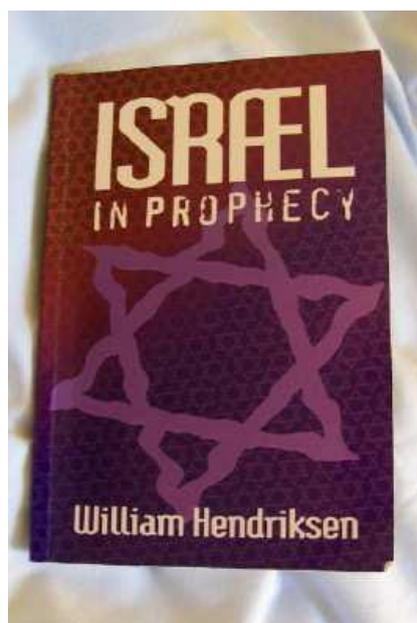


## A critical appraisal of Chapter 2 of William Hendriksen's 'Israel in Prophecy'.



William Hendriksen's terse and simple comment has been a source of light and wisdom to many young and old Christians struggling with the 'hard sayings' of passages of the New Testament. As has been well observed, his books are masterworks of simplicity and penetrating study. Their homely style often disguises the rigour of his background study and biting analysis of different commentators. His writings lack neither persuasive force nor nuance. Israel and the question of the legitimacy of Zionism is and will remain for some time a white hot contemporary topic. The importance of whether or not Biblical prophecy is pertinent to the resurrection of the Jewish state has profound theological and political ramifications. In this work published in 1968 he addresses the topic. His second chapter takes the form of a 12 point rebuttal of a position which he constructs from citations which propose that modern Israel is a fulfilment of Bible prophecy, it is a position he completely opposes. Here is a response to each of his 12 points.

### Are 'the restoration promises of the Jews' prophecies being fulfilled today?

1 WH's response to 'The return is now partial and will shortly be complete.'

WH starts with a passage especially convenient to make his case. Jer. 29.14 is clearly primarily applicable to the return from Babylon and for the reasons he gives. Yet the immediate neighbour of even this carefully selected passage, which initially seems like a simple reiteration, Jer. 30.3, cannot be confined to the return from Babylon alone. It echoes the promise of restoration in Deuteronomy 28, and looks forward to the reign of the Messianic King, Jer. 30.9,21 and that at a time when the foreign yoke is perpetually broken (30 v.8), Gentile exploitation ceases (v.8), their adversaries taken captive (v.16), and their sins removed and their wounds healed (v.15-17). The following chapter again echoes the sense of Jer. 29.14 in 31.4, 8-9, 23-4, 28, but its context is also mixed with prophetic references to the slaughter of the babes at Bethlehem, 31.15-7, the implementation of the New Covenant made with the same backsliding and rebellious people who broke the old Sinaitic Covenant, 31.31-4, and is tied to a cast iron promise to the same apostate seed *and nation* of Israel of an ultimate deliverance and pardon more secure than the sun and the stars (v.35-47). Prophets often allude to events in the same passage which are related though not contemporary, for example Isaiah's sign of the virgin birth of Emmanuel is given to Ahaz in

the context of Syrian and Israeli incursions into Judah 7 centuries before, Isa.7.10-6. Similarly repeated events of the same character are often seen prophetically as occurring as one event, like the first and second coming of Messiah, for example in Isaiah 66.8-14 and 15-16.

So his claim that in Jer.29.14, ‘it cannot be proved the passage has anything to with recent or still future migrations’ looks distinctly suspect. Greater caution is warranted, especially when in order to consistently maintain this position, prophecies of Israel are referred to the Jewish nation when considering the return from Babylon, and then switched to the already ingathered church, without special regard to sinful Israel, when the Messianic monarchy, dominion over or among the Gentiles, or the physical destruction of enemies in battle is referred to. He also claims, ‘the same holds, of course, for similar restoration passages...’ and cites four of these. Two bear closer examination.

Deut. 30.1-10, is preceded by the prophetic curse of Deut 28.68 which speaks of the sale of Jews in Egypt in such vast numbers that they are bought for a derisory price. Such events were documented not at the time of the Babylonian captivity, but by the overwhelming mass of slaves captured in 70 AD<sup>1</sup> and again in 135 AD<sup>2</sup>. So again the promise of restoration to the land follows a prophecy, over a millennium before the event, which describes captivity well after Babylon’s destruction. Again WH’s claim looks distinctly suspect.

Ezek. 36.17-19, 26-28

It is telling that Hendriksen chooses not to quote verses 23 to 25 which profoundly undermine his claim by pointing to a restoration of Israel to the land *before* not after cleansing. ‘And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I *am* the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.’

2 A return not only from Babylon but from many other parts of the globe, therefore not referring to first captivity.

Again, whilst Hendriksen’s general point is valid that the return from captivity outside Babylon does not preclude specific reference to the Babylonian captivity – Jer.29.14 is an excellent example - his citation of Isaiah 11 here is highly problematic to his case. Firstly, the chapter is eminently Messianic, as many Jewish writers also assert<sup>3</sup>, and initially describes the spread of Messianic kingdom. Secondly, immediately preceding and within WH’s quote is an emphatic reiteration that it is the ‘rod of Jesse’ who shall act as an ensign in drawing the Gentiles and then the diaspora. Thirdly, both v.10 and v.12 repeat the expression, ‘in that day’, underlining that they occur together in history. It is exceedingly difficult to see what post-Messianic restoration of the non-Gentile Israel could be intended if not that of the C.20th. It would be a considerable stretch to confine this restoration to 5 centuries B.C.

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1 Josephus, Wars of the Jews Book 6, ch 9, para 418.

2 Munter, Primordia Eccl. Africanæ, pp. 85f.,113.

3 Gill cites: Bereshit Rabba, sect. 85. fol. 75. 1. Midrash Tillim in Psal. lxxii. 1. Apud Yalkut Simeoni, par. 2. fol. 112. 2. Abarbinel, Mashmia Jeshua, fol. 8. 4. ben Ezra, Jarchi, & Kimchi, in loc. Nachman. Disputat. Cum Fratres Paulo, p. 53.

### 3 A second not first return. (Isa.11.11)

This 'second recovery' is applied by the prophet first to Assyria, not to Egypt – this makes Hendriksen's assertion that he here describes what was actually the first return from Assyria as the second, on the basis that it was the second from Egypt look transparently hollow.

### 4 Zechariah refers to post exilic return from future captivity. (Zech. 8.1-8)

The passage WH has chosen from Zechariah is significant, but not as plain or as dramatic as later passages, which speak plainly of a post exilic scattering and a post exilic gathering, like Zech.10.8-10, or of dramatic events in or after the time of Messiah. John Gill says for example of 10 v.9, 'this is to be understood of the conversion of the Jews', and then alludes repeatedly to their restoration to their land<sup>4</sup>. If however, as Calvin suggests, the return here is merely metaphorical, to the Gospel and to true spirituality in the rejected Messiah, then it's hard to understand what is intended by the expression, 'and place shall not be found for them' v.10 – is the Gospel insufficiently capacious to accommodate a few million extra sinners, is the mercy of God tightly constrained? Calvin suggests as a solution, 'So also now Zechariah says, that the number of people will be so great, that the place [churches] will be hardly large enough for so vast a multitude.' Indication if he were right at the least of a massive Jewish revival, not a trickling stream of conversions. Again references in Zechariah which combine extensive spiritual revival, like Zech.9.9-10 or Zech.12.2-5, 6-8 or Zech. 14.14-17, with overwhelming military victory must either virtually extinguished by allegorising or we are at a loss to attribute them merely to the milder successes of the Maccabees, which were long before the Advent. It is also noteworthy that the predicted transformation of 4 specific fasts to feasts is as yet unfulfilled, Zech 8.19, and likely to remain so till there is widespread national revival in the land of Israel.

### 5 Use of 'latter days' implies end times.

It is easy to see the force of WH's assertion that the expression the 'last days' is not to be confined to the immediate end times, however he is quite wrong to claim that 'nothing whatever' is mentioned' of the second coming in several of these passages. In Genesis 49.8 for example, a triple prophecy is given of Judah. The first and third that his brethren will glorify or confess to him and then worship him, reminiscent as it is of Joseph's provoking his hardened brethren to repentance remains largely unfulfilled to this day. The second that his hand will be on the neck of his enemies has been and is being amply fulfilled amongst the Gentiles, but remains highly constrained with respect to Christ's kinsmen according to the flesh.

His restriction of Jer.30.24 to the termination of the 70 years' exile is an uncharacteristic trammelling of the broad scope of a prophecy that plainly extends at least to the first coming and the resurrection v.21, 9, and very likely also to more contemporary events as well as ones to come, v.10-11, 16-18.

### 6 Predicted in unbelief.

Hendriksen claims that Ezek. 36.24-26 is a poor proof of Israel's return in unbelief. However the use of the waw conversive or consecutive perfect at the beginning of v.25 is strong indication of a continuing narrative, and therefore of sequential events: the return and then the cleansing. What is the meaning of the vision of the valley of the dead bones, where bone

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<sup>4</sup> Commentary in loco and Doctrinal Divinity Bk.6, , Ch.13, Sn.3.

is brought to bone and clothed with flesh before the Spirit breathes? ‘Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD.’ (Ezek.37.12-4). The knowing and the living seem to succeed not proceed the return.

Again, after the events of Gog and Magog, which still lie unfulfilled to this day, ‘When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I *am* the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.’ (Ezek. 39.27-9). The strong implication is that the sanctifying and imparting of knowledge succeeds not proceeds the return into the land.

This reality of grace is all the more obvious when one considers that the Gospel of free and sovereign grace is founded on the covenant with Abraham, and is in many senses coterminous with it, and thus distinguished from the Law Covenant of Sinai that followed, Deut. 5.2,3. Gal.3.17, ‘And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.’ Yet what was the occasion of the covenant with Abraham, not the seed promise, but the land promise, ‘And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?’ Gen.15.8. The land was the focus of the covenant with the patriarch, which covenant may never be revoked, not even for a 1000 generations, ‘He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word *which* he commanded to a thousand generations. Which *covenant* he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, *and* to Israel *for* an everlasting covenant, saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance.’ Ps.105.8-11. Of course the fact that the Assyro-Babylonian return was not in unbelief, as WH reminds us, confirms that these prophecies remained yet unfulfilled until recently.

## 7 Establishment of State is proof of the fulfilment of ancient prophecy.

WH argues the unbelieving character of Israel’s current state and government mitigate against it being recognised as a divine ordinance. However if the unbelieving rulers Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar, could be described as the Anointed One and as God’s servant, Isa.45.1 and Jer.27.6, why are the secular Zionists exempt from serving God’s wiser and better purposes? Don’t the Orthodox with some insight describe them as God’s ass for the fulfilling of His mind?

## 8 Physical and intellectual restoration also evidence truth of fulfilled prophecy.

Only the hard hearted or the wilfully ignorant could fail to be impressed by the extraordinary renaissance of Israel, from a barren land of malarial swamps and deserts which utterly dispirited and defeated many would be European colonialists to a thriving, fertile land. In Jewish hands Israel is one of the richest agricultural economies per hectare in the world, let alone the region. Who could begrudge the extraordinary technical, academic and medical

achievements of Israelis, whilst still such a young nation? Who but the most jealous and short sighted can fail to marvel at the plethora of Nobel prizes, the extraordinary artistic, economic and educational attainments of the Jewish state, as yet largely in blind unbelief? Who is the Giver of every good gift? Why can we not recognise His tokens of a greater mercy and pardon yet to come upon this impoverished and darkened nation? Why must WH confine the fulfilment of these prophecies to the Maccabees or the Persian return, when the contemporary material richness and blessing is considerably more remarkable by comparison with Israel's intellectually petrified neighbours?

#### 9 Swift, overwhelming conquest of enemies confirm prophecy.

WH's use of overconfident predictions by zealous dispensationalists and his citation of Plato to discredit the possibility of detailed Biblical predictions in the last days are unworthy of his usual precision and sagacity. If it is not possible to see the signs of the fig tree's leaves, how are we to know that Christ's coming is right at the door, as He warned we should be able to discern, Matt.24.33? He asks almost like a liberal writer, 'where in the entire Bible... does the Lord pinpoint present day states, telling us exactly what will happen and what will not happen to them?' No doubt the Sadducees would have said the same in Jesus' day. Ezekiel's identification of Gog and Magog may be difficult to establish beyond reasonable doubt, but there should be no doubt these momentous events still lie in the future, Ezek. 38 and 39, Rev.20.8. The events there described are specific and highly detailed, one can almost read the contemporary newspaper headlines echoing the Divine question, 'Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants, the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them?' Ez.38.17. Three co-conspirators with Gog are very plainly identified, Iran, Cush or Sudan and Libya, Ez. 38.5, and it is certainly tempting though as yet unwarranted to identify the jihadist revival in the horn of Africa as a precursor to these events. As to the specific and apparently literal prophecy of Amos 9.14 and 15, it must either be allegorised, or it was definitely not fulfilled in the First and Second centuries. The Temple itself is highly significant here, for even a pagan King prophesied that the Second Temple would be destroyed, Ezra 6.3. So the apostate Jews of the first century should have taken Jeremiah's warnings to their own predecessors to heart not to trust in structures but in the Lord Himself, Jer. 7.4-12. However that the Temple will be reconstructed in egregious violation of the same expired Levitical covenant it will be intended to honour seems transparent from both the New and Old Testaments, Matt. 24.15, 2 Thess. 2.4, Daniel 8.14 and 12.11, none of which can be understood as precisely fulfilled by past events. How will this be possible without an apostacy similar to the apostacy of Jehoahaz after the glorious and unprecedented revival of Josiah 2 Chron. 36.1-2? How can there be a revival without a prior return to the land, in accordance with grace of Abraham's covenant, for which the true surety was Christ!

#### 10 Return of Jerusalem to Jewish sovereignty proof of fulfilment of Lk. 21.24.

It is intriguing that no capital in the world is the focus of so much international disapprobation as Jerusalem, even by Israel's allies, not even Taipei suffers so much, despite Jerusalem's possession of a majority Jewish population for over 130 years<sup>5</sup>. Rarely do building projects, and citizenship permits provoke such international criticism and scrutiny, certainly not in Tibetan Lhasa where the abuses make Jerusalem's look like snow by

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<sup>5</sup> According to Ottoman census data, Jews were a majority in Jerusalem from 1880, and probably were for considerably earlier than this.

comparison. It is also intriguing how vast a portion of the United Nation's prodigious output is devoted to the Holy Land and to the Holy City, no other country has been so singly criticised and so repeatedly isolated for relatively minor transgressions by comparison with the crimes of its accusers, Saudi Arabia's treatment of its one million or so Yemeni citizens during the first Gulf War springs to mind for example, but how few have even heard of that act of ethnic cleansing? Some bodies like the embarrassingly named UN Human Rights Council criticise virtually no other state, as though all the iniquities of the world were concentrated in one state the size of Wales! WH attempts to empty Luke 21.24 of any significance to a subsequent work of grace in the land by curiously denying the expectant weight of the term 'until'. His denial of pregnant significance of the same word in Romans 11.25, which echoes the passage in Luke eviscerates the hope and expectation of the whole chapter that grace will at last be shown not merely to the Gentiles and a scattering of some Jews but to a massive and significant 'fullness' v.12, a resurrecting refreshment to themselves and to a cold and apostate world! Joseph showed grace to the Gentiles first in order to provoke his own brethren to jealousy, Deut. 32.21. The world body's preoccupation with Jerusalem is very reminiscent of prophetic warnings about iniquitous inconsistency, Zech.1.15-16, 12.1-3, 14.1-3, though I do not claim that every detail of these predictions is as yet transparent to us.

11 Mt 19.28 alludes to 12 tribes, not just 2 ½.

I have no major beef with WH's contention that the true Israel in eternity will be composed of Jew and Gentile, in mutual service and mutual harmony, with the middle wall of partition already destroyed and the veil of hostility already torn from top to bottom. Yet I would observe that the nations of the world are apportioned their inheritance and distinguished, 'according to the number of the children of Israel', Deut. 32.8. Perhaps the ethnic descendants of Jacob who receive Messianic grace will serve some distinct and sacred function, being the natural olive and privileged recipients of advantage and graces the Gentiles have inherited less directly, that we too might serve without conceit before Him.

12 1 Cor.10.32 indicates Jewish nation, as distinct from church is recipient of Divine favour.

WH provides here a sharp and a well founded critique of dispensationalism, with which most old evangelical Christian Zionists (not a term of course they would recognise) would heartily agree.

Here is a crucible of moral courage for our generation, as Nazi ideology was to another - where will evangelicals stand today - will we too, as so many German and French professing evangelicals did then, fall short when the trumpet calls?