

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 27—Ezekiel #3
Ezekiel 36-37 – Dry Bones and Two Sticks, Prophecy/Fulfillment

Ezekiel 33 – Jerusalem Has Fallen

In Ezekiel 33:22 it says, “Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.” It was in Ezekiel chapter 3 where it said that he would be silent. But in any case, the city of Jerusalem is smitten, and now what he does is turn to prophesy concerning future blessing. So the issue that had been in question, you might say, is settled. Ezekiel was right. Judgment had come on Jerusalem. Further judgment had happened. He had told the exiles, “You were not going back to Jerusalem, for Jerusalem is going to be destroyed.” Now that had happened. Ezekiel at this point doesn’t say, “I told you so,” or reapproach them with that kind of attitude. Instead, he turns to the future and points out things that are going to happen in the future.

Select Passages for Ezekiel 36 in Context (Restoration)

So in this section then, beginning in chapter 34, you look into the future. I want to just take some selective passages again from a section; you notice one is chapter 36. It’s a rather lengthy chapter, but there are 3 verses that certainly stand out, and they are verses 25-27, where we read, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Now, when you read verses like that, isolated from their context, I think you could almost say this is descriptive of the new birth, if not a prediction of the new birth. It seems to describe exactly what we experience in connection with regeneration and the new birth.

But how are these verses related to the context? That's what's interesting. If you look at verse 24 and the beginning of verse 28, they form almost a parentheses around those three verses 25-27. Chapter 36, verse 24 says, "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land." And 28 says, "And you shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers, and you shall be my people and I will be your God." So they're set in the context of a return of Israel to the land when the Lord will do this – give them a new heart and put his Spirit within them.

Now the question is: What is described in these verses? Has that been fulfilled or is it yet to be fulfilled? When we look at the history of interpretations of this passage with commentators, we find that the commentators are divided about how to assess this. I think in your bibliography, we are under Roman numeral III: B. 1., page 7 of your bibliography. I have in the first entry there D.C.H. Aalders who is a Dutch commentator, volume 2 of his Ezekiel commentary. Unfortunately it was written in Dutch, but it is a very useful commentary in a lot of respects. Here's what Aalders says on page 194, "This is a rich promise of restoration, which went into fulfillment with the return of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. With this, attention should be especially given to the total reversal of viewpoint which is described – the moral and religious improvement as the work of God's Spirit, in particular, and an end shall come to the idolatrous practices that constantly had to be rebuked by the prophets before the captivity." You see what Aalders is suggesting is that this has been fulfilled, and it was fulfilled in the return from captivity and thus emphasis on the return to the land.

But let's go back to verse 8. I will read chapter 36, verses 8 through 15: "But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, and I will multiply the number of people upon you, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then

you will know that I am the LORD. I will cause people, my people Israel, to walk upon you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children. This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because people say to you, “You devour men and deprive your nation of its children,” therefore you will no longer devour men or make your nation childless,’ declares the Sovereign LORD. ‘No longer will I make you hear the taunts of the nations, and no longer will you suffer the scorn of the peoples or cause your nation to fall,’ declares the Sovereign LORD.”

Now you notice particularly the last few verses of that section, verse 14 for example, is speaking of the land of Canaan. “You shall devour men no more.” What’s it mean--To devour men? If you look at Numbers 13:32, it says, “And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said--this is the spies who went out to spy out the land--“The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.” See, the spies were afraid to go up into the land of Canaan because they were afraid of being defeated. “The land we explored devours those living in it.” It seems to me the Lord is saying here in Ezekiel that the land is no more going to devour men; there’s not going to be war there anymore. ““Therefore you will no longer devour men or make your nation childless,’ declares the Sovereign LORD. ‘No longer will I make you hear the taunts of the nations, and no longer will you suffer the scorn of the peoples or cause your nation to fall,’ declares the Sovereign LORD.” It’s not going to be a territory that is subdued by foreigners or overrun.

If you go to the following context, look at Ezekiel 36:29 and following, verse 29 says, “I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake,’ declares the Sovereign LORD. ‘Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt.’”

Notice what God will do, “On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettlement your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, ‘This land that was laid waste has become like the Garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited. Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep, as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.’”

I would think that someone listening to this message in the time of Ezekiel might well think that this was going to happen in the not too distant future at the point of time of return from exile – 70 years they were supposed to be in exile.

Beyond the Return from Exile – Church or Future Return of Israel to Its Land

You might say that you could see some aspects of this fulfilled in the return from exile but I don’t think that sufficiently explains all the details that are mentioned here. It seems to me that you have to look elsewhere, particularly when you read chapter 36, verse 14, that the land will no longer devour men. Read verse 35: “This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden. The wastes of ruined cities have become fortified.” It doesn’t seem to me that you can say the situation in Canaan after the return from exile fulfilled those conditions. There was continual disorder in the land after return from exile and warfare continued, particularly when you think of the time of Daniel that he described, referring to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes from the Maccabean period. The cities weren’t built and desolate places inhabited, and certainly the land did not appear like the Garden of Eden.

Well, in any case, if you read Ezekiel 36, verses 25 through 27, you get back to the heart of the chapter, which in context is return to the land. But I think you could say that

it does describe what the Christian is and what the Christian receives from the Lord at the point of regeneration. Then you could ask the question, is this a description of the beginning of the Christian Church? Is that where you're to look for its fulfillment? Chapter 36, verses 25-27, is that a prediction of the beginning of the Church? If so, what do you do with the context? Or is it a description of God's dealing with the nation Israel to some extent far greater than he ever had before at some future time? At this future time, that nation would be reestablished and the Jewish people would be brought back to the land that he had promised to them, to Abraham and to his descendants.

It seems to me that particularly chapter 36, verses 12 through 15, and verses 33 to 38, as I have mentioned, suggest that we cannot find adequate fulfillment in the return from exile. Neither does it do justice to that emphasis on return to the land if you try to find fulfillment of verses 25-27 in the Church. So it seems to me that the only option is to look for a future fulfillment of this prophecy in connection with the return of Israel to the land. So it seems to me that it is a strong passage for looking for a future return of the Jewish people to the Lord in the land to which he will bring them back.

Ellison – Church and New Covenant (Jer. 31-34)

Look at page 50 of your citations; there's a little book by H. L. Ellison called *Ezekiel: the man and his message* – it's in your bibliography. But look also on page 50 of your citations, second half of the page, from pages 129-130. He is commenting on this passage. He says, "We must pause, however, for a few minutes to consider a question which may have been growing in the mind of some readers. Is not Ezekiel, in fact, prophesying the Church in these chapters? Is not the Church the new Israel? And so far as the Jew is envisioned are not these promises fulfilled spiritually for him when he is converted and becomes a member of the Church? It is beyond cavalier or question, that what the Lord promises Israel in Ezekiel 36:24-27 and Jeremiah 31-34...."

You see, Jeremiah 31-34 promises a new covenant. It's very similar to verses 25, 26, and 27. It seems that whatever these two passages are talking about, they are talking about the same thing. Ellison continues, "It is beyond cavalier or question that what the

Lord promises Israel is what he has done for us in Jesus Christ. The fulfillment for Israel can neither be greater nor less nor other than for us. Yet it is noteworthy that the former passage, that is the Ezekiel passage, is not quoted in the New Testament. And that the latter, that is the Jeremiah 31 passage, lies behind Mark 14:24 and parallels and is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16.” That’s the references to the new covenant passage. But he says, “It is given in terms of description rather than fulfillment,” I think he’s right in that. “By which I mean that there is no suggestion that the promise has been exhausted in the Church’s enjoyment of it.”

Problem with the “Church View”

“Now what is exactly promised in Jeremiah 31 is what we experience as believers in Christ, as members of the Church. It is what we experience but it’s not that that passage is specifically predicting that we participated in some blessing. So it’s given in terms of description rather than fulfillment. By which I mean there is no suggestion that it’s exhausted in the Church’s enjoyment of the promises. We do enjoy what is exactly described here. We do not question that assertion that the promises made under the Old Covenant have been lifted to a new level and fulfillment in the new. This means that the language in which it promises, must as often as not be regarded as symbolic rather than literal.

“But it is one thing to recognize the symbolic nature of so much prophetic promise, it is quite another to spiritualize it to mean something quite different than it could possibly have meant to the original hearers. The transferal of symbolic images is harder than many think, and hence, the grossly materialistic nature of much modern prophetic interpretation. But the spiritualization of Scripture is seldom a spiritual process. It is normally the substitution of the expositor’s own views for the teachings of Scripture.”

“Unless,” top of page 51, “he can give full weight,”--I think it’s a good statement-- “full weight to the transformed land of Israel in chapter 36, and to the national resurrection of Israel, chapter 37, the expositor has no right to banish the Israel and the

Old Covenant from the picture in favor of the Church.” In other words, what he is saying is that he doesn’t think even though we enjoy the blessings of regeneration described in chapter 36, verses 25-27, it’s not right simply then to spiritualize the rest of chapter 36 about returning to the land. He says that it all applies in some spiritual sense to the Church. Yet there’s too much emphasis on Israel’s return to the land. You have to do justice to that. “So unless you can give full weight to the transformed land of Israel, and the national resurrection of Israel, the expositor has no right to banish Israel of the Old Covenant to the picture in favor of the Church.” On the other hand, we are under no obligation to distort the whole balance of both by entering in discussion of the most difficult problem of the relation of the old people of God to the new, of the saved, of “all Israel” (Romans 11:26) as the body of Christ.

On Continuity and Discontinuity (Ezek 36 and Jer. 31)

There is a certain continuity and certain discontinuity there. Exactly how do we work that out? But I do think his emphasis is correct that there is quite a stress on return to the land and on the type of situation that’s going to exist when Israel returns to the land: rebuilding her cities, becoming like the Garden of Eden, no more consuming its inhabitants. You can’t do justice to that simply to say this is a prophecy of the Church. In other words, as he suggests, what Jeremiah 31, when that is quoted in Hebrews 8 and 10, it’s given in terms of description rather than fulfillment. See the second paragraph, “By which I mean there is no suggestion that the promise has been exhausted in the Church’s enjoyment of it.” The Church is enjoying precisely that – it’s describing what the church enjoys. But it is specifically predictive of the situation of when Israel returns to the land. Again, when we look at Jeremiah 31, it’s in the context of return to the land. It is the same promise just as it is in Ezekiel 36. But these promises serve as a type of the blessings of peace the Church enjoys.

If you look at Jeremiah 31, in context I think it’s the same problem as here in Ezekiel 36. Verse 31 says, “When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” And then it describes what that is, which is very similar to

this passage in Ezekiel, but then in verse 35, right after that –“This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-- the LORD Almighty is his name: ‘Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,’ declares the LORD, ‘will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.’” God links the continued existence of Israel as a nation with the creation description of the sun and the moon, providing for measurement of times and days and seasons and years. As long as there are days, there’s going to be a nation of Israel. “This is what the LORD says: ‘Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,’ declares the LORD.” So again the context of things is quite strong, that what is being spoken there is specifically predictive of something that is going to be experienced by Israel. But that is also descriptive of that which we as the Church also enjoy presently as Hebrews makes very clear and as Jesus himself confirms when he says, “This is the New Covenant in my blood,” in the Lord’s Supper. What was described in that New Testament passage is already in existence in the Church. But what is specifically predicted in the context of that passage about national Israel is yet in the future. So we enjoy it, but in terms of description rather than prophetic fulfillment.

NT Use of Jer. 31 and Ezek. 36

I would say, you have Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, here’s the prophecy, here’s the timeline. It seems to me that it is pointing forward to the time when Israel returns to the land. So it is specifically predicting that. That’s what the words of those texts mean. Now in here somewhere you have the Church. Exactly what is being described here is being enjoyed by the Church. Yet this prophecy is not speaking about the Church directly. It’s speaking about Israel. When Hebrews quotes the Jeremiah passage, it’s doing so in terms of description, not in terms of fulfillment of prediction. When you read Ezekiel 36, which is not quoted in the New Testament. I would see it in terms of description. Verses 25 through 27 describe exactly what we enjoy. Yet it’s speaking about what Israel is

going to enjoy in the future. So I think that in terms of description, you can apply this to the church. But it is not specifically speaking about the Church. It's predicting this about Israel. I'd say we enjoy the very things that are described there. We can do that with New Testament sanction on the basis of this citation of the Jeremiah passage in terms of description. This is describing what we enjoy. But it is not specifically predicted as for the Church. Maybe that is a fine line, but it seems to me that it is a valid distinction.

3 Options

If you look at page 51 in your citations, there are a couple of statements by J. Barton Payne in his *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* on the Ezekiel 36 passage. Notice what he does, he takes this as the return from exile interestingly enough. He says, "For this portion of Ezekiel 36 is post-exilic." He's speaking of verses 26 and 28. "Note especially verse 18 on Judah's pre-idolatry, followed by verse 25 by God's removal of the same strictly as a B.C. problem." In other words, what is he saying? Idolatry was a problem for the Jewish people before the exile, not subsequent to the exile. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and from all your idols will I cleanse you." And verse 29, on page 111 and above – that "God will give men new hearts and will put a spirit in them not in a dim and distant future, but in the days of return from exile and of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This immediacy is quite clear from the context." Well, what about verse 33b? "Cause you to dwell in the cities and they shall be built," and chapter 36 verse 35, "The desolate will become like the Garden of Eden." What does he do with that? He says verse 35 evokes hyperbole, "It says the land will become like the Garden of Eden, but as explained in the following lines, this means that the ruling cities are fortified and inhabited. Fulfillment ... occurs for the Jews in restoration." Well, again I think it is hard to be absolutely dogmatic on texts like that there is certainly room for disagreement. It doesn't seem to me though, that appealing to hyperbole does justice to the larger preceding and following contexts like Ezekiel 36:25-27. So there are three options, 1) return from exile, 2) spiritualize it as it applies to the Church, or 3) look for a future fulfillment and actual returning to the land and applying at the same time the Church's

enjoyment of specifically the blessings described in 25-27.

Ezekiel 37 Dry Bones and Sign of the Two Sticks

Let's go onto Ezekiel chapter 37. Chapter 37, the first ten verses are familiar, while the rest of the chapter probably is not so familiar. There are two prophecies in chapter 37 about the future. The first one is the prophecy of the dry bones in verses 1-14. I say that's probably well-known because of the Negro spiritual – "The hip bone is connected to the thigh bone, the thigh bone is connected to the leg bone," and so forth. But the second part of it is not so familiar. I don't know the spiritual song about the second part– the sign of the two sticks joined together.

Aalders, as you might guess based on what he did with chapter 36, takes both the prophecies of the dry bones and the two sticks as referring to conditions realized in the return from exile. So you're into the same issues in chapter 37 that you had in 36. Let's look at the text itself. Chapter 37, "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD."' So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live."' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army. Then he said to me: 'Son

of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’” So that’s the first prophecy of the dry bones.

Ezekiel 37:1ff -- Prophecy of the 2 Sticks

Then in chapter 37, verse 15 and following, you have this prophecy of the two sticks being joined together. “The word of the LORD came to me: ‘Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, “Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.” Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, “Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.” Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand. When your countrymen ask you, “Won't you tell us what you mean by this?” say to them, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph--which is in Ephraim's hand--and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah's stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.” Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.’””

And notice verse 24, “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all

have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.”

Aalders “Spiritual” Approach

Now as I mentioned, you have these two prophecies. Aalders suggests that these were also fulfilled in return from exile. He says on page 200 in his commentary on verse 12, where it says, “I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.” He says, “That is the situation in which they find themselves in exile. God will open and cause them to rise out of it and bring them back to their land.” So the grave is exile, “and when that happens, they will truly know that he is truly the Almighty that brings to pass that which is impossible according to human thoughts.” So the dry bones are the return from exile, coming to life after being in death, as it were, in the grave. The two sticks, verses 15 to 23, notice he says, “In 15 to 23, the two sticks refer to the same thing.” But then admits that this forces a discontinuity with verses 24 to 28. See, you can’t follow through with 24 to 28 where you have reference to David my servant who will be king over them. How do you fit that into return from exile? So he would say that the second prophecy is return from exile down through verse 23.

Concerning chapter 37, verses 24 to 28, Aalders says that, “It must be said that there must be very loose connection between it and the symbolic act of the two sticks of wood.” He says a couple pages later, “The blessings of the Messiah that is in the Church are proclaimed in the language of the old dispensation as living according to the ordinances of God, verse 24b “They will walk in my ordinances, and living with children and children’s children in the promise land forever.” That’s verse 25. “Making an eternal

covenant of salvation,” that’s 26. “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.” He takes all that in a spiritual sense of description of the Church in terms of the old economy. Verses 24-28, he would see as having nothing to do with return from exile, but moving forward to a descriptive, spiritual, symbolic sense for what we are experiencing presently in the Church.

Ellison: Modern Israel’s Return Yes...but Spirit Still Needed

Look at Ellison page 51, in your citations. He says, “The bones were very dry; the return from exile was no true restoration of national life. It is more a religious community than a national state that we meet in Ezra and Nehemiah. There was no time, not even under the short lived Hasmonean rule, 140-63 B.C., where anything likened to majority of Judah was living in Palestine. It was no accident that the people turned to Simon the priest and elected him as ‘High Priest forever’ until there should be a faithful prophet that should arise and be captain over them as stated in 1 Macc. 14:41, instead of turning to the senior living descendant of the house of David. You didn’t have a ruler on the throne of Israel as a united nation in the line of David in the times subsequent to the exile. The pattern set then became even more obvious after the destruction of the Second Temple when we find scattered Jewry is in the hands of the rabbis. Though the existence of the Jews was always hard and bitter, an even more dreadful chapter began in 1879 with the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany that spread rapidly to Russia and then right around the world. Just in this period, traditional orthodoxy was crumbling rapidly. And so Jewry was shaken to the core as had not been since the destruction of the First Temple, but it was through this shaking that a new consciousness sprang into birth. In just over 70 years, an independent Jewish state existed for the first time since 63 B.C. All it needs is the Spirit of God.”

Ellison continues, “Notice the skill used in describing God’s work in verses 12 to 14. Resting on the ambiguity of *ruach* [spirit, breathe, wind]. God’s breath and Spirit must be upon them so that they may return to the land in verse 14. Yet the giving of true

spiritual life follows on the return to the land in verse 12. This is also the order of chapter 36, verses 24-28. You can't help but notice the parallel between verse 14 of chapter 37, and verse 27 of chapter 36. Chapter 37, verse 14, says, 'I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Ezekiel 36:27 is: 'And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.' Again it seems to be speaking about the same thing. The earthquake shock has passed over Israel, and in part he has returned to his land in a consciously national sense though there are at least five times as many outside the land as in it. How long will it be before the spiritual transformation takes place is hidden in the council of God. We have every reason to believe that it is not far at all. Yet again it is hard to see how the most hardened allegorizer and spiritualizer can find the Church here. Nor can the small companies of 'Israel,' who doubtless joined Judah in the return from exile, be considered any sense a fulfillment." So what Ellison is saying is it's hard to view this passage as having anything but a future fulfillment because it just doesn't fit with the return from exile or with the present situation of the Church.

Taylor, Ezekiel 36 – Messianic Kingdom of the Last Days

Now, let me give you John B. Taylor on page 53 of your citations. Taylor has a volume in the Tyndale Commentary Series from InterVarsity. He says, "Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Fulfillment of prophecy is a question that must always take second place after the issue of correct exegesis has been settled. What then does Ezekiel say? The explanation given in chapter 37, verses 21 to 28 is futuristic." See verses 21 to 28, particularly the latter part of that, beginning with verse 24, speaks of David the king. Taylor says, "It describes the ideal Messianic Kingdom of the last days. The children of Israel will gather from among where they have been dispersed (verse 21). They will be resettled in their own land, they will be one kingdom under the Davidic king (verses 22 and 24). They will no longer practice idolatry; they will be purified from all their defilement (verse 23). They will live a life of obedience to the Lord and will enjoy an everlasting covenant with them (verses 24 and 26). The Lord will establish a sanctuary in

the midst of them forevermore and heathen will know that I, the Lord, have sanctified Israel (verses 26-28). Now all this is the language of the Golden Age to which Israel looked forward as the culmination of national religious existence. Any question of fulfillment has to be related to the whole picture that is given, not to isolated features of it. The answer of the New Testament to this future hope of Israel is that it has come about but has not been fulfilled.”

Alexander – Church Fulfills Many Expectations

Now Alexander, I’m not sure how he tries to fit this all together. He speaks of a partial fulfillment now and a complete fulfillment later. It has come about but has not been fulfilled. “The Golden Age has come in the dawn of Jesus the Messiah. Fulfillment has begun but has not yet been completed. The experience of the church finds that many expectations of the past have become realities. But then realities are only a foretaste of the full and final Messianic joy which is to come. An over-literal interpretation of one aspect of this future hope prevents one from seeing that the prophet is mainly concerned with the ideal of unity in the Messianic Kingdom. That is a spiritualized pattern of the future Israel based on the historical precedent of David’s United Monarchy which was the Golden Age of the past.” Now, I’m not sure what he means by that last sentence. It certainly does stress the unity of the nation here, but whether in some sense it is then, as he says, “a spiritualized pattern,” it is in some sense fulfilled in the Church. But is that what this is specifically talking about? I’m inclined again to think I would view this as a prophecy of what God is going to do in connection to Romans 11: “All Israel will be saved.” That is what God is going to do.

J. B. Payne – Complex View (Divide and Conquer Approach)

I wanted to just tell you what J. Barton Payne does because I think that gets rather complex but also interesting. I have a bit of this, but somehow it didn’t all get in the citations, but look on page 52, at the bottom of the page, of your citations, of Ezekiel 37:1-14, that is the dry bones vision. Payne sees that as fulfilled in the return from exile.

You see the first statement there under Payne on page 52, “These bones under the whole house of Israel: ‘I will open the graves,’ means not individual resurrection, but national. ‘For I will bring you into the land of Israel’ means terminating their exile in battle.” So the dry bone vision, Payne says, is the return from exile.

When you go Ezekiel 37:15-22a, you see that two sticks passage where it says, “I will make them one nation upon the mountains of Israel.” He sees that as union of the nations after return from exile. Verses 15-22a, the second paragraph there, “Describes the prophet’s symbolic action of uniting the two states labeled. God explains verse 22, ‘I will make them one nation from the mountain of Israel.’ The fulfillment is period 9, participation of Hebrews from the ten lost tribes in Israel’s post-exilic restoration.” So again Ezekiel 37:15-22a means a return from exile. Verses 22b and 24 says, “That one king shall be king to them all” and towards the middle you wonder how does that fit in return from exile. But 22b and 24 says “David my servant shall be king over them.” Payne says that’s the First Advent of Christ.

See the third paragraph there bottom of page 52 under Payne, “Some think of this as being a politically ruling king, the reference could indeed be Millennial. But there is no specification of political kingship, and Christ is both the good shepherd, John 10 and 11, and a spiritual king from the New Testament here onward. Ezekiel 37:34, as a result of the shepherd’s presence ‘They shall also walk in my ordinances’ is fulfilled in the coming of Christ, the shepherd as a descendant of David, through the Jehoiachin and Zedekiah line in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Fulfillment in the First Advent of Christ, verse 23. Then you go back to the flow, you see that 22a was return from exile. 22b was the First Advent of Christ and also 24. Now 23, “They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses.” What he does is move back to the abandonment of idolatry during the return from exile.

So in Payne you see the return from exile up to 22a, then you go to First Advent of Christ at 22b, then you go back to return from exile in 23 where they abandon their idols. Ezekiel 37:24 moves forward to the First Advent of Christ because that’s “David my servant shall be king over them.” So then you move to verse 25a and “They shall dwell in

the land which I have given unto Jacob my servant in which your fathers have dwelt.” Payne sees in 25a fulfillment in the New Jerusalem. So you move way to the future, the eternal state really, the New Jerusalem. “They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever.” Verse 25b the last phrase is: “And David my servant shall be prince forever,” where he sees a continuous fulfillment. The First Advent begins the fulfillment, but it continues on forever as you see in 25b. Verse 26 is: “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.” He sees millennial fulfillment. That covenant of peace is the constitution of the messiah’s future kingdom and a millennial fulfillment. Then verses 26b-28 speaks of the sanctuary, “I will set my sanctuary amidst them forevermore, my tabernacle shall be with them” he sees that as a millennial temple. Payne says, “The theological proof that this building conveys by means of type continues into the New Jerusalem and is, namely, that of God’s tabernacle and Christ, though there will then be no more physical structure of temples. So he sees the millennial temple in that sanctuary of verses 26-28. Although I might say here that he does not link that with the temple of Ezekiel’s vision in chapter 40 and following. He views that as something else, although he does project a millennial temple, he doesn’t think that Ezekiel 40 describes that specific temple.

Now you see Payne has very interesting suggestions about the fulfillment of various features of this prophecy but it forces him to cut it up. Here is your return from exile then the First Advent, then back to return from exile, then he jumps forward to the future state and back to the Millennium. To me that kind of approach to interpretation does not do justice to the flow and continuity of the passage. It is too broken up into isolated units that have little or nothing to do with what precedes or follows it. It just doesn’t seem to me to be a legitimate way to interpret prophecy. That coherence is important in trying to interpret a passage, as is flow, but Payne’s approach destroys that. So you’re left then with the question finding fulfillment since return from exile doesn’t do justice to verse 24 and following. To try to spiritualize it, to find fulfillment in the

Church, I don't think does justice to the requirements of particularly verses 22-28 where it says, "I will make them one nation in the land." So again, a future fulfillment involving Israel as a nation seems to be required – Israel in the land as a nation.

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