

Are Restoration Prophecies Being Fulfilled Today?

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It is a rather common belief among Christians of various faiths that the recent return of many Jews to Palestine and their establishment as an independent state May 14, 1948, is a fulfillment of prophecy.¹ This opinion, *with many variations as to details*, is set forth in the following brief twelve-point summary. *Let it be stated at the outset that this summary does not represent the conviction of the author of this treatise, and, having been given, will be refuted point by point.*

A. Summary

1. The return itself is even now a partial reality. It will be completed in the not too distant future. Proof: "And I will bring back your captivity [or: will restore your fortune], and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, says Jehovah; and I will bring you again to the place whence I have banished you" (Jer. 29:14).

2. Since this return is described as a going back *not only from Shinar or Babylon* but "from all the nations and from all the places" of the dispersion (Jer. 29:14), "from Assyria

¹ See, for example, G. T. B. Davis, "Regathering Israel — A Modern Miracle," *The Sunday School Times* (March 19, 1949); R. Wolff, *Israel Act III*, 1967, pp. 43-49. Also see footnote 3.

and from Egypt and from . . . Shinar . . . and from the four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:11, 12), it must refer to what is happening today and is still to take place in the future.

3. This is not the first return but the second one (Isa. 11:11).

4. Since these return prophecies are at times addressed to people who had already come back from the Babylonian captivity (Zech. 8:1-8), they must refer to later happenings, that is, to twentieth century events and others.

5. The expression “in the latter days” (Jer. 30:24) confirms this.

6. The predicted return is “in unbelief” (Ezek. 36:24-26), which agrees with what is happening today.²

7. The establishment of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948, is proof of the fact that these ancient prophecies are being fulfilled.³

8. Hand in hand with political re-establishment goes physical and economic restoration. Did not Isaiah predict that one day the desert would rejoice and blossom as the rose [or crocus] and that the ancient ruins would be rebuilt (Isa. 35:1; 61:4)? Accordingly, prophecy is being fulfilled today in the reclamation of the soil after centuries of neglect, in the diversion of water from the Jordan to irrigate the Negev desert, in the building of numerous new cities and villages, in the re-utilization of long-forgotten physical resources, and so on. Travel advertising is therefore justified in taking advantage of this situation. See, for example, the ad in *Christianity Today*, October 27, 1967: “Is Prophecy Being Fulfilled In The Bible Lands Today? Come and See.”

9. In fulfilment of Amos 9:14, 15,⁴ the swift victories of the Jews over their enemies — May, 1948, October, 1956, and especially June, 1967⁵ — prove that God’s promises to Israel are being — and will be — fulfilled, and that it will be impossible to eradicate the state of Israel.

10. The return of the ancient city of Jerusalem to the custody of the Jews proves that the prophecy of Luke 21:24, namely, “Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles

² See H. Bultema, *Maranatha*, p. 83; J. M. Grey, *Prophecy and the Lord’s Return*, p. 23; R. Wolff, *op. cit.*, pp. 44, 45.

³ “The re-establishment of that nation in its own land, even in unbelief, is significant indeed,” *Voice of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America*, August, 1949.

⁴ R. Wolff, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 13, 44, 62.

⁵ See the magazine *Newsweek* (June 5, 1967, p. 43; June 19, 1967, pp. 24-30).

until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,” has now gone into fulfillment, for Jerusalem is no longer being trodden down by them.⁶

Probably implied in Paul’s teaching is the prediction that the Jews, having returned, will rebuild the temple. Antichrist will take his seat in this literally rebuilt temple (II Thess. 2:4).⁷ This prediction, too, may be in the process of being fulfilled. In fact, if reports are reliable, loads of stone, precut to exact specifications for this rebuilding, are, already being sent to Israel.⁸

11. Among other New Testament passages that point in the direction of the end-of-the-age restoration of the Jews (national return in unbelief followed by national conversion) is especially Matt. 19:28, which clearly teaches the regathering of the twelve tribes.

12. Finally, there is also I Cor. 10:32 which, in making mention of the Jews and the church as the two groups on which God bestows his special favor, as contrasted with the third group, “the Gentiles” (Authorized Version), clearly indicates “that God still has a program for Israel.”

B. Refutation

The author of the treatise which you are reading regards this entire presentation to be an error. As he sees it, these ancient prophecies, whether Old or New Testament, do not refer to recent or coming events.

Taking up the above-mentioned points one by one, the answer is as follows:

Answer to 1. The context of the Jer. 29:14 passage speaks specifically of a return “after seventy years” (Jer. 29:10), correctly interpreted by Daniel (in his book, 9:2), as applying to the time in which he was living. It cannot be proved, therefore, that such a passage has anything to do with recent or still future migrations. The same holds, of course, for similar restoration passages, such as Deut. 30:1-10; I Kings 8:46-52; Ezek. 36:17-19, 26-28; Hos. 11:10, 11.

Answer to 2. The fact that, in addition to Shinar (Babylonia), several other countries and regions are also mentioned as places from which Jews were to return, presents no difficulty, if only it be remembered that it was customary in those days to sell some of the war-prisoners to nations round about, so that they were dispersed far and wide (Ezek. 27:13; Joel 3:7; Amos 1:6, 9; Rev. 18:13). In the step-by-step return from captivity — first some returning, later others, and afterward still others — it is natural

⁶ See the well-written and in many respects valuable insert by W. M. Smith, “The Second Advent of Christ,” p. 19, included in the December 22, 1967 issue of *Christianity Today*.

⁷ R. Wolff, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 62-64.

⁸ See “Israel: Things To Come,” *Christianity Today* (December 22, 1967), p. 35.

that also some of these widely dispersed Jews went back to the Promised Land, the country from which they or their ancestors had come. It is well known that the slave-trade was carried on especially by the Phoenicians whose mariners pushed boldly out to various parts of the then-known world, selling their “merchandise,” which included slaves. Moreover, the fact that, here in Isa. 11:11, in the enumeration of the nations of the dispersion Assyria and Egypt are mentioned first is again very natural, for how often had not the prophets, especially Isaiah, warned the people to lean neither on Assyria nor on Egypt! And how often had not the people placed their trust *now* in Egypt, *then* in Assyria, constantly shifting their allegiance from the one to the other, instead of committing themselves, without any reservation, to the care of Jehovah! Not only here in Isa. 11:11 but also elsewhere these two — Assyria and Egypt — are mentioned together (Isa. 7:18; 19:24, 25; 20:4; 27:13; Jer. 2:36, 37; Hos. 7:11; Zech. 10:10; etc.). From all these regions, therefore, Jews, in greater or lesser numbers, were to return. There is no reason whatever to doubt that this is also what actually took place. Moreover, those who returned did not belong exclusively to the tribe of Judah (or to Judah and Benjamin) but also, to some extent, to the other ten tribes. See I Chron. 9:33, 34; Ezra 2:59. When during the reign of Darius the temple was rebuilt and dedicated, a sin-offering was brought “*for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel*” (Ezra 6:17). This is also the New Testament view. It looks upon Israel as a reunited people, consisting of “twelve tribes,” whether literally or symbolically conceived (Matt. 19:28; Acts 26:7; James 1:1; Rev. 7:1-8; 21:12). In connection with the story of the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus we read not only about Joseph and Mary of the tribe of Judah (II Sam. 7:12, 13; Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:27; 2:4, 5; Acts 2:30; Horn. 1:3; II Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5), but also of Zechariah and Elizabeth of the tribe of Levi (Exod. 2:1; 4:14; I Chron. 24:1, 10; Luke 1:5), and of Anna, a prophetess, of the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). Over all the tribes, now viewed as *one* people, rules the *one* Shepherd, according to prophecy (Ezek. 37:15-28). Says G. Ch. Aalders, “To be sure, in the return from the Babylonian captivity the emphasis falls on Judah, but by no means are the ten tribes excluded. They probably took a more prominent part in this return than many people think.”⁹

It has become clear, therefore, that there is no reason whatever for interpreting Isa. 11:11, 12, *in its literal application*, as referring to what is taking place in the twentieth century A.D. On the contrary, that view is open to serious objection: In the context we are told that those who have returned from the captivity “will swoop down upon the shoulder of the Philistines to the west, will together plunder the people of the east, and will put forth their hand against Edom and Moab. The children of Ammon will obey them” (Isa. 11:14). That these predictions were fulfilled is clear from I Macc. 3:41; 5:1-8, 68; 10:83-89; 11:60, 61; etc. However, those who believe that *now*, in the twentieth century A.D., these Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites must still be destroyed or plundered or subjected will have a hard time even *finding* them!

Answer to 3. The fact that Isa. 11:11 refers to a *second* recovery has nothing whatever to do with recent events, for according to the context the *first* recovery or exodus was

⁹ *Het Herstel van Israel volgens het Oude Testament*, p. 44.

the one under Moses. It was the return from the house of bondage (Isa. 11:16). Hence, the second recovery was fulfilled when, in stages, the Jews returned from the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity, and were established in their own land. All this took place long, long ago. There is, accordingly, no justification for interpreting these prophecies as if they referred to events happening in the twentieth century A.D.

Answer to 4. The same thing holds with respect to predictions made to those who had already returned. Zechariah carried on his prophetic activity about the year 520 B.C. His divinely inspired prophecy of a still further return of exiles, and of a restoration of peaceful life in Jerusalem, old men and women dwelling in it, and boys and girls playing in its streets (Zech. 8:1-8), was fulfilled in the days of Ezra, Nehemiah, and afterward. See Ezra 7:1-10; Neh. 11:1, 2; I Macc. 14:8-12.

Answer to 5. The expression “the latter days” (Jer. 30:24) occurs also in the following passages: Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 10:14; Hos. 3:5; Micah 4:1. In each instance its meaning must be interpreted in the light of the specific context. That this phrase does not necessarily have any reference to Christ’s second coming or to the days immediately preceding that event is clear from its very first occurrence (Gen. 49:1). Jacob was not trying to tell his sons what would happen *to them* — note “what will befall *you*” — *in the twentieth century AD!* He predicted what would take place during the lifetime of his children and of their descendants in days to come. To be sure, even the *first* coming of Christ out of the tribe of Judah is included in these predictions (Gen. 49:10), but nothing whatever is mentioned here regarding the days of Christ’s *second* coming. And as to the twelve tribes, in their separate existence, where are they today? Accordingly, the translation of Gen. 49:10, adopted by some of the modern versions, namely, “in coming days” (Berkeley) or “in days to come” (Revised Standard Version), must be considered excellent.

In the passage under consideration (Jer. 30:24) the context is also abundantly clear. Note “After *seventy years are accomplished for Babylon* I will visit you . . . and I will bring back your captivity [or: will restore your fortune] . . . and you will be my people, and I will be your God . . . The fierce anger of Jehovah will not turn back until he will have executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. *In the latter days* you will understand this” (Jer. 29:10, 14; 30:22, 24). It is very clear, therefore, that the phrase “in the latter days,” as here used, indicates that when Jehovah’s judgments have been fully executed, and the seventy years will have ended, God’s people will understand that his punishment had been inflicted in order to heal them.

It has become clear, therefore, that none of the aforementioned passages (Isa. 11:11, 12; Jer. 29 and 30; Zech. 8:1-8) has anything whatever to do with a twentieth century A.D. return and restoration. Neither do any of the other passages: Dent. 30:1-10; I Kings 8:46-52; Jer. 18:5-10; Ezek. 36:17-19, 26-28, 33; and Hos. 11:10, 11. They all speak of divine judgments and restorations that had significance for the people who were living at the time when these prophecies were uttered. *In their literal sense* they were intended for *them* and for *their* children, grandchildren, and so forth, not for the people living

today, though it is true that their underlying moral and spiritual lessons remain valid for every generation:

“Let children thus learn from history’s light
To hope in our God and walk in his sight,
The God of their fathers to fear and obey,
And ne’er like their fathers to turn from his way.”

No. 149 of *The Psalter Hymnal of
the Christian Reformed Church*,
centennial edition, third stanza;
cf. Ps. 78:1-8

Answer to 6. Now if the Old Testament does not contain any predictions regarding a present-day return of the Jews, then, of course, by implication it does not teach either that their present return *in unbelief* is a fulfilment of prophecy. In fact, such a return, namely, *in unbelief*, is not even predicted with respect to the deliverance from the *Assyrian-Babylonian* exile! It is worthy of note that those who have accepted the idea of such a return *in unbelief* offer hardly anything that might even superficially pass as scriptural proof. Even such a passage as Ezek. 36:24-26 is, of course, no proof. The Lord, through Ezekiel, does not say, “I will bring you into your own land, *and then afterward* I will give you a new heart.” He simply mentions two things he will do for his people, without immediately stating the order in which these events will follow each other. If the context sheds any light at all on the sequence of events, it would rather seem to place spiritual cleansing — hence, repentance and faith — *before* re-establishment as a nation, though both occur in the same “day,” a day of indeterminate length. Note verse 33: “Thus saith Jehovah, In the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places to be builded.”

This sequence of events, so that returning to Jehovah *precedes* restoration, is, in any case, the regular order that we find in Scripture. *God does not reward disobedience but obedience.* Hence, the deliverance predicted in the prophets is *conditional* in character. What the prophets meant when they predicted recovery from the *Assyrian-Babylonian* captivity was this: “Israel will be restored *if it repents*. In that case its sins will be blotted out, and it will be permitted to return to its country.”

See this for yourself by consulting the references that were indicated a moment ago:

“And it shall come to pass *when* thou shalt return unto Jehovah thy God, that *then* Jehovah thy God will turn thy captivity” (Deut. 30:2, 3).

“Jehovah will again rejoice over thee for good, *if* thou return unto Jehovah thy God with all thy heart” (Deut. 30:9, 10).

“*If* they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and make supplication to thee saying, We have sinned, and have

done perversely, we have dealt wickedly, *if* they return unto thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who carried them away captive, *then* hear thou their prayer and their supplication, and forgive thy people, and show them compassion” (I Kings 8:47-50).

Jeremiah 18:5-10. Here the Lord states that *whenever* he predicts that *woe* will befall a nation, then *if* that nation repents, he will also “repent” of the evil which he had intended to do to it. On the other hand, *whenever* he predicts *weal* for any people, then *if* that people becomes disobedient, he will “repent” of the good which he had intended to do to it. A definite rule is established here, showing that there is, indeed, a sense in which we can call the divine impartation of blessing a *conditional* matter. It must always be born in mind, however, that it is only by God’s grace and power that men are able to fulfil the condition. But the condition is there, nevertheless. We have no right to take these “*ifs*” out of the Bible! Note, therefore, the words: “*If* that nation turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them” (Jer. 18:8). Observe that, here in Jer. 18:5-10, the Lord himself declares that *whenever* he predicts weal or woe, good or evil, for a nation, the condition *always* applies. It would therefore also apply to a passage like Jer. 31:35-37, though there are those who in their explanation of that passage forget all about Jer. 18:5-10.

Hosea 11:10, 11 was also mentioned. Here, too, as elsewhere, *repentance precedes return and restoration!* We read, “They shall walk after Jehovah . . . and the children shall come trembling from the west . . . out of Egypt . . . and out of the land of Assyria.” (This, by the way, presupposes that Assyria was still in existence. Where is it today?) A noted commentator has the following comment on the Hosea passage: “As a result of divine love, now actively displayed, Israel will return from the exile. The Lord has placed himself at the head, and those who return will gladly follow him, for they have been cured of their desire to depart from him” (J. Ridderbos).

Answer to 7. It has now become clear that the establishment of the state of Israel, May 14, 1948, *in unbelief* — for those who established it are still rejecting the Christ — “has nothing whatever to do with divine prophecy.”¹⁰ This is true for two reasons: (a) Prophecy says nothing about a twentieth-century return and restoration; and (b) even if it did, it speaks about a return *of a believing remnant*.

That the spirit of repentance was actually present at the time of the return from the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity is clear from such passages as the following: Dan, 9:1, 2, 5, 6; Ezra 3:5, 10, 11; 6:16-22; 7:10; 8:35; 10:11, 12; Neh. 1:4-11; Hag. 1:12, 13, etc.

Answer to 8. It has also become clear that *insofar as passages like Isa. 35:1; 61:4 and others refer to physical and economic restoration*, they, too, have reference to the times of the recovery from the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity. In Isaiah there are over forty references to Assyria, the Assyrian, and the Assyrians. Babylon and the Chaldeans are mentioned about twenty times. Cyrus, who gave orders for the rebuilding of the temple

¹⁰ Ch. Aalders, *De Oud-Testamentische Profetie En De Staat Israel*, p. 18.

at Jerusalem, is mentioned in 44:28 and 45:1. The nations upon whom judgments are pronounced in Chapters 13-24 are Babylonia, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Arabia, Edom, and Phoenicia. All this suits the old dispensation, not the twentieth century AD.

That during the years intervening between the return from captivity and the birth of Christ there were indeed periods when the desert “blossomed as the rose [or crocus],” is clear from passages in Josephus and in I Maccabees. The former speaks of “renovation of former prosperity,” and “cultivation of the land”; the latter about “tilling the land in peace,” “the land giving its increase,” and “each man sitting under his vine and fig tree” (cf. Micah 4:4). It is, accordingly, entirely unnecessary and unwarranted to transfer the *literal* fulfillment of such and similar prophecies to the twentieth century A.D.

Answer to 9. Was Amos (9:14, 15) actually speaking about the twentieth century A.D. “state of Israel”? Where, in the entire Bible, whether Old or New Testament, does the Lord pinpoint present-day states, telling us exactly what will happen and what will not happen to them? The writer well remembers a series of articles that appeared in a religious journal, now defunct, during World War II. Detailed predictions were made, all of them purportedly *on the basis of prophecy*. One of them was that Italy would emerge as *the winner!* There was wide demand for these articles. But history itself gave the lie to this line of interpretation. This holds, too, for the writings of those who claim the ability to foretell what is going to happen to such countries as Germany, Russia, China, and the United States of America, all, it is claimed, *on the basis of Holy Writ!* That such prognostications are popular was to be expected. Mankind is incurably inquisitive. To the extent to which this curiosity is focused upon that which God has actually revealed, it is an inestimable blessing. But when this desire to know everything goes beyond the limits indicated in Deut. 29:29 it is no longer a blessing at all. Did not even Plato hold that there is some vice of impiety in enquiring too curiously about God and the world? When inquisitiveness becomes intrusiveness, when curiosity degenerates into nosiness, watch out! In the past, too, there have been those who predicted confidently that it would be utterly impossible to destroy “Israel” (by whatever name the political unit was then known) or Jerusalem with its temple. See Jer. 7:4; also Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* VI.v.2. But Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C., and again in AD. 70, and again in A.D. 135.

Answer to 10. By no means all dispensationalists or similarly minded people are agreed that today Jerusalem is no longer being trodden down. Are not the circumstances with reference to this city still rather insecure? Even R. Wolff is of the opinion that the expression “trodden down” (Luke 21:24) could refer to contemptuous ill treatment (*op. cit.*, p. 53), which, as is well-known, continues to this very day. And as to the idea that the return of the ancient city to the custody of the Jews means that “the times of the Gentiles” have now been fulfilled, in the same issue of *Christianity Today* (Dec. 22, 1967, insert. p. 19) in which this is suggested the opposite view is also expressed; see the issue itself — not the insert — p. 35. here we are told that the consensus is that “the times of the Gentiles” will not be concluded until the second coming of Christ. The meaning, then, is simply this, that Jerusalem and those whom it represents will be trampled underfoot during the entire lengthy span of time that extends to the moment of

Christ's return. The treading down by the Gentiles will not stop before the close of the present era. Moreover, there is no implication here, or anywhere else in Scripture, of any literal restoration of Jerusalem *after* the second coming.

To be sure, the passage speaks of a being trodden down *until* — But it just is not true that in every case in which *until* is used this little word introduces a condition which is the exact opposite of that which was described in the preceding part of the sentence. Merely on the basis of what is stated here in Luke 21:24 it is certainly not possible to conclude that earthly Jerusalem as we now conceive of it, or the people whom it represents, will be entering a condition of unclouded, radiant glory at Christ's return. That little conjunction (*until*) must be interpreted, in each case, according to its specific context. Here in Luke 21:24 the meaning is simply this, that for Jerusalem the condition of being trampled underfoot *will not cease* a hundred years or fifty years or even ten years before Christ's return, but will last on and on and on, *until* Christ's second coming. Somewhat similar is the meaning of this little word in Rom. 11:25; I Cor. 11:26; 15:25; and Rev. 2:25. The fact that each passage must be studied in its own context is clear especially from this last mentioned text. Does "That which you have, hold fast *until* I come" actually mean that after Christ's coming we shall no longer hold fast the precious spiritual treasures that have been imparted to us? Does it not rather indicate that, *conic what may*, we must keep clinging to God's revelation in Jesus Christ and to its fruit in our own experience? Relinquish it? Never! Not today, nor tomorrow, nor the next day. We must *hold it fast* — *by giving it away* to the nations!

It is clear, therefore, that neither the word *until* nor anything else in this passage is or implies a prediction of national restoration in store for the Jews either just before or in connection with Christ's return.

Let us suppose for a moment that another temple will be built in the state of Israel. Will it be a temple in which the Jews will gather in order to glory in the cross of Christ? Cf. Gal. 6:14. If not, then will not the restoration of such a temple constitute further evidence of the fact that the divine approval is not resting upon such worshippers? Was it not our Lord Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6; cf. Matt. 1:21; Acts 4:12; Heb. 10:12, 14; Rev. 7:14)?

Answer to 11. This concerns Matt. 19:28. In answer to Peter's question, "Look, we have left everything, and followed thee, What then shall we have?" Jesus says, "I solemnly declare to you who followed me, that in the reborn universe when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

It is immediately clear that this prediction does not in any sense refer to what is happening in the twentieth century A.D. Nor does it refer to anything that is still to happen before the one and only second coming of Christ to judgment. The reference is clearly to what will take place in the new heaven and earth, the restored universe. See Matt. 25:31 ff.; Rev. 21:1, 5; and compare Isa. 65:17; 66:22; and II Peter 3:13. What we have here is the solemn assurance that those who have sacrificed most (note: "We

have left everything”) will receive a special measure of glory. More than many others they will share in the glory of their Redeemer. Passages like I Cor. 15:41b, 42a; II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:21; 20:4 shed light on the nature of this reward. Those who have been most loyal to Christ *here* will be closest to him *there*. Within the sphere of “the twelve tribes” special honor and dignity will be accorded to those who have placed their all on the altar of devotion. The expression “the twelve tribes of Israel” refers, according to F. W. Grosheide,¹¹ to “the restored new Israel . . . the entire people of God.” Whether, as such, it indicates the total number of the elect gathered out of the twelve tribes from the beginning to the end of the world’s history (cf. Rom. 11:26), or even *all* the chosen ones out of both the Jews and the Gentiles (cf. Gal. 6:16), in either case it must refer to those who have been regenerated, for into the reborn universe of which Matt. 19:28 speaks nothing unclean will ever enter (Rev. 21:27). It is immediately apparent, therefore, that there is here no mention of any massive return of the Jews to Palestine followed by national conversion

Answer to 12. I Cor. 10:32 reads as follows “Give no occasion for stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God.” The apostle Paul, in his characteristic manner, is exhorting the Corinthians to impose upon themselves a voluntary restriction in the use of Christian liberty. He does not want them to throw stumblingblocks in the path of *anybody*. Not only with respect to “the church of God,” should believers watch their conduct, giving none of its members just cause for offense, but they must exercise the same circumspection and tender regard toward *others*, namely, Jews and Greeks. Note that in this passage the Jews are not mentioned in connection with the church of God, as if the apostle had in mind two elect groups. On the contrary, the *Jews* are mentioned in connection with the *Greeks* (“Gentiles,” Authorized Version), as together constituting the body of non-Christians. The meaning, therefore, is this: “Be devoid of offense for non-Christians (whether Jews or Greeks) as well as for Christians.” The non-Christians are divided into two classes: Jews and Greeks. That this is, indeed, the correct view is indicated by the very terminology that is used here. On the one hand, in order to indicate the two divisions of the first group Paul uses two terms of exactly similar structure: both are *plural* nouns: “Jews and Greeks”; while, on the other hand, the *singular* noun “the church” is used to refer to the second group. The passage, therefore, simply shows that Paul makes a clear distinction between (a) unbelievers and (b) the church of God; and that, with reference to (a), he distinguishes between unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Greeks. *In no sense whatever does he conjoin Jews and the church, as if both of these were objects of God’s very special delight.* There is, accordingly, nothing in this passage that will give any comfort to those who expect a return of the Jews to Palestine, followed by conversion!

It has been made clear, therefore, that the view according to which recent happenings prove that the Lord is fulfilling ancient prophecies regarding the return and restoration of the Jews is an error. One more matter must be briefly stated before this chapter is finished: As was stated previously, the various predictions of restoration for Israel were fulfilled in the return from the Assyrian-Babylonian exile, *insofar as they were intended*

¹¹ See his *Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament, Mattheus*, p. 232, on this passage.

to be fulfilled in a literal sense. It remains true, of course, that the *literal* fulfillment of these and of similar prophecies of weal does not exhaust their meaning. Ultimately these predictions are fulfilled in Christ, and therefore also in all those, whether Jew or Gentile, who place their trust in him.

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