

Simeon and the Restoration of Israel

GERALD BRAY

Abstract

Charles Simeon, one of the leading founders of modern Anglican Evangelicalism, was a staunch advocate of missions to the Jews, whom he regarded as God's chosen people. Basing himself entirely on the witness of the prophets and apostles, he believed that the church held the gospel message in trust against the day when those for whom it was originally intended would hear it and turn to Christ. The church had a responsibility to proclaim the message of salvation to the Jewish people but was failing in its duty. In his sermons on the subject, Simeon called Christians back to faithful witness among Jews and did much to further the cause of Jewish evangelism in the Church of England and beyond.

Keywords

Jews, Israel, conversion, restoration, prophecy, fulfillment, miracle, mission

Introduction

Few students of Anglicanism would doubt the central importance of Charles Simeon (1759–1836) for the strength and character of the modern Evangelical movement within the Anglican Communion and beyond. His influence, whether direct or mediated through a variety of successors and imitators, continues

to be felt, even if his major work, the *Horae Homileticae*, is less widely read or appreciated today than it once was.¹

It is in these sermons and sermon outlines that Simeon's teachings are most readily accessible. Among the many subjects that he discussed is the place of the Jewish people in the plan of God for the salvation of humankind. The number of sermons dedicated to this theme is small—only about 40 out of 2,536, or 1.5% of the total—but the message they convey is both comprehensive and consistent. He could not have foreseen what would happen to the Jewish people in the twentieth century, nor could he have known about the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, but it is astonishing how much of what he predicted on the basis of the Scriptures has either come to pass or remains relevant to a Christian approach to Jews today.

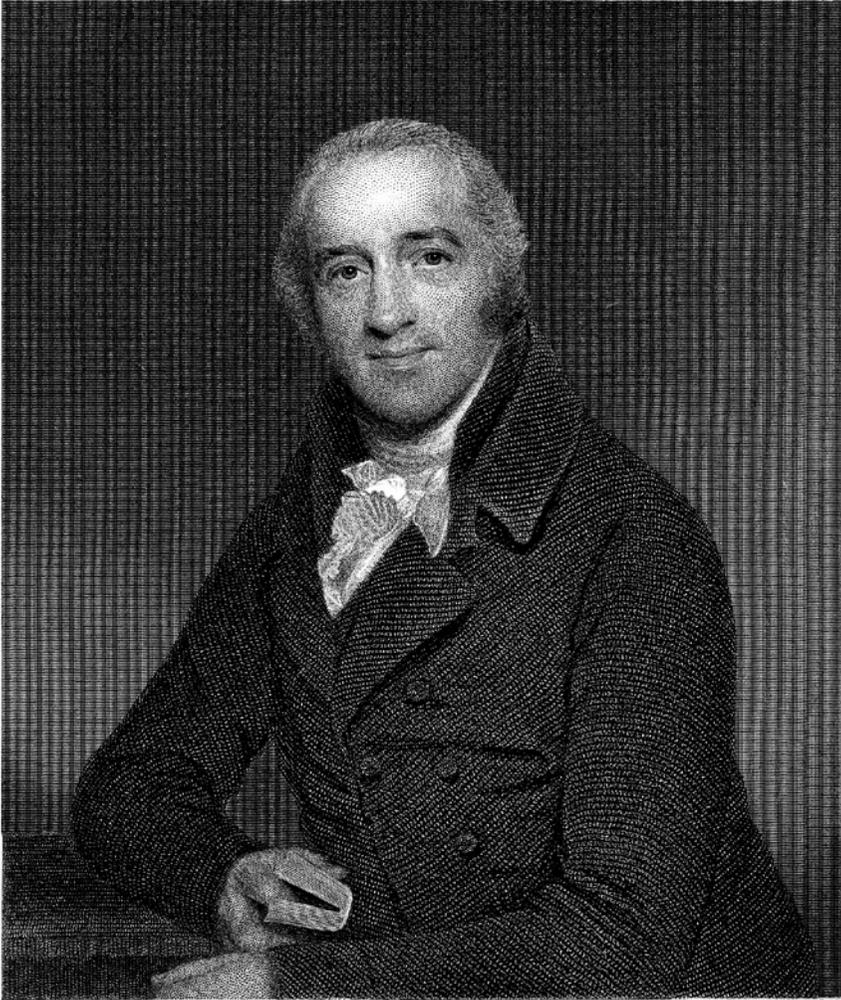
I. Simeon, Israel, and the Church

In line with most Christian interpreters of his time, Simeon believed that the Christian church is the new Israel, the direct and legitimate successor of the Old Testament nation. He therefore read the stories of the patriarchs and kings recorded in the historical books of the Old Testament as models of how God continues to deal with Christians today. He generally eschewed allegory and regarded what is recorded about Israel as a statement of plain historical fact, but he did not hesitate to apply the experiences of the ancient Israelites to the lives of Christian believers now. His approach was broadly typological, or to use his word, “typical.”² We are united with them at the level of spiritual principles, and their successes and failures have been preserved as encouragements and warnings to us. In these sermons, Simeon said little or nothing about the application of the Old Testament texts to Jews today because in his view, Christians are living in a new dispensation in which the Jews will receive the blessing of God only as they turn to embrace the Messiah.

However, although Simeon did not gloss over the parlous state of modern Jewry, neither did he condemn the Jews for their unbelief or express opinions about them that would now be regarded as anti-Semitic. On the contrary, Simeon saw the centuries-old fate of the Jews suffering discrimination and persecution as deeply tragic, both for them and for the church. His deepest desire, like that expressed by Paul in Romans, was to see the chosen people

¹ Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, 8th ed., 21 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohm, 1847).

² Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 90 on Exodus 17:11,” in *Horae Homileticae* 1:433. Simeon says, “The whole history of the Israelites. From their deliverance out of Egypt to their establishment in the land of Canaan, was altogether of a typical nature.”



Sir William Beechey, pinxt.

William Findex, sculpt.

CHARLES SIMEON

1759-1836

restored to the inheritance that is rightly theirs. He even went so far as to claim that the gospel has been entrusted to the church as a deposit to be held in trust against the day when the Jews will be converted and reclaim what belongs to them.³ At the consummation of all things, it will not be Israel that is dissolved into the church but the other way around—all *Israel*, Jews and Christians alike, will be saved and share their common identity as children of Abraham and inheritors of the covenant promises originally made to him and subsequently fulfilled in Christ.

When asked why God should have chosen the Jews as opposed to any other nation, Simeon's answer was that it was a decree of God's sovereign will, which he manifested in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and later extended to the Gentiles. At no time, either in the distant past or in the present, does any human being have the right to boast of being a child of God or claim that distinction on their own merits:

It was altogether of God's sovereign will and pleasure that he chose Abraham out of an idolatrous world, to make him the head and father of an elect seed. ... It was also purely of his own sovereign will and pleasure that God chose the Gentiles to inherit the blessings which the Jewish people had forfeited and lost. It is impossible to view this matter in any other light.⁴

Simeon knew, and urged the message on his hearers, that every point in this history appears to us as an inscrutable mystery. We do not know why God did not abandon his ancient people entirely after they rejected him. We cannot say why there has been such a long delay in fulfilling the promises originally made to the patriarchs. We cannot predict when the restoration of the Jews will occur or when Christ will come again. But we can know that in all these things we are brought face-to-face with "the sovereignty, the uncontrollable sovereignty, of the Most High, who imparts to everyone so much only as he himself sees fit, and *that* too in the time and manner which seems best to his unerring wisdom."⁵

One point that Simeon made is that for all their failures, the Jewish people have survived in a way that their persecutors through the ages have not. As he put it,

The various nations that, in successive ages, have oppressed them, the Egyptian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Grecian, Roman, have all sunk beneath the yoke which their respective conquerors have laid upon them, and have been mingled with their

³ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1901 on Romans 11:30–31," in *Horae Homileticae* 15:451–56.

⁴ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1898 on Romans 11:22–24," in *Horae Homileticae* 15:433.

⁵ Simeon, "Outline no. 1901 on Romans 11:30–31," in *Horae Homileticae* 15:453.

invaders in one common mass. Not so the Jews: they, though more cruelly oppressed than any, have still been kept distinct from the people amongst whom they have dwelt.⁶

The ways of divine providence may be obscure in many details, but the overall pattern is clear. Enough had happened in the past to give him confidence for the future, and that future would be shared equally between the Jews and the Gentiles who had been won to the faith of Abraham as revealed and completed in the work of Christ.

II. *Israel's Estrangement from God*

Simeon was well aware that the Jews of his day had fallen a long way from the glory days of David and Solomon, and even from what they still were in New Testament times. In his England, Jews had no civil rights and were still thought of as foreigners. Simeon compared their plight to that of the ancient Israelites in the time of Ezra:

Though the temple worship was restored, it was carried out by the Jews without any zeal for God's honour, or any of that spirituality of mind which is the very essence of all acceptable worship. ... So at this time the Jewish people are at a very low ebb, both in respect of morals and religion. They are indeed, by the providence of God, placed in a situation in which no other people upon earth stand: for they alone, of all the people upon the face of the globe, are incapable of serving their God according to the directions of their own Law, and the dictates of their own conscience.⁷

Rightly or wrongly, that is how Simeon saw the position of Jews in his day, but as questionable as his analysis might be, he did not stop at that. Somewhat unfortunately, he went on to describe what he perceived Jewish worship to be like:

But, at the same time, they show no sense of privation on this account, nor any desire to honour God in the services which they do render: for there is universally among them, in all their synagogues, a degree of irreverence, which we should scarcely expect to find amongst heathens in the worship of their idols.⁸

What Simeon knew about Jews would have come from Christian sources, which were almost all inadequate and prejudiced to some degree, as the above quotation indicates. But if Simeon's assessment of Jewish worship was

⁶ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 898 on Isaiah 27:6," in *Horae Homileticae* 8:4.

⁷ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 436 on Ezra 7:23," in *Horae Homileticae* 4:251.

⁸ *Ibid.*

almost certainly secondhand and ill-informed, the overall picture of their condition that he painted was clear enough. Jews were strangers and pilgrims on earth, with no home they could call their own and subject to varying degrees of discrimination, even in the United States, which was the only country that gave them full civil rights in the early nineteenth century.

Simeon was in no doubt that this unenviable fate was the direct result of the Jewish rejection of Christ, but he resisted any temptation to attribute it to the standard medieval belief that the Jews had “killed Christ” and had therefore gotten what they deserved. He also refused to see their rejection of Jesus as no more than a reaction to the preaching of Paul and the early Christians. On the contrary, he believed it was something that had been foretold by Moses himself. As Simeon saw it, the great lawgiver of Israel had predicted that a prophet would come who would be the mediator, lawgiver, ruler, and deliverer of Israel. But Israel would not listen to him, and for that reason God would cast them out and punish them for their unbelief.⁹ In his words,

The treatment they should meet with was most circumstantially foretold: the hardships they should undergo, the oppression they should endure, the contempt in which they should be held, the conviction which they themselves, in common with all mankind, should feel, that their sufferings were inflicted by God himself on account of their iniquities; all, I say, was foretold, and all is come to pass.¹⁰

The worst thing the Jews ever did was crucify their Messiah, something that Simeon believed had provoked God more than any of their other crimes against him.¹¹ In saying this, he merely repeated the standard accusation that Christians had always made against Jews, but unlike many of his predecessors, he did not indulge in righteous indignation at the infidelity of God’s chosen people. On the contrary, he understood what had befallen them as part of God’s twofold plan—to bring them to repentance and to bring salvation to the rest of humanity. The first part of this plan had already been worked out in the Old Testament and was attested by the prophets. As Jeremiah said, “He sent them into Babylon for their good.”¹² After the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, God “cut off the Jews from all

⁹ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 206 on Deuteronomy 13:1–3,” in *Horae Homileticae* 2:358–59.

¹⁰ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 224 on Deuteronomy 30:4–6,” in *Horae Homileticae* 2:438.

¹¹ Charles Simeon, “Outline no.233 on Deuteronomy 32:21,” in *Horae Homileticae* 2:489.

¹² Jeremiah 24:5. Simeon’s comment was, “Afflictive as that dispensation was, it was the most profitable to them of all the mercies and judgments that they ever experienced; for by means of it they were cured of their idolatrous propensities; and never have yielded to them any more, even to the present hour.”

possibility of observing the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, in order that they may be constrained to seek for mercy through the Messiah whom they have crucified.”¹³ By then, of course, the second part of God’s plan was in operation and has continued to the present time. As he put it,

The Jews were once the only people upon earth who possessed the blessings of salvation. But God, in righteous indignation, cast off them; and, in a way of sovereign grace and mercy, took us from a wild olive tree, and grafted us in upon the stock from which they had been broken, and from which they had been broken *on purpose that we might be grafted in.*¹⁴

This, however, was far from being the whole story. When describing the dispersion of Jewry, Simeon has this to say:

The Jews are scattered throughout the world, unconscious of any particular good which they are destined to perform: but God designs to use them as his instruments, and by them to communicate the blessings of salvation to the whole world.¹⁵

He continues almost immediately with the following observation:

For this office they are fitted, having their own Scriptures in their hands, and understanding the language of the different countries where they sojourn: so that nothing is wanting but to have the veil removed from their hearts, and they are ready at this moment, each in his place, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer.¹⁶

Given this destiny, there is only one possible conclusion:

Wherever we see a Jew, we should regard him as an object *from whom we are to derive good, and to whom we are to do good.* There is no creature under heaven from the sight of whom we may derive greater good than from the sight of a Jew. We have before said, that, whether intentionally or not, he proclaims to all, in the most convincing way, both the nature and the perfections of God.¹⁷

Lastly, the message of salvation comes *exclusively* from the Jews. Even the closely related Samaritans cannot claim salvation apart from the Jews, as Jesus told the woman at the well.¹⁸ In Simeon’s words,

¹³ Simeon, “Outline no. 233 on Deuteronomy 32:21,” in *Horae Homileticae* 2:494.

¹⁴ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 214 on Deuteronomy 23:3–4,” in *Horae Homileticae* 2:391. The italics are in the original text and a reference to Romans 11:19–20.

¹⁵ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1211 on Micah 5:7,” in *Horae Homileticae* 10:313.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10:314.

¹⁸ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1617 on John 4:22,” in *Horae Homileticae* 13:283.

We ought never to forget how greatly we are indebted to the Jews: since, whether in its primary structure or its subsequent conveyance, our salvation is altogether of them; of them originally, of them instrumentally, of them exclusively: so that not a soul amongst us shall ever go forth from this devoted land to the mountains of eternal bliss, but as instructed, instigated, and assisted by a Jew.¹⁹

III. *The Duty of Christians toward the Jews*

Simeon's analysis of the divine plan would not have surprised his Christian contemporaries, most of whom believed that they had supplanted the ancient people of God and felt little sympathy for the Jews who had been cast away. It is at this point that Simeon's radically different approach to the Jews began to make itself felt. Should we as Christians rejoice in the fact that we now enjoy the inheritance originally given to ancient Israel and leave the physical descendants of Abraham to suffer the consequences of their rebellion against God? Not at all! Christians who complacently accepted this situation and saw no need to do anything to help Jews were guilty of the grossest hypocrisy and had to be called to account for their unpardonable indifference:

All that thou hast of spiritual good was once the exclusive heritage of the Jew: and thou art possessing what has been taken from him; yea, thou art revelling in abundance, whilst he is perishing in utter want: and all the obligation which, by thine own confession, would attach to me in the case I have stated, is entailed on thee: and thou, in refusing to fulfil it, art sinning against God, and against thine own soul.²⁰

The Jews were suffering because of the sins of their ancestors, but they were not personally responsible for their spiritual blindness. The real guilt fell on Christians, who understood what had happened and had a duty to reach out to their Jewish neighbors but had not done so. Simeon did not hesitate to point out that if Christians were enjoying the blessings once reserved for the Jews, it was because those blessings had been entrusted to them as a deposit that was ultimately destined for the benefit of Jews in later times. Quoting Romans 11:30–31, he argued that it was through the mercy of Christians that Jews would also obtain mercy, and the blame for the failure of this to come to pass lay squarely at the door of the former: “God has made thee a trustee for the Jew; and thou hast not only betrayed thy trust, but left him to perish, when thou hadst in possession all that his soul

¹⁹ Ibid., 13:291.

²⁰ Simeon, “Outline no. 214 on Deuteronomy 23:3–4,” *Horae Homileticae* 2:392.

needs.”²¹ The condemnation of the church of Simeon’s time for neglecting its duty could not have been starker.

For Simeon, the Christian’s duty toward Jews began with the simple historical fact that without them, there would never have been Christianity at all. Everything that is good and holy in our own faith comes ultimately from them, and our debt to that inheritance extends to their modern-day descendants. He was quite explicit about this:

To whom are we indebted for all the instruction which we have received respecting the way of peace and salvation? We owe it all to Jews. We know nothing of God and of his Christ, but as it has been revealed to us by Jewish Prophets and Apostles Such infinite obligations as we owe to that people should surely be requited in acts of love towards their descendants.²²

This is a theme that Simeon returns to again and again, but nowhere more extensively than in his sermon on Romans 15:26–27, where he goes over the history of Israel point by point and details the ways in which Christians are indebted to the Jews. Whether we are talking about the patriarchs, the prophets, or even the apostles of Christ, the spiritual enlightenment and knowledge that we have of God is entirely dependent on the witness of faithful Jews who risked everything and endured all kinds of persecution and hardship in order to bring the precious message of salvation to us.²³

To Simeon, the propensity of Christians to ignore this history was nothing but base ingratitude, a point he drove home with one accusation after another against the church of his time. Particularly interesting here is his emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus, which he pushed to what most Christians today would probably regard as an extreme. As he saw it, Jesus was a Jew who died to redeem souls from death and hell; he is a Jew who now intercedes for us at the right hand of God; he is a Jew who is the “fountain of all spiritual good to our souls.”²⁴ Christians have always emphasized the full humanity of Christ in his incarnation, but very few have gone to the lengths that Simeon did in identifying that humanity with Jewishness. Yet Simeon had no hesitation in doing so or in drawing from that identification the conclusion that Christian indifference to Jews is “highly criminal.”²⁵ The fact that God was punishing them for their rebellion against him was,

²¹ *Ibid.*, 392–93.

²² *Ibid.*, 2:391.

²³ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1924 on Romans 15:26–27,” in *Horae Homileticae* 15:561–77.

²⁴ Simeon, “Outline no. 224 on Deuteronomy 30:4–6,” in *Horae Homileticae* 2:440.

²⁵ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1066 on Jeremiah 30:17,” in *Horae Homileticae* 9:191.

for Simeon, no excuse for Christians to turn a blind eye to their fate. On the contrary, their tragic circumstances ought to act as a spur for Christians to reach out to Jews in love and do everything in their power to alleviate their sufferings.

Simeon was not indifferent to the civil status of the Jews in England, and he was ashamed that when Parliament had tried to relieve them, the outcry was so great—from Christian believers as well as from the religiously indifferent—that it was forced to backtrack on the legislation, which (as he remarked) “did nothing more than concede to them the common rights of humanity, the rights possessed by the meanest beggars in the land.”²⁶ He knew that there was little he could do to change the civil status of Jews, but to him, their spiritual condition was more important, and in that realm the church was free to act.²⁷ Jewish emancipation would come when Christians overcame their indifference to the spiritual welfare of God’s ancient people. There had been some attempts to address this problem, including the founding of a society for the conversion of the Jews, but the results had been patchy.²⁸ In Simeon’s opinion, the sins of his fellow Christians were nowhere more apparent than in their reactions to these serious attempts at evangelism among the Jewish people:

Instead of rejoicing, that now, at last, a society has arisen to seek their welfare, we regard their attempts as visionary; and are disposed rather to deride their efforts, than to afford them our active and zealous aid. Instead of praying fervently to God for this people in secret, and then going forth to exert ourselves for the conversion of their souls, we give them not so much as a place in our thoughts.²⁹

The sinfulness of this indifference was all the more striking in that we Christians were once in a more deplorable state than Jews had ever been. For however mistaken or rebellious Jews might be, they had always worshiped the one true God. In sharp contrast, Gentiles of every kind had been bowing down to “stocks and stones.”³⁰ To call on Jews to turn to Christ was

²⁶ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1066 on Jeremiah 30:17,” in *Horae Homileticae* 9:194. Simeon was referring to the Jewish Naturalisation Act of 1753, which was repealed a year later. The cause of Jewish emancipation did not begin again in earnest until the very last years of Simeon’s life and did not succeed until more than twenty years after his death.

²⁷ Simeon was alive to the danger that Jews might mistake the messianic prophecies in the Old Testament as promising them an earthly empire, something that was not God’s purpose concerning them. See Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1746 on Acts 3:26,” in *Horae Homileticae* 14:285.

²⁸ The London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, founded in 1809.

²⁹ Simeon, “Outline no. 1066 on Jeremiah 30:17,” in *Horae Homileticae* 9:195.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9:199.

not to call them away from such idolatry to the worship of the true God but rather to urge them to worship the God they already knew—in the right way. He was very clear about this:

We do not call our Jewish brethren *from* Jehovah, but *to* him Instead of calling them *from* the law, we call them *to* it We go further, and say, that no human being can be saved, who has not a perfect obedience to that law as his justifying righteousness.³¹

Having established that fundamental point, Simeon then went on to explain why the Christian gospel was necessary. Nobody can keep the law in all its particulars, as the apostle Paul had pointed out. Beyond that, however, there was the fact that the destruction of traditional Israelite society had made even an attempt to observe the ceremonial law of Moses impossible. The only way out of this dilemma was to recognize that the prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Christ at a time when that was still possible and that faith in him had superseded the dispensations of the old covenant without altering their underlying meaning. In Simeon's words,

We call you only from shadows to the substance. We call you to Christ as uniting in himself all that the ceremonial law was intended to shadow forth. He is the true tabernacle, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.³²

To put it a different way, Christian missions to Gentile nations called them to turn from their false worship of false gods, but when addressing Jews, the plea was that they should turn from a mistaken worship of the true God to the way that had been opened up in Christ. Jews were not being asked to abandon any of the truths of their religion; rather, they were being urged to see its true nature. "In no place under heaven, but in Zion, is holiness found."³³ That holiness, Simeon pointed out, was "a real conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God." The message had been entrusted to Christians, but its focus was unmistakable—only in Zion, with the restoration of God's ancient people, would its power and potential be fully and finally realized. It was the sacred duty of Christians to do all in their power to bring that about, and the way open to them was the preaching of the gospel of Christ to the Jews from whom it had originally come and to whom it ultimately belonged.

³¹ Simeon, "Outline no. 206 on Deuteronomy 13:1–3," in *Horae Homileticae* 2:353.

³² *Ibid.*, 2:355.

³³ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1197 on Obadiah 1:17," in *Horae Homileticae* 10:248.

IV. *The Conversion of the Jews*

Simeon believed that before the restoration of Israel would occur, there would be a progressive work of conversion among the Jewish people to Christianity. Christians had no excuse to wait for God to act at the end of time—it was their duty to reach out to their elder brothers in the faith of Abraham and share the good news of Christ with them. He was aware that many Christians thought that such an effort was hopeless—that the Jews are now so blinded and hardened against the gospel that it is pointless to attempt their conversion. To that he replied,

whose fault is it that they are so blinded and hardened? Is it not ours? If Christians had universally displayed in their life and conversation the superior excellence of their religion, is there not reason to think, that the Jews might by this time have been led to view it in a more favourable light?³⁴

Today, even more than two hundred years ago, Simeon’s reproach to his fellow Christians strikes a painful but undeniable chord. The experience of the Holocaust in the mid-twentieth century, which was but the ghastly culmination of centuries of discrimination against the Jewish people, is a blot on the conscience of the church that cannot be ignored and that constitutes a barrier to evangelism among them that is all the more formidable for being based on experience. If Christians are known by their love, then Jewish people have seen precious little of it, and Simeon’s rebukes are as powerful now as they were when they were first uttered.

That said, evangelism among the Jews has never been rooted in the behavior of Christians, but in the message they are called to bring, and that is readily available in the New Testament. Making it available to Jews, Simeon believed, was one of the primary tasks of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. It must be admitted that there is a certain lack of realism in Simeon’s approach to this subject, but the intention is clear enough. In his words, “The translating of the New Testament into pure Biblical Hebrew, and circulating that throughout all the world, is a work which we in particular ... shall do well to encourage.”³⁵ That the work of converting the Jews would be slow and difficult, Simeon did not doubt. Preaching on the subject in 1821, he acknowledged that the results obtained by the London Society, which he had helped to found twelve years

³⁴ Simeon, “Outline no. 1924 on Romans 15:26–27,” in *Horae Homileticae* 15:573.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15:576.

earlier, had been less impressive than many at that time had hoped. But that did not dampen his enthusiasm:

We have sent forth a few missionaries amongst them ... and they have, in many instances, been most kindly received by the Jews; who, instead of rejecting the offer of the Hebrew Testament ... have most gladly and thankfully received it; and indeed, have expressed the most ardent desire to obtain it. They have shown a great willingness, also, to be instructed in the knowledge of Christianity; and, to a very great extent, have they shaken off the yoke of Rabbinical tyranny and Talmudical superstition: so that, when we shall be able to send forth amongst them a larger number of well-instructed missionaries, there is every reason to hope that the light of Divine Truth will arise upon them.³⁶

What are we to make of this? It is quite possible that some Jews, at least, were polite to the Christian missionaries and thanked them for their gift of the Hebrew New Testament, but that is not the same thing as demonstrating a willingness to be instructed in Christianity. That a few were converted is certainly true, but as Simeon himself remarked elsewhere in the same sermon, the results were disappointing. The upheavals of the Napoleonic wars had led to a spread of Enlightenment ideas that affected Jews as much as others, and no doubt some were indeed casting off their inherited rabbinic traditions, but the same thing was happening in “Christian” circles and would hardly be considered a sign that divine truth was spreading. Some Jewish families were adopting Christianity in its liberal bourgeois form in order to assimilate into broader European society—the family of Karl Marx (born in 1818) among them. But again, that can hardly be counted as a widespread or deep reception of the gospel. Perhaps the fairest judgment is that for those like Simeon, who wanted to see them, encouraging signs of a movement toward Christianity among the Jews could be detected here and there, but they had little long-term significance. Simeon was right not to be unduly discouraged after only twelve years of missionary labor, but it is hard not to believe that he was being unduly optimistic in his predictions for the immediate future. He never gave up hope for the eventual conversion of the entire Jewish people, but realistically, he read the Old Testament prophecies as telling us that “the first converts will be only a small remnant, a gleaning after the gathering has been made.” Quoting Isaiah 10:22, he said that only a remnant of the people would return, though he added that with respect to the complete ingathering that would ultimately follow, they would be the firstfruits of the harvest, and the drop before the shower.³⁷

³⁶ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1262 on Zechariah 14:7,” in *Horae Homileticae* 10:544–45.

³⁷ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 899 on Isaiah 27:12–13,” in *Horae Homileticae* 8:13.

Perhaps his most mature reflection on the subject is what we find in his sermon on Psalm 102:13–15, where he states,

We cannot, it is true, boast of thousands converted at once: nor were the efforts of John, and of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, very successful ... but the seed sown by him grew up on the day of Pentecost and brought forth fruit an hundredfold: in like manner we have only fruit sufficient at present to encourage our continued exertions; but we hope that Pentecostal fruits will yet be found, and that too at no distant period.³⁸

What we now witness in individual cases will then be proclaimed on a massive scale to the wonderment of the world and the eternal glory of God. Conversion would come slowly, but Simeon did not believe that the church should sit idly by and wait for a miracle to occur. To justify this approach, he preached a series of sermons on Ezekiel 37, the famous vision of the valley of the dry bones. In the first of these, he recognized the dire spiritual condition of the Jews of his time and pointed out that they had been prejudiced by their own leaders against the claims of Christ. At the first mention of Jesus, the average Jew would instinctively recoil in horror, and the rabbinic establishment could be relied upon to stoke the flames of prejudice against the man whom they claimed was an imposter. Christian evangelists should have no illusions about this—dry bones would not naturally hear the word of the Lord because there was no life in them.³⁹

At the same time, Ezekiel had been commanded to speak to the dry bones and prophesy their future restoration to life, and it was on that basis that Simeon advocated evangelism to the Jews of his time. The latter part of his sermon was given over to developing a strategy for accomplishing the task that was thus assigned to the church of his day. The first and in many ways most important element of this task was the need for constant and fervent prayer. In his words,

Were the Christian world more earnest in prayer to God for the restoration and salvation of his people, I feel no doubt but that God would arise and have mercy upon Zion, and that a great work would speedily be wrought among them.⁴⁰

The second thing was the need to form missionary societies dedicated to the evangelization of the Jews, something that he himself had been involved in.

³⁸ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 670 on Psalm 102:13–15,” in *Horae Homileticae* 6:200–201.

³⁹ Charles Simeon, “Outline no. 1120 on Ezekiel 37:1–6,” in *Horae Homileticae* 9:448–63.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9:463.

And lastly, the aim of converting Jews to Christianity must not be the achievement of some nominal conformity of outward forms, but a genuine movement of the heart and mind to a living faith in Christ. The important thing for him was not that the dry bones should be arranged into a presentable skeleton but that they should live by acquiring the flesh and blood that a living organism would naturally have.⁴¹ That this would be a gradual development, Simeon believed, was indicated in the text that he was expounding, though it must be admitted that the means he advocated to attain it are not mentioned in Ezekiel's prophecy.

V. *The Future Restoration of Israel*

Closely linked to the conversion of the Jews in Simeon's mind was the future restoration of Israel as a civil polity in the promised land. He admitted that there were many wise and learned Christian theologians who did not believe that, but although that made him more cautious than he might otherwise have been, it did not deter him. In his words,

There are even amongst wise and good men some who doubt whether the Jews shall *literally* be restored to their own land; and therefore I would speak with diffidence respecting it: but I confess that in my opinion the declarations of God respecting it are so strong and numerous, that I should scarcely know what to believe on the authority of Scripture, if I did not believe that.⁴²

Interestingly, Simeon believed that this restoration would include all twelve tribes of the ancient Israelite state, reaching back to the time when they were united under David and Solomon. Given that the ten "lost" tribes of the northern kingdom had apparently disappeared, it is hard to know how they would be reunited with the remnants of Judah and Benjamin, who made up the Jewish nation of Simeon's day, and Simeon had no clue as to how that might occur. Nevertheless, it appeared to be what Ezekiel prophesied, and Simeon had no doubt that it would happen, however difficult it might be for our minds to conceive.⁴³

Simeon envisaged the miraculous character of Israel's restoration as an integral part of the millennial reign of Christ. The subject of the millennium

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9:463–64.

⁴² Simeon, "Outline no. 899 on Isaiah 27:12–13," in *Horae Homileticae* 8:11. The same thought is repeated, in almost identical words, in Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1069 on Jeremiah 31:7–9," in *Horae Homileticae* 9:215.

⁴³ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1122 on Ezekiel 37:15–22," in *Horae Homileticae* 9:468–75.

was enjoying a revival in Simeon's day, with an increasing emphasis on the literal fulfillment of prophecy. Simeon did not go into the subtleties of what we would call premillennialism, but of the reality of the millennial reign he had no doubt. Moreover, he believed that it was set out in some detail by the prophet Micah, who (along with Isaiah, whose vision he shared) was one of the chief sources of messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. As Simeon expounded it, the millennium

shall be the time for the universal reign of Christ: at which time the Jews are destined to act a most conspicuous part upon the theatre of the world: being, on the one hand, God's instruments for the conversion of the Gentile world; and, on the other hand, his agents for the destruction of all who shall oppose his will.⁴⁴

Simeon was also inspired in his millenarian expectations by the prophecies of Zechariah, though he admitted that they were particularly difficult to interpret correctly. Unlike Isaiah or Micah, Zechariah was living at a time when the Jews were returning from Babylon and rebuilding their temple in Jerusalem. The restoration of Israel had an immediacy for him that could not be overlooked, and much of what he had to say could be applied to the circumstances of his own time. However, Simeon was clear that Zechariah's vision went far beyond what his contemporaries were achieving. For a start, like Ezekiel before him, Zechariah saw the restoration of Israel as embracing all twelve tribes when it was clear that what he was witnessing was the return of Judah and Benjamin only. Also, the Jews who returned to Jerusalem were not particularly pious, and the prophecy that they would be a blessing to the world was not fulfilled. On the contrary, claimed Simeon, the Jews in the time of Jesus were universally reviled, and apart from the work of Christ and his apostles, whom they rejected, were a blessing to nobody.⁴⁵ To Simeon, that could only mean that the fulfillment of the prophecy still lay in the future, and he therefore interpreted it in line with his millenarian expectations.

Confirmation for that view came above all from Romans 11, where the eschatological dimension of Jewish restoration could not be mistaken or denied. The alienation of the Jews would continue until the fullness of the Gentiles had been gathered in, at which point their conversion to Christ would come swiftly and suddenly. With the whole world watching them, they would experience the truth and importance of the gospel and become

⁴⁴ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1217 on Micah 7:18–20," in *Horae Homileticae* 10:341.

⁴⁵ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1249 on Zechariah 8:3–8," in *Horae Homileticae* 10:482.

preachers of it, as they had been in the days of the apostles. Then, and only then, would the final restoration of Israel become a reality.⁴⁶

For modern readers of Simeon, the thing that strikes us the most is his unwavering faith in the restoration of the Jews to their ancient promised land. In his day, that land had been under Islamic domination for over a thousand years, apart from the brief episode of the Crusades, and there was no sign that things would ever change in that respect. Simeon could not have known that international politics would lead to the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, that a small group of Zionist Jews would emigrate to Palestine and form the nucleus of a future state, and that the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe would create a climate in which sympathy for the victims would overshadow the claims of the inhabitants of the land and allow for the mass immigration that produced the State of Israel in 1948. For many Christians at the time, that event was a clear fulfillment of prophecy, and it is still a prominent theme in many Evangelical Christian circles. Would Simeon, one of the leading exponents of Evangelicalism in his time, have concurred with that analysis?

We cannot go back two hundred years and ask him about that, but his words of caution on the prophecies of Zechariah perhaps give us a clue as to what he would say today. The establishment of the modern State of Israel is undoubtedly as improbable a historical event as the return of the exiles from Babylon was, and Simeon would have concurred in the assessment that it is a modern-day miracle. Like the returning exiles from Babylon, modern Jews have built a state in Palestine that is generally recognized as Jewish. At the same time, it is a far cry from the eschatological vision of the Old Testament prophets. Israelis are not particularly pious, their state is secular, and the religious elements among them are legalistic and obscurantist. Their neighbors are not attracted to them—on the contrary, they do all in their power to get rid of them. Modern Israel survives because it is supported by powerful interests outside the country. If those interests weaken or turn their attention elsewhere, the country may well be doomed.

Comparisons with the past do not so much point to the ancient kingdom of David and Solomon as to the Crusader states, which were seen as an alien intrusion and which lasted barely two hundred years before they were eventually extinguished. Will modern Israel go the same way? Will those who see it as the fulfillment of prophecy be forced to admit that they were mistaken and that the state we see today is nothing but a false caricature of what the Bible predicts? These are questions to which there is no answer,

⁴⁶ Charles Simeon, "Outline no. 1895 on Romans 11:11–12," in *Horae Homileticae* 15:416.

but Simeon's spiritual vision of the future would certainly allow him to consider that possibility and advocate caution. That Israel's destiny awaits its fulfillment he would have no doubt, but that the present State of Israel incarnates that destiny would be less certain. He might perhaps accept that Israel may yet turn back to God and fulfill the promise of the ancient prophecies now that it has returned to its homeland—we cannot say. For Simeon, the ultimate plan of God was clear but ultimately inscrutable—the times and seasons of its fulfillment remained beyond the ability of mere human minds to understand.