

The Resurrection Body of Christ the Lord

(Part 4)

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National, ethnic Israel will turn to their long-rejected Messiah in genuine faith at least three years before they see Him at His second coming and the inaugural millennial banquet.

By the mid-point of the 70th week of Daniel, 42 months before He returns to establish His kingdom, 144,000 Israelis will have been sealed by God – 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes – to evangelize the entire world (Rev. 7:1-8; 13-14). The Messiah assured His disciples that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

How will these Israelis come to know their Lord? It will not be through a visual encounter with Christ, but through the preaching of “Elijah the prophet,” who will return from the realm of the dead “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” Under God,

“He will turn

The hearts of the fathers to the children,

And the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:5, 6).

That is a description of genuine national revival, beginning in the homes of the people.

When three of the apostles were granted a spectacular preview of Christ's second coming on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 16:28-17:8), they seemed to be especially fascinated by the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Coming down from the mount, they asked the Savior, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” (Matt. 17:10). His answer was emphatic: “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things” (Matt. 17:11), just as Malachi had predicted.

Thus, by the middle of the 70th week – not at the end when they see Christ returning to the earth – the nation of Israel will be a regenerated nation. Isaiah was amazed at how quickly this will happen:

“Who has heard such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day?
Or shall a nation be born at once?
For as soon as Zion was in labor,
She gave birth to her children” (Isa. 66:8).

Paul assured us that “all Israel will be saved... For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable” (Rom. 11:26, 29).

Among the converts of the two witnesses (who will be killed after 42 months of proclaiming the true gospel to Israel; cf. Rev. 11:7-14) will be the 144,000 witnesses. The rest of the nation will flee from the newly resuscitated “beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit” (Rev. 11:7), and will be protected by God throughout the remaining 42 months of the great tribulation (Rev. 12:6, 13-17; cf. Isa. 26:20-27:1).

What will the regenerated nation of Israel do when they finally see their resurrected and glorified Messiah at His second coming? To be sure, “every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him” (Rev. 1:7).

Especially traumatic will be this experience for Israel. The Lord Jesus Himself announced 550 years before He was crucified: “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn” (Zech. 12:10).

In fact, the prophet Zechariah was told: “In that day there shall be a great mourning in

Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo” (Zech. 12:11; cf. 2 Chron. 35:20-25 – when Josiah, the last godly king of Judah, was killed by Pharaoh Necho).

Even more specifically, “The land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves” (Zech. 12:12-14). Can anything in the history of the world be compared to this?

The wording of Isaiah 53 will be totally appropriate at that time:

“Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:4, 5).

This will not be a conversion experience, but a very deep remorse for having been responsible for His crucifixion and for having rejected Him for many centuries. It will be like the Apostle Thomas, who was overwhelmed at the sight of his Savior whose resurrection he had denied and cried out: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). And it will be like the Apostle Peter, who suddenly realized that he had denied his Lord and “went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75).

We have presented two reasons why Israel's national conversion to Messiah cannot occur at His second coming in glory. First, people are converted by hearing and believing His

Word, not by seeing Him physically, even in His glorified state. Second, Israel must have experienced her spiritual transformation three-and-a-half years before Christ's return in order to take His gospel message to all the Gentile nations of the earth (cf. Matt. 24:14). This will constitute a spectacular fulfillment of her very purpose of existence as a chosen people: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). "And they [redeemed Israel] shall declare My glory among the Gentiles" (Isa. 66:19; cf. 49:22-23; 55:5; 60:5, 9, 11, 14; 61:6).

But why will the people of Israel be given this magnificent privilege of knowing the Son of God by faith (and thus entering into the spiritual privileges of the New Covenant of Jer. 31 and Ezek. 36) and also of seeing their Messiah in His glory?

The answer to this urgent question is made emphatically clear in the Bible: "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out" (Deut. 7:7, 8; cf. 4:37; 10:15; Ezek. 36:16-32). But our God is not a respecter of persons. Because of thousands of years of disobedience to her divine calling, Israel "has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:2).

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Israel as a nation officially rejected Jesus as her Messiah (cf. Matt. 27:25; Mark 15:13; Luke 23:21; John 19:12, 15). To this our Lord did not reply: "You shall see Me no more." That is indeed what the nation deserved. Instead – and this is an oft overlooked statement of Christ – He said to them: "You shall see Me no more till you say, '*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!*'" (Matt. 23:39).

The breaking off of Israel from the tree of divine blessing (cf. Rom. 11:17-22) was therefore temporary, not permanent. It was partial, not complete. As the Apostle Paul went on to explain: "Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25, 26).

True, Israel does not deserve to be saved, because, “concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake” (Rom. 11:28). But it is not a question of deserving salvation. The ultimate reality is this: “Concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers [i.e., Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom God gave an unconditional covenant – Gen. 15, 22, 35]. For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28, 29). Thus, God has not permanently replaced Israel with the church.

It would be very dangerous for a Christian to think: “Jews do not deserve to be saved, but I do!” Apart from the infinite grace of God, what do we really deserve?

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:4-9).

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