

The Object of Prophecy

by John Nelson Darby

The church is not the object of prophecy in Daniel, but rather Israel, and the prophecies of Daniel refer to a time when Israel is more or less owned on earth.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-2, Ezekiel 1:1, Ezekiel 11:22-23, Daniel 10:14, Daniel 11:14, Daniel 11:30-31, Daniel 12:1, Daniel 12:7, Daniel 12:11, Romans 11:25-26

Topics: "Israel and the Church", "Prophecy"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that the common interpretation of prophecy, which equates the church with Israel, is fundamentally flawed. He argues that God's ultimate purpose is centered on Christ and His glory, with Israel being the focal point of God's governance over the world. Darby highlights that many prophecies, particularly in Daniel, pertain specifically to Israel and not the church, and that overlooking this distinction leads to confusion in understanding God's plans. He asserts that the church and Israel have distinct roles in prophecy, and that the church's involvement is absent during the time when Israel is recognized in God's dealings. This misunderstanding has significant implications for interpreting biblical prophecy and the nature of God's governance.

Transcript

In ordinary works on prophecy it is assumed as an admitted, incontestable truth, that the church is specially regarded in Daniel; and now, many believe that a godly Jewish remnant is in question, and cite the word in proof. This is a capital point. Why not discuss it? Why preserve a silence so absolute? It is necessary to their system that it should be the church; but they cannot demonstrate and assume it without proof. In truth, it is an utterly false principle, that God guides the world in view of the church. Christ and His glory are the end of God's counsels. The church will share His glory, and consequently it also enters into His counsels.

But the difference is complete, because, if Christ is the end, the Jews, of whom He will be head and chief, are the object of God's government as to the world, and even the arrangements of the nations. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." Now, this revealed end of God's arrangements on the earth is set aside, and the church, or heavenly people, is substituted for Israel. It will be readily understood how completely all is changed thereby. For example, the greatest part of the prophecies apply to a time when

Israel is more or less owned on earth. This fact is overlooked and shut out of the common system. Now, when Israel is owned as the object of God's dealings, the church, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, is necessarily out of the scene. It is no longer a question of long years, but of "a short work" of God on the earth, of days whereof it is said, except they were shortened "no flesh could be saved" - a passage where the Saviour Himself directs our attention to Daniel and the predictions of the time, times, and an half, or 1260 days.

This, then, goes to the bottom of the question in dispute between the two great schools. The historicalists in general avoid it carefully. They talk of the approaching tribulation as if it must needs be for the church's portion to pass through it. They leave aside the Jews, as if they certainly were not concerned in such predictions; and thus the whole subject is involved in endless perplexity. Now this confusion of the church with Israel, profoundly injurious in spiritual things, becomes capital in prophecy, and most questions treated by these writers depend on the solution of this; because if Israel means Israel, the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, &c., have an application which is not admitted or seen, and the system of interpretation, save certain analogies, is unsound from one end to the other. To omit the Jews, and apply all to the church, is confusion; to do so without discussing the point, is to build without any foundation whatever. If the predictions of Daniel refer to the time when the Jews enter the scene of prophecy, all is overthrown. Now the Spirit says so several times in the last chapters of the prophecy, (Dan. 10:14; 11:14, 30, 31; 12:1, 7, 11,) where these numbers occur; and the Lord, in speaking of Jerusalem and the great tribulation, sends us to the prophecies of Daniel, where these numbers are given.

These men talk as if the statue in Dan. 2 were the key of prophecy, and the abridged plan of God's government of the nations. On the contrary, God's government of the nations, properly called, ceases during the duration of the powers represented by the statue; though, of course, His providence always acts. It is the time of the Gentiles, during which Israel is set aside, and God's government of the Gentiles, with Israel as the centre and pivot of his rule. Before the statue, there were various independent nations which were the fruit of the judgment of Babel, and Israel occupied the central place, and God had established His throne there, whence He governed all the nations in relation to His people. Then came Israel's sin, ruin, and judgment, and at the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldean king, the divine glory visits the city, and leaves it for a season. (Ezek. 1, 11.) Then God set up imperial unity in the hands of a Gentile chief over the known world, His own people being in bondage, and Jerusalem trodden down by them till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Then He will resume His direct government, and judge the imperial power, which will have rebelled against Him. Is God's government of the earth confined to the time during which He has delivered His people to His enemies? Clearly, the period of His people's captivity is not properly, still less exclusively, the period of His government, and the system which considers it as such and which takes neither of this people nor of the mass of the prophecies which apply to them, is necessarily false. Daniel was of the captivity, and God gave His servant the divine light, which showed He had not forgotten His people, and to Daniel speaks naturally and only of this time. But his most detailed prophecy was after the Jews returned to Jerusalem - a circumstance which shows that the true captivity, the times of the Gentiles, still existed. Daniel just goes up to the judgment and the beginning of God's covenant, and there always he stops. He never describes that government or its effects; he, abides prophet of the captivity.

The system of the nations and of Israel chosen, then, subsisted till Nebuchadnezzar. It will be renewed in a more excellent manner when the beast is destroyed. The interval is the time of the beasts, of the Gentiles, in contrast with the government of God.

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