

# The Necessary Death and Resurrection of Israel

by Art Katz

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*Art Katz's sermon explores the profound connection between Israel's necessary death and resurrection and the Church's role in manifesting God's glory.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 12:34, Matthew 15:8, John 14:13, John 17:1, 1 Corinthians 6:20

**Topics:** "Prayer Life", "Divine Mercy"

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## Description

The preacher from the Longer Catechism of The Orthodox explores the significance of prayer as a means to attain a saving hope, emphasizing Jesus Christ's affirmation that whatever is asked in His name will be done by the Father for His glory. Prayer is defined as the lifting up of one's mind and heart to God, demonstrated through devout words, and involves praising God, giving thanks for His mercies, and making petitions. The sermon delves into the distinction between inward prayer, which is spiritual and of the heart and mind, and outward prayer, which is expressed in words and accompanied by other acts of devotion.

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## Transcript

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Ezekiel Chapter 37

As with the prophetic 'son of man' of this dread and glorious chapter, so also are we, the prophetic people of God, required to be set down in the midst of a valley full of dry bones (See verses 1-2). Here one is required to dismiss all wishful thinking of things as we would like them to be and to consider them as they in fact are, which is to say as God Himself sees them--indeed, as they must be seen--or we later forfeit any prophetic use by which these bones can be brought to life again. For to prophecy, that is, be as God's mouth, to speak the creative life-giving word, requires an identification with God that is total as against a begrudging condescension to a necessary obedience.

From the opening first verses of this text we perceive that the object of God's intention is not Israel alone, however glorious her restoration (Rom. 11:15), but that of the 'son of man'--a figure I would suggest of the Church of the Endtimes in its full prophetic makeup and stature. What is more, it is brought to that condition by the very urgency that Israel in her helpless death requires from outside herself in the ultimate prophetic faith and obedience of the other. This theme of the reciprocal relationship between Israel and the Church, by which the one is not made complete without the other, is the very heart of Paul's discourse in Rom. 11 and alone explains the ecstatic language defying paean of praise with which the chapter concludes; for the mystery of Israel is not only her restoration but the transfiguration of the Church obtained in being the agent of that restoration!

That this will be no small accomplishment requires us to be reminded of the Church not as it is in all its present fragmentation and divisiveness, but as the whole people of God in the true corporateness required in speaking as with one voice. This is an agreement that can never be the product of ecumenical arrangement but the statement only of apostolic authenticity itself. Such a Church would likely at first comprise such extremes as those who are indifferent toward Israel--if not hostile, with scant appreciation for her future let alone her destiny--as against those whose celebration of the nation and her people is extravagant to the point of near idolatry! Both will require appropriate depths of dealings from God that will constitute virtually their own death and resurrection from those unplumbed subtleties of heart that can only be met at the Cross.

Little wonder then that so many of us till now have been quick to affirm and to congratulate Israel in her present condition. Has she been the projection, more than we could have understood, of our own satisfaction and self-acceptance as the Church? Are we mindless about the question of Israel as a means toward God's glory and unconsciously unwilling for the sufferings and deaths by which it is to be obtained? Is there not an issue beyond Israel's success as a nation? Can it fulfill its covenantal destiny to "bless all the families of the earth" except as a nation transformed through resurrection? Can we consider that what we are presently celebrating is not the final prophetic fulfillment but its necessary preliminary? that "the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual"? that "what is raised in glory" must first be "sown in dishonor"?

How much are we saved from the predicament of defending or justifying Israel's increasingly desperate measures if we see them as the very stratagem of God to bring the nation to an end of its false hope in itself? For others will be quick to reject her or to join the chorus of those who censure her for the very moral failings she must experience in being brought to a necessary end of herself (of which God Himself is the author). Such a paradox is revealed in the harsh suppression of the Palestinians and the denial of their political autonomy her own democratic suppositions would logically have conceded if her self-preservation would not have been threatened thereby. Is this not in fact what she must experience to bring her to an end of that hope in herself as a distinctively, morally superior nation, her stated reason for being? Yet, we must be reminded that the issue of Israel as a witness nation is not to herself but to God; not achievement based upon her own prowess and impressive ability, but exclusively in His--and that finally by a Word spoken--when all human basis for hope is gone! For not to know God as the God who speaks and by whose word alone the dead are quickened, who calls those things which be not as though they were (Rom. 4:17) is not to know God as He essentially is and must be made known. Such a fulfillment waits upon the painful exhaustion, utterly and finally of any human ability to fulfill one's calling; for He will share His glory with no man. As Paul so appropriately concludes Romans 11 "for of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever."!

Surely, the pathetic national acknowledgment of Ez.37:11: "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts" is a statement of final despair as is proportionate to the historic, well-known and inveterate optimism and self-sufficiency by which we, as Jews, have again and again demonstrated to the world, as to ourselves, our impressiveness. Is it on that basis that we are to fulfill our Abrahamic calling that "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" [not 'impressed'] (Gen. 12:3)? Israel's increasing failure, therefore, to establish herself as a righteous state as an example to the Gentile nations is a testimony to this fact. How wrong of us to condemn her then for the very thing she is prophetically required to demonstrate! How more than is Israel His witness people in apostasy and undeservedness that He might be sanctified through her before the face of all nations when He restores her exclusively on the basis of His own mercy, which is to say, what He is ultimately in Himself. It is as this God that a redeemed Israel must make Him known to the nations and that out of their own experience of His power, His faithfulness to His promises by His Word and no other.

The issue then, is not the glorification of Israel, but of God. His own goodness prompts Him to act as He does; it is as recipients of His undeserved grace and mercy that Israel becomes most powerfully ultimate witness unto Him and is brought to such depths of broken repentance and corresponding character changes as the world has never seen (Ez. 36:31, Zech. 12:10-14, Zeph. 3:11-13, Isa. 60:15) so as to "make Jerusalem a praise in the earth"! That even the Holocaust did not suffice to elicit the cry of Ez. 37:11 her present condition testifies. On the contrary the oft-reiterated boast 'Never Again' suggests a defiant attitude and statement of military self-confidence (The arm of the flesh) that unhappily invites the severity of things that must yet befall the long-suffering nation. For us who had hoped for the progressive improvement or even 'spiritualization' of Zionist Israel and the end of such sufferings, there is the need to reassess whether our own hopes have been sentimental or idealistic, contrary to what we should perhaps rightly have understood in light of the whole tenor of the gospel and the Scriptures.

Can we therefore not suspect that Israel can only be called to life prophetically, out of our own experience of death and resurrection? Is not this death made necessary by the stubborn depth of human pride convinced of its own intrinsic righteousness despite the doctrinal suppositions to the contrary? The issue of Israel's resurrection from the dead becomes then our own, compelling us to that transcendent ground by which we are ourselves transformed--and to which we would not ourselves otherwise have been required to come except were it not for her!

I grant that this perception of Israel is painful; how much greater though would be the pained disappointment for many of an Israel that fails our every expectancy and brings into question even the supposed veracity of Scripture (as we had naively understood it) and of the God who appears now unable to save Israel from unexpected distresses? Could this be, at least in part, among the causes of that Last Day's great falling away of which Paul warned? Better, I would suggest, to allow ourselves "carried out in the Spirit of the Lord" (Ez.37:1) (from evangelical naïveté and presumption) and put "down in the midst of the valley (i.e. place of depressing truth)" rather than find ourselves in opposition to or exempted from His purposes with Israel however well-meaning our intentions! How much, we must inquire, of our own present Christianity is a desperate 'keeping alive' of what God would make desolate--and unredeemed Israel the projection of our own vain hopes? Nothing is more calculated to make the church awake from its dreams and sleep than the deepening intractable and insoluble crises of Israel! To pray for the 'elimination' of that which now vexes and threatens Israel, however humanly it is to be desired, is to find us perhaps praying against the very instrumentalities raised up by God to obtain that very death of Zionist and charismatic hope by which alone the prophetic and enduring glory is birthed. This much is sure: the issues

are too great to be prompted by sentiment rather than the Spirit; and that travail is effectual that has not its own agenda but finds itself in agreement with heaven however much its own humanity must be crucified.

Such in fact was the obedience of the Lord Jesus Himself when despite His own human desire after hearing of the sickness of His friend Lazarus, "abode two days still in the same place where He was" (John 11:6). Had He acted prematurely out of His own human compassion to hasten to the bedside of His beloved friend so as to alleviate his suffering He would have rendered null and void the purposes of God. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (11:4). How assuredly is a prophetic mouth disqualified when it speaks a false word, however well-meaning! May we keep ourselves in prophetic obedience as sons, despite the censure, and misunderstanding and criticisms of others for our 'lovelessness', lest unlike His, our word shall fail and fall limp when the Father calls us to be the agent of Israel's resurrection with a 'Come forth' that we are destined to speak! Ironically, however much our silence before that time will be construed as lovelessness, only a faith that works by love will suffice in that once-for-all critical moment; not that 'love' which is no more than sentiment or symbiotic identification or appeasement for guilt or fascination for the mystique of Israel but the unconditional love of very God Himself in an hour when Israel will be hated among all nations! In a word then, we are called to a prophetic faith beyond ourselves ("Son of man, can these bones live?"), a love beyond ourselves; an obedience beyond ourselves; an agreement in unity beyond ourselves--for we will be required to speak as with one voice! Truly for us to live then will be Christ (at last!). Little wonder that the Lord enjoins Israel in v.14, 'then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord!' Indeed, for who is to say where the prophet ends and the Lord begins? So complete is the dissolution of the man that one cannot tell where the one begins and the Other ends; in such a manner is the Bride adorned for the Bridegroom, having the glory of God; so is the Church fitted and readied for its eternal destiny to rule and reign with Him whose "sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore" whose "covenant of peace with them shall be an everlasting covenant" "and David their prince forever" (Ez.37:24-28).

#### A Summary and Conclusion

Only first as an utterly devastated Son--cut-off and out of the land of the living--could the then resurrected and glorified Son enlist the faith and hope to birth His Church. What should we expect for Israel then whose glorious restoration is the key to the nations?

But how again is this affected? The prophet is no mere spectator, but agent; his fidelity alone releases the powers which bring new life; his vision is critical to the fulfillment--all the more because he sees the situation at its human worst. Therefore is he dealt with as severely as Israel itself for if he is to be as God's mouth he must first become one with God's heart--for out of the abundance of the heart alone does the mouth speak! and that by a willing obedience consistent with all past obediences and not a final moment's 'religious obligation'! That obedience is itself a death to those final prejudices and envies, insecurities and reluctancies that would just as soon leave Israel in its grave than bring the prodigal back from the dead to share the Father's favor! For only death will free the 'son of man' company from those final subtleties of pride and prejudice that qualify it at last as God's prophetic people. Now the 'sticks' can be joined together so that "one king shall be king over them all... David, their prince forever" (37:22,28). It is the issue of Israel alone, though she be oblivious to this function, that shall stretch the Church and bring it to that ultimate faith, obedience and stature by which it is fitted for eternity! The heart of that mystery whose understanding alone saves us from deadly 'conceit' (Rom. 11:25).

What shall be found more to redound to the eternal honor of God than this triumph over sin and death in both Israel and the church? The same powers of hell and darkness that rushed in their characteristic fury to bring to death the Son of God will now again at the end of the age repeat their ineluctable logic against the whole house of Israel--an extermination of that nation whose restoration is cojoined with the Coming of its King and the establishment over the nations of His theocratic rule! The threat of that lost sway of the principalities and powers over the nations, so enjoyed till now, accelerates and intensifies the rabid hatred of deceived nations, both Islamic and western, against Israel fulfilling the purposes of Him who is sovereign over all and whose certain triumph over death by the spoken word will be played out before the face of all nations and that of the Chosen Nation itself. So will it fulfill the role which it had spurned or so grievously misunderstood fulfilled now more in its vices than its virtues, by its failings than its successes.

"O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33)

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