

THE CANON OF DOUBLE SENSE

This message is listed as “Tiresome Happy” on the audio series, Treasures from Tenach on the website, www.thevineyard.org.au; 006tiresomehappy.mp

MY FRIENDS, it was the French philosopher and historian Montesquieu (1689–1755) who said: “Happy the people whose annals are tiresome.”

How truly he spoke! Yet, tiresome is a word that could never be applied to the annals of Israel; on the contrary, Israel’s history has fascinated multitudes of all nations down the centuries.

It is, unfortunately, equally true that the word “happy” could scarcely be employed to describe the sustained condition of the people of Israel throughout the ages.

Truly, neither tiresome nor happy are the annals of Israel.

Of course, the same could be said of other nations, but, as we have seen in my previous messages, Israel alone, as a nation, received a Divine call to perfect a Divine purpose; but Israel’s self-written history is frank acknowledgement of a poor performance.

Yet Israel’s poor national performance did not frustrate the Divine purpose; but it did charge Israel’s annals with experiences neither tiresome nor — unfortunately — happy; nevertheless, the nation’s history weaves a clearly discernible and perfect pattern of the unfolding drama of Divine world redemption.

“**Your kingdom come**” is no vain petition, of that I am fully persuaded, and the people and nation of Israel, the Jewish people and nation, are inextricably woven into that Divine redemptive purpose.

We shall see all this in that God-inspired volume very erroneously designated the “Old Testament,” but which would be more correctly titled — I think — “The Book of the Divine Kingdom,” and which is affectionately known to us Jewish people as the Tenach.

The Tenach reveals that in the more than 1200 years of Israel’s chequered history before the Common Era there have been tragic captivities and glad restorations.

These historic circumstances were invariably used by the Eternal God of Israel to speak to the nation a message of hope regarding a great Final Restoration; indeed, no dark night of Israel’s annals was left unrelieved by the bright gleam of future promise.

In Israel’s vicissitudes, three captivities stand out prominently. You will be familiar with them, I am sure: the Egyptian captivity of 215 years from 1706 to 1491 B.C.E. from which captivity Moses delivered Israel: then the Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C.E. from which there was no deliverance; and, thirdly, the seventy-year Babylonian captivity.

The ancient Babylonian power was the rod in the hand of the Eternal by which He chastised the Southern Israel Kingdom of Judah; yet at the same time, through His prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel, the ultimate overthrow of Babylon itself was predicted (Isaiah 47, cf. Isaiah 10:5–19; Jeremiah 25:12; Jeremiah 50–51; Daniel 5).

This overthrow took place in the year 538 before the Common Era. To this date two years must be added for the beginning of the separate reign of Cyrus, the Persian, and thus we have the 70 years from 606 to 536 B.C.E. which was the historic fulfilment of Jeremiah's famous prophecy of the 70 years of Babylonian chastisement as pre-announced by him and recorded in chapter 29 and verse 10 of the book bearing his name.

Thus, Israelitish history knows only two Exodus movements: one into Israel from Egypt, and the other, some 950 years later, into Israel from Babylon.

Fortunately, we can assess the magnitude and quality of the Babylonian Exodus, as history provides us with the most minute detail of the venturesome pilgrims who embarked on that four-months' migration across the forbidding and unsympathetic desert in the year 536 B.C.E.

In this first stage of the return from Babylon, of all the multitude of captives only a mere 42,360 returned — besides 7,337 slaves and 4,000 priests, with a protecting escort of 1,000 cavalry.

Some of the ecstasy of those returning to Israel from the Babylonian captivity may well be captured from Psalm 126:

“When the Eternal turned again the captivity of Zion,

We were like them that dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter,

And our tongue with singing:

Then said they among the nations,

‘The Eternal has done great things for them!’

The Eternal has done great things for us;

Whereof we are glad.”

So, my friends, in the second year, that is in B.C.E. 535, the foundation of the Second Temple was laid amidst difficulty and opposition, hence the edifice itself was not finished until B.C.E. 516, twenty years after the return.

Some 78 years after this first stage, in the year 458 B.C.E., Ezra led a caravan of perhaps, well, some 5,000 souls back to Israel in the second stage of the return from Babylon.

Then, in the year 445 B.C.E., Nehemiah completed the return, being himself almost the final instalment.

Now, I know that this brief peep into Israel's annals has been sufficiently interesting to you in itself; but, let me confess, I have an additional reason for disclosing its details.

You will remember that, in my last message, we paid a breathless and rather exciting visit to the very centre of this third captivity — the awe-inspiring, ancient city of Babylon. We paid this visit in order to view the scene and circumstance out of which our great Jewish prophet Ezekiel uttered his amazing prophecies of the Final Restoration, for it was to Ezekiel in Babylon that a wealth of dramatic detail was Divinely vouchsafed regarding the new Israel and the future Messianic Kingdom.

Now, here is the point of my present message.

My friends, careful examination of all the Ezekiel prophecies and an equally careful examination of Jewish national history reveal that it is quite impossible to pour the full volume of Ezekiel's predictions into the very limited dimensional capacity of the meagre return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity; there is a great residue of prophetic detail which overflows the mere historic vessel.

Thus, when we measure the magnitude and meaning of Ezekiel's prophecies against the historic Babylonian return, we find — to use an illustration — that the prophetic foot will not fit into the historic boot: the boot is too small for the foot; the foot is too large for the boot.

Well, then, what are we to do with this situation? Perhaps, we should admit that some interpretations have been ingenious and others wild and fanciful.

Shall we follow some and tear the historic boot apart to force the prophetic foot into a boot thus mutilated?

Or shall we follow others and surgically amputate not a few parts of the prophetic foot to make it fit the historic boot?

I confess both these suggestions are unnatural and highly unsatisfying. Personally, I prefer equally to avoid a mutilated historic boot and a disfigured prophetic foot.

Yet the phenomenon to which I refer remains. Is there an explanation? Of course there is. A reasonable and a proven one. Theologically, it is known as the Canon of Double Sense, by which is meant that a first historic accomplishment, chronologically near at hand, employs some of the properties of the total predictions without necessarily absorbing or exhausting them, but leaves the prophetic total itself to an occasion chronologically more remote.

Thus the earlier historic movement becomes married to the initial predictive prophecy preceding it to combine with it in forming an even more formidable attestation and assurance of full historic fulfilment of the total content of the prediction in the more remote occasion.

Rest assured, my friends, that Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch is absolutely correct when he says that,

“Ezekiel predicted not only the return from the Babylonian exile ... but also the ultimate redemption and regeneration of Israel in a distant age in the future.”

Yes, the rabbi has correctly applied the Canon of Double Sense to the Ezekiel prophecies and now, with our shared knowledge of this proven principle of prophetic interpretation, we shall be better able in my next message to assess the current Restoration of Israel and its possible relation to a mighty menacing power just north of the new-born State.

Dr Lawrence Duff-Forbes

(1900-1964)

Founding Director of David House Fellowship Inc.

This article is an extract from the very popular radio series, "Treasures From Tenach", which are also transcribed. Both audio (click MP3 tab, then "006tiresomehappy.mp3", and transcriptions are available for free download at www.thevineyard.org.au