

Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones
Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach 5777

By Perry Davis

This d'var Torah is dedicated in honor of the bar mitzvah **today** of our grandson Eliyah Itai Weinstein, son of Shefa and Aharon, in Even Shmuel, Israel.

On Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach we read Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. Ezekiel was a transitional prophet who straddled the time period from the destruction of the first Temple by Nebuchadnezzar into the Babylonian exile. According to *Seder Hadoroth*, Ezekiel was taken captive and imprisoned by the Babylonians for 5 years. His book covers the destruction of the Temple and ends with the promise of consolation. Throughout the book, Ezekiel describes fantastic visions of heavenly chariots, the future Temple, the apocalyptic war of Gog and Magog and the valley of resurrected dry bones. Why is this chilling vision of dry bones read on Pesach?

Rashi, citing the Talmud Sanhedrin, indicates that the dry bones brought back to life are the remains of the tribe of Ephraim. According to the Midrash, that tribe left Egypt before the redemption of the other Jews and were killed in Canaan by the people of Gath. In Ezekiel's vision, these fallen Ephraimites arise from the dead and are brought to the promised land – thus providing the true culmination of the exodus from Egypt for all of the children of Israel. There is also a debate as to whether this vision reflected reality or was a vivid allegory. Rabbi Judah ben Betheirah actually claimed to be a descendent of one of these resurrected bodies.

A simple reading of the text, however, should clarify the identity or representation of these resurrected individuals. Chapter 37 verse 11 states:

Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Behold they say, 'Our bones have become dried up, our hope lost, we are cut off.'

The purpose of the narrative is similarly clarified by the text (37:12)

... I open your graves and raise you from your graves as my people, and I bring you to the land of Israel.

So what we have is compassionate consolation to a nation bereft of its home and Temple.

Historically, if one threw a dart at a chart listing all the years from the first Passover until today it would likely hit a date in time when Jews were in exile and oppressed somewhere in the world. This haftarah was, together with the seder's culmination - "next year in Jerusalem," a story designed to bring the comfort of hope to millions of Jews in scores of countries for over 2000 years who yearned for freedom, redemption and a return to our homeland. Ezekiel's voice promises a rescue mission led by God himself for the living and the dead.

While today we have, thank God, the privilege to return to our homeland, some bones remain in horrible exile. Oren Shaul and Hadar Goldin a'h, made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation during the 2014 Gaza war – when they discovered terror tunnels and fought a barbaric enemy to destroy them. A US-brokered cease fire was violated. Hamas killed the boys and took their bodies hostage. We pray today for the return of these heroes to *kever yisrael*. We also have to act strategically to fulfill the IDF commitment to leave no soldier behind on the battle field.

The Goldin family asks us to put particular pressure on the U.N. by helping fulfill the promise they got from Ambassador Haley to do all she can to return these remains to Israel for proper burial.

May we soon merit the final words of Ezekiel's vision:

And I will put my spirit into you, and you shall live, and I will set you on your land and you shall know that I, the Lord, spoke it and did it. Ezekiel 37:14

Shabbat Shalom, Chag Sameach