



THE LAST DAYS

14

RETHINKING BIBLE PROPHECY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

'Eschatology' is the study of last things. Christians should never fear having their eschatological 'system' scrutinised by the plain teaching of the Bible. If you subscribe to the currently popular "Left Behind" system of eschatology, prepare to be challenged by Scripture and history. Moreover, prepare to gain a greater respect for the integrity of the Bible.

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL REEXAMINED

PART TWO BY JAMES B. JORDAN

The upshot of our survey of Israel's history is this: The Hebrews ceased to exist when they were transformed into Israelites. The Israelites ceased to exist when they were transformed into Jews. And the Jews ceased to exist when they were transformed into Christians. The continuing existence of people calling themselves Jews and claiming to represent the old order does not change these facts. "Jew" is an English contraction of "Judahite," which was the name given to God's priestly nation after the Exile. Calling yourself a Jew does not make you one, and in the Biblical sense of the term Jew, there were no longer any Jews after A.D. 70, unless by "True Jews" we mean Christians.

What about the land? Well, consider this: Suppose in Moses' day the blood-line Hebrews had gone to the circumcised descendants of Abraham's servants and said this: "The land was promised to us, not to you. We have legal title to it; you don't." Or suppose they said this to the converts among the mixed multitude? It is clear that they would have been wrong to say this. All Israelites were the same as far as their inheritance was concerned (save for the Levites).

Similarly, Christian Jews have no special claim to the land of Palestine. There is only one kind of Christian, and all Christians are in Christ, and all Christians have exactly the

same rights. The idea that there are two kinds of Christians is a Satanic heresy, one that Paul anathematizes in the book of Galatians. In my opinion, the notion that the Jews, after they convert, will have a claim on the land of Palestine smacks of just this heresy.

Now, what I have written above is the logic of Biblical theology, and it is basically what the New Testament teaches everywhere except possibly Romans 11. The futurist interpretation of Romans 11 will counter what I have written above by saying, "True, when Israel came into being, the Hebrews ceased to exist, and when the Jews came into being, Israel ceased to exist, as you have put it. But Romans 11 reveals a mystery, which is that this time the old people continue to exist as an apostate nation, which will someday convert to Christ. Thus, you are wrong, Jim, when you say that the Modern Jews are no different from any other people. They are indeed special."

I answer: Obviously, I need to expound Romans 11 and argue my case. But before doing so, let me say that the mystery of Romans 11:25 needs to be understood in the light of everything else the New Testament says about the gospel mystery. Ephesians 3 makes it clear that the mystery is that in Christ there is no longer any distinction, as there was in the Old Covenant, between priestly Israelite and non-priestly God-

THE DAY on which Titus encompassed Jerusalem, was the feast of the Passover; and it is deserving of the very particular attention of the reader, that this was the anniversary of that memorable period in which the Jews crucified their Messiah! At this season multitudes came up from all the surrounding country, and from distant parts, to keep the festival. How suitable and how kind, then, was the prophetic admonition of our LORD, and how clearly he saw into futurity when he said "Let not them that are in the countries enter into Jerusalem." Luke xxi. 21.

Nevertheless, the city was at this time crowded with Jewish strangers, and foreigners from all parts, so that the whole nation may be considered as having been shut up in one prison, preparatory to the execution of the Divine vengeance; and, according to Josephus this event took place suddenly; thus, not only fulfilling the predictions of our LORD, that these calamities should come, like the swift-darting lightning "that cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the West," and "as a snare on all of them (the Jews) who dwelt upon the face of the whole earth" (Matt. xxiv. 27, and Luke xxi 35,) but justifying, also, his friendly direction, that those who fled from the place should use the utmost possible expedition.

— George Peter Holford in *The Destruction of Jerusalem, 1805*

fearing gentile. That is the whole point of the mystery. Thus, the meaning of the mystery runs against any notion of a continuing distinction between Jew and gentile. According to the mystery, the only distinction any longer is between Christian and unbeliever. The futurist interpretation of Romans 11 tends to contradict the meaning of the mystery.

There is another point that emerges from this historical survey. Paul's whole argument in Romans 11 is that the entrance of gentiles into the Kingdom will provoke the Jews to jealousy. This was possible in the first century, but it is not possible now. The reason it is not possible now is that Christians do not have what Modern Jews want. The minds of Modern Jews are set by their traditions, not by the Old Testament. In order for them to be jealous, they would have to perceive that Christians have the Kingdom they expect to inherit. This was true of first century of Jews, but it is not true of Modern Jews. Talmudic Jews are looking for a completely different kind of kingdom.

In short, Romans 11 makes sense if it applies to the first century; it does not make much sense if we try to apply it to "Jews" since that time. The valid application of Romans 11 today is to liberal Christians, a point I shall return to later in this study.

The Problem of "Anti-Semitism"

Before turning to Romans 11 and its meaning in the context of New Testament prophecy, I want to set down my thoughts on the problem of "anti-semitism." First, very few Modern Jews are semites, and very few semites are Jews, so the term "anti-semitism" is a very misleading term. In English, however, "anti-semite" means "anti-Modern-Jew," and so I shall use it that way here.

I am indebted to the work of Rene Girard for the discussion that follows. Girard is a liberal Christian who has done some marvelous studies on the phenomenon of the scapegoat in religion and culture. I do not by any means agree with him at every point, but his book *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986) has provided me the insights that follow. When times get tough in a society, people seek for someone to blame. They might blame themselves and say "God is punishing us for our own sins," but since people are wicked, they don't say that. Instead, they look for someone to blame, saying, "Everything was fine

until these people came along. They are different, and therefore they are criminals, and therefore they are to blame for these distresses and catastrophes."

In times of distress, people turn against outsiders and strangers. In Romania today, Gypsies are being treated this way. Throughout history, both Jews and Gypsies have often been made the scapegoats for society's problems. This is because they are different. They have their own laws and customs. They don't mingle with other people well. They seem obnoxious because their customs are strange. People suspect them of bizarre practices, like incest, stealing babies, poisoning wells, and the like.

People want to feel superior to other people. I grew up in the Old South, and the attitude of white trash people was this: If we are not better than niggers, we are not better than anybody. The reason for the Jim Crow laws was to make white trash people feel better than blacks. Many educated Christian white people were unsympathetic to these laws, but such good people were in the minority. Democracy lets trash rule, because democracy allows demagogues to appeal to the mob. This phenomenon also plays a part in the continuing persecution of Gypsies and Jews.

But there is more. Girard shows that envy plays a large part in scapegoating. Those who are rich are admired and imitated by society, but when they fall, everyone rushes in to gloat. Job experienced this, and you need only read the newspaper to see how "rich and famous" people are treated when they fall. Historically, the Jews have been a disciplined and provident people, which means they have often had wealth, which means that they have been the object of envy, though usually not of admiration.

Now, let us bring in the catastrophe. The mob wants someone to blame. They blame the strangers, the Jews. They blame those they want to feel superior to, the Jews. They blame those they envy, the Jews. When times got tough in Germany after World War One, the mob found it easy to go after Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Catholics, and Godly evangelicals—all the people who were "different."

Now, this is bad enough, but now enters another factor. Unlike Gypsies, the Jews claim to be the continuing racial expression of God's chosen people. This kind of claim is naturally offensive to other people. It only makes matters worse when

the Church adds her voice to this claim.

In short, I am arguing that by giving Modern Jews a privileged place in history and prophecy, the Church has reinforced rather than undermined the foundation of anti-semitism and persecution. If the Church had strongly maintained that the claim of the Jews was mythical, and that Jews were no different from any other exceptional group in society, the persecutions against the Jews might have been milder. The Jews would have been treated like Gypsies. They would still have been persecuted, but perhaps not as severely.

Of course, the only real and lasting solution to the problem of persecution is for the Church to do her work of remaking people into kind and charitable human beings. But until we have a Christian world, there will be persecutions. I believe that the futurist view of Romans 11, whether espoused by premillennialists or postmillennialists, distorts society's understanding of the Jews, and sets them up for persecution when times get tough.

Background to Romans 9-11

We now come to a survey of Romans 9-11. Because of this newsletter format, I simply want to set out how I see these chapters at present. I shall not try to argue the case in depth all along the way, but rather my intention is to make a credible case for a preterist view, a case that can be expanded and defended in detail later.

To understand Romans 9-11, we have to bear in mind some background matters that are often overlooked by expositors, concerning the origin and purpose of Israel. God called Abraham to be a priest to the nations right after the incident at the Tower of Babel. These two events are intimately related (compare Gen. 11:4 with 12:2). After the call of Abraham, there were two distinct kinds of believers in the world: Hebrew and Gentile (Noahic)—but this was not God's original purpose. The bifurcation of humanity had a special and limited purpose: to manifest God's covenant until the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of the world (Ex. 19:6; Dt. 4:6-8).

During the Old Covenant there were many Gentile believers who did not become Israelites. There was no reason why a Gentile believer should become circumcised, unless he felt some calling of God to join the priestly nation. As an uncircumcised "God-fearer" he had

access to the Tabernacle (Numbers 15) and to all the feasts except Passover. (For a full discussion, see chapter 2 of my book *Sabbath Breaking and the Death Penalty*; and chapter 3 of my book *The Sociology of the Church*.)

In the Book of Romans, Paul is concerned about this bipolar world from start to finish. The burden of Paul's "mystery" is that in the New Covenant, this bipolarity no longer can exist. All believers are one in Christ. There can no longer be any such thing as a Jew, and since Gentiles are defined in relationship to the Jews, there can no longer be any such thing as a Gentile either. There can only be Christians and non-Christians. Yet though this bipolarity was judicially overcome in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it was not actually overcome until later. Just as individual salvation has a beginning, a development over time, and a culmination in glory, so the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile as One New Man in Christ had a point of inception at Pentecost, a development during the period of the Interim, and a culmination in A.D. 70.

The calling of Israel all along was to minister God's promises to the Gentiles. That is what Abraham was called to do, and we see him doing it. Joseph did it. Moses married an Ethiopian. Samson offered marriage to a Philistine. David converted the Philistine city of Gath. Elijah went to a Gentile widow. Elisha cured a Gentile soldier of "leprosy." Thus, it is no surprise that when Jesus appears on the scene, as the True Israelite He ministers to the Gentiles, warning Israel in Luke 4:18-30 that they may well lose the privilege of being priests.

The ascended Christ, as True Israel, sends the gospel to the Gentiles. On the day of Pentecost, the gospel was preached in every language except Hebrew, a sign that True Israel was going about His priestly work. This was also a sign, however, that the Babelic world was being overcome, and if there is no longer a Babelic curse, there is no longer any need for a priestly nation of Israel. Remember, the two go together. As Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22, speaking in tongues was a sign to Israel that her history was over because her purpose had been accomplished by True Israel.

It was still necessary, however, for believing Jew and believing Gentile to be united as one people in Christ. As I men-

tioned, this was effected judicially in A.D. 30, but the outworking of the restoration of the world took some time. The events leading down to A.D. 70 brought about the end of the Babelic/Jewish world in the judgments of both Rome and Jerusalem. It brought about the filling up of both Gentile and Israel, and ended in a harvest of fulfilled Gentile and Jewish believers. The end result of this process was that after A.D. 70, the bipolarity no longer exists.

The reason this bipolarity had to be overcome is that the rent body of the human race is a form of death. God's scattering judgment on Babel was a manifestation of death, and the continuing presence of both Jew and Gentile in the world manifested the presence of death. Just as the individual's physical body dies if ripped to pieces, so does the body politic. God's scattering of Israel at the Exile, and His regathering of her at the Restoration, is pictured as death and resurrection in Ezekiel 11:17; 22:15; 36:19; 37:1-28. God's resurrective regathering of Israel overcame the judgment-division of the nation into two halves (Ezk. 37:15-22), a type of the future union of Jew and Gentile.

A man rent his garments to symbolize rending himself, identifying himself with death. Similarly, rent garments could symbolize the ripping apart of the body politic (1 Sam. 15:27-28; 1 Ki. 11:30-31). Such images as these establish the conceptual correlation between individual death and political death, both through tearing, and lead to a correlation between individual resurrection and political resurrection. Individual death happens when the life (soul, personality) is torn from the body, and individual resurrection happens when the body is revived. Political death happens when a society is torn apart, scattered. Political resurrection happens when a society is reunited.

Two further points need to be noted. First, Ezekiel 37 establishes for us that it is only believers who experience resurrection in the positive sense. It is believing Ephraim and believing Judah who are reunited in the resurrection of Ezekiel 37. Similarly, it is believing Jew and believing Gentile who are reunited in the New Covenant gospel.

Second, during the time between Rehoboam's reign and the Restoration from the Exile, believing Ephraim and believing Judah were kept apart by God. It took God's action to reunite them

after the Exile. Similarly, after Babel, it was God's will for believing Jew and believing Gentile to be in separate bodies politic. It took God's action to reunite them after the Cross. Any divisions and separations within the believing community today are not caused by any judicial act of God, and are solely the fault of sinful Christians.

The purpose of the gospel is not simply individual salvation, but also cosmic salvation. The rent body politic of humanity has to be restored. The reuniting of believing Jew and believing Gentile in one body undoes the death-judgment of Babel, and thus is a political resurrection. This resurrection occurred in A.D. 70, as an outworking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in A.D. 30, and as a foretaste of the eventual physical resurrection of all believers at the Last Judgment.

After A.D. 70 the gospel has no more message of reconciliation between believing Jew and believing Gentile. That reconciliation has been accomplished once and for all. Babel has been undone. Now what the Church must do is call all men into herself, to be reconciled to God.

In other words, the work of reconciling all things to God has two states. The first stage, during the Interim (A.D. 30-70), reconciles the Church to herself. The Old Testament Church, which had two different companies, is gradually united during the Interim. The second state, after A.D. 70, is the reconciliation of all humanity to God. During both stages, those who refuse reconciliation are allowed to develop and are eventually judged. Accordingly, the judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70, because she refused to be reconciled, is a type of the eventual judgment on impenitent humanity at the Last Judgment.

In A.D. 70 the Babelic/Jewish world was put to death, and resurrected in Christ as the Unified Church. At the Last Judgment, the whole history of humanity will be put to death, and resurrected in the Eternal Kingdom. The former typifies the latter, and both are historical outworkings of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ at the cosmic-political level.

Thus, throughout the New Testament there is a constant expectation that Christ is coming soon to render a judgment on the Church and on the old Babelic/Jewish order. He is "near," "at the door," "coming soon," because it is

the “last days,” even the “last hour.” Jerusalem will be destroyed, as will the Roman Beast, and the Church will yield a first-fruits harvest. This event will usher in the New Covenant in a fullness not previously seen, because now at last the residue of the Old Covenant will be gone. The events surrounding A.D. 70 happen “in Christ,” as a sign of the completion of His work. “In Christ” both the Interim Church and the Babelic/Jewish world die, and “in Christ” the Church is resurrected. These events illustrate the nature of Christ’s ensuing work throughout future ages until His Final Return.

The failure to understand the Babelic context of Israel’s history results in a failure to understand the purpose of tongues in the New Testament, and a failure to understand the historical transition that took place between A.D. 30 and 70. God judged Babel because if the people were united, nothing would be

withheld from them (Gen. 11). Jesus prays that His people would be united, so that nothing will be withheld from us (John 17). It was necessary for Jewish and Gentile believers to overcome the Old Covenant bipolarity and be united, before the Gospel could really go forth in full power. After A.D. 70, with Jew and Gentile united in one Church, nothing can be withheld from us, unless we choose by our sin to be disunited. After A.D. 70, there is no longer any God-instituted historical disunity in operation.

We need to push this discussion back one more step before we move to Romans. The bi-polarity of Jew and Gentile came into being because of the sin at the Tower of Babel, but what made it possible for God to do this was the design of the world in the first place. The Garden of Eden, in the Land of Eden, was the center of the world, with other lands downstream from it. Apart from sin, the world should have been united

by a geographically central sanctuary. Because of sin, that world unity was slain, and the bi-polarity of Eden and Outlying Lands became an expression of death. The destruction of Temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70 ended that whole first creation by removing the geographically central sanctuary. Now the sanctuary is with Christ in heaven, and there is no center on earth; or rather, there are as many centers as there are churches.

For this reason, Jesus said that the destruction of Jerusalem would pay for all the murders since that of Abel (Mt. 23:35). All the prophets murdered by God’s people in His land, from the murder of Abel in Eden forward, would be put in Jerusalem (Rev. 18:24, “earth” = “land”). By implication, all the murders outside the land from Lamech forward (Gen. 4:23) could be put upon the Beast. The entire bi-polar world of the first creation would be destroyed.



THE ARCH OF TITUS

The Arch of Titus marks the sack of Jerusalem in 70 AD which fulfilled the prophecies of Jesus.

What is interesting about this arch is the fact that the pictures on the inside of the arch show Jews being led away as slaves, and it shows many of the articles of worship that the Old Testament prescribed for use in the Temple: the Table of the Show Bread, the Silver Trumpets, and the Menora. Secular history confirms the practices of the Jews of Jerusalem.

Paul called the Old Covenant “the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones” (2 Cor. 3:7) and “the ministration of condemnation” (2 Cor. 3:9) but the New Covenant, he said, is “the ministration of the spirit” (2 Cor. 3:8) and “the ministration of righteousness” (2 Cor. 3:9), which “giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6). The glory of the Old Covenant, as once reflected in the face of Moses, “was to be done away” (2 Cor. 3:7) and was to be replaced by the New Covenant that would “exceed in glory” (2 Cor. 3:9).

That Paul had no doubt that the New Covenant had forever replaced the Old Covenant is clear from his conclusion: “For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2 Cor. 3:11).