

## THE SHEPHERD PRINCE

MY FRIENDS, in my last message we visited the eerie prophetic valley described in the 37th chapter of Ezekiel and popularly known as the **“valley of dry bones,”** but which I presumed to retile the **“VALLEY OF DEAD HOPE.”**

Hear the prophet יחזקאל, that is, Ezekiel, is Divinely shown the utter hopelessness of Israel’s national condition in the גלות, the dispersion, the scattering, among the Gentile nations of the world.

Yes, hopeless indeed, humanly speaking; yet, commenting upon this very 37th chapter, one of our rabbis has declared: “Israel’s restoration could not be achieved by human power, but only by the spirit of God.”

What the rabbi has said is true, and Ezekiel is granted the Divine revelation that what Israel cannot achieve by human effort that same Spirit of God will perform by Divine power.

You will remember that I gave chapters 33 through 39 the title “The Messianic Kingdom Imminent,” for these chapters speak prophetically of the Restoration of Israel.

I now ask you to observe that these seven chapters give us three pictures of Israel’s future prosperity.

Listen carefully whilst I itemize them for you —

First, Israel’s monarchical prosperity through a Shepherd Prince;

Secondly, Israel’s material prosperity through a supernatural productiveness;

Thirdly, Israel’s manifold prosperity through a spiritual palengensis.

The first picture, the subject of this message, incidentally, is painted for us in chapters 33 and 34.

Here we see the Eternal God of Israel, ברוך הוא, blessed be He, sorrowing over the deplorable condition of the careless people and the erring shepherds of Israel.

Assuming the initiative in this sad situation, the Eternal appoints Ezekiel to be His watchman to warn the misled nation and its misleading shepherds; then, with a touching revelation of Divine love and solicitude for Israel’s well-being, the Eternal Himself grants tender promises of future fealty:

**“For thus says the Eternal God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. (Ezekiel 34:11)**

**“And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. (v:13)**

**“And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Eternal will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Eternal have spoken it. (v:23, 24)**

The Scripture I have just quoted will be found in Ezekiel’s thirty-fourth chapter.

Before proceeding any further, and for the benefit of those who may need the information, let me add that the prophet Ezekiel lived many centuries after the great King David so lovingly referred to as the “sweet psalmist of Israel.”

Since Ezekiel was not prophesying backwards into the past but forwards into the, then, future, some of my listeners may be threatened with a chronological confusion regarding the reference to David which the Eternal made through the lips of Ezekiel. Who is this David to whom Ezekiel refers?

Well, surely I cannot do better than to quote the words of that great Jewish commentator Rabbi Meir Loeb Malbim (1809–1879), one-time chief rabbi at Bucharest, who says, “while ‘king’ signifies a political ruler, ‘shepherd’ denotes a spiritual leader. The Messiah will combine both offices.”

Rabbi Malbim, I am convinced, is correct in his reference to המשיח, the Messiah.

But what does the term “Messiah” connote? What are its implications? Well, if we really do want to know we shall have to wash from our definitions the blinding dust of our preconceived ideas, and we can best do this by plunging them beneath the crystal waters of Divine revelation which flow from the Holy Scriptures.

Before we thus cleanse our ideas from human misconceptions, let me tell you a story.

At an important and somewhat tense international conference where several foreign delegates were assembled, the weather being warm, the polyglot waiter was beckoned to a certain table to supply some liquid refreshment. “Flasche Wasser bitte,” was the request of one. “Pour moi,” ejaculated the Frenchman, “Je desire un verre d’eau.”

Gravely the waiter turned to the third person, who said:

תן לי כים מים בבקשה.

In response to the interrogative look of the imperturbable waiter, the fourth gentleman, an Englishman, said, “Oh! I don’t want anything like these, thank you. Just fetch me a glass of water; that’ll do.”

When the stoical waiter returned and, with tranquil serenity, set only pure water in front of all four, there was an exchange of smiles among those delegates which promised to make mutual understanding between them as clear as the water now standing before each one.

Let us think of this whilst we attempt to strip from our definitions some of the obscurities with which difference of language may have clothed them.

The word משיח is a Hebrew word; it is derived from the root משה which has the basic meaning “to anoint.” Among oriental nations it was quite a common practice to anoint the head or body with oil. Such an action assumed a religious significance, particularly in the nation of Israel where prophets were occasionally anointed to their office (I Kings 19:16; I Chronicles 16:22; Psalm 105:15); initially Israel’s priests were also anointed (Exodus 40:15; Numbers 3:3) though towards the end of the Israelite economy only the High Priest seems to have enjoyed this dignity.

The anointing of Israel’s kings was quite an early practice, and was a Divinely appointed ceremony (I Samuel 9:16, etc). Very few realize that the great King David was three times anointed as king – first by Samuel under Divine instruction (I Samuel 16:1,13), then over Judah at Hebron (II Samuel 2:4), and thirdly over the entire nation (II Samuel 5:3).

The person thus anointed became known as the “anointed one”; now we know that the Anglicized English word “Messiah” possesses the same meaning as the Hebrew word משיח and means, simply, the one anointed of God to a particular function.

Our Jewish Scriptures teach that this literal or material anointing of prophet, priest and king was to instruct Israel to understand better the function of a supreme Anointed One Who would combine in Himself the three fold function of prophet, priest and king and Whose anointing would be the anointing of רוח השם, the Spirit of God.

Some three hundred years before the Common Era, our Jewish Hebrew Scriptures were translated from the Hebrew language into the Greek language and, consequently, the Hebrew expression המשיח appeared in the Greek language as Ho Kristus, which Greek expression was brought over into the English language by a word which, unfortunately I think, is neither English, Greek, nor Hebrew – I refer to the word “CHRIST.”

In the future when you hear this word “CHRIST,” you will know that it has the same basic meaning as the Hebrew word “משיח,” the Greek word “Kristos,” and the English word “Anointed.”

Remember the foreign delegates and their glass of water, won’t you?

Moses ben Maimon (1135–1204), better known simply as Maimonides, makes twin affirmations with which I find myself in hearty concurrence. Here they are:

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שכל דברי נביאים אמת

“I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the Prophets are true.”

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה בביאת המשיח

“I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah . . .”

These are grand affirmations, my friends, and may the Eternal, blessed be He, spare us from stolid incredulity regarding the advent of this blessed Being, the Messiah, for the restoration of Israel and the reign of the Messiah are linked together as successive events in Scripture predictive prophecy.

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**(1900-1964)**

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