific and plenteous will gladden the hearts of the inhabitants and bring songs of thankfulness to Him Who is able to produce streams in the desert.

It is this quality of wealth which, among other inducements, will, I believe, entice the great, godless power located north of Israel, into an abortive invasion of the Promised Land “**in the latter days.**” This is a subject which will claim our attention in our messages immediately ensuing.

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(1900-1964)

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