

Jerusalem - Center of Worship and Government

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Jerusalem as the center of worship and government, and the restoration of Israel according to the prophecies of the Bible.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:8-9, Isaiah 4:2-6, Isaiah 29:18-19, Isaiah 32:1-2, Micah 5:3, Zephaniah 3:12-20, Zechariah 10:6-12, Zechariah 12:10, Zechariah 14:4-9, Romans 11

Topics: "Restoration of Israel", "Jerusalem as Center of Worship"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of Jerusalem as the center of worship and government, asserting that the Jewish people will be the royal nation under Christ's dominion. He explains that the restoration of Israel is prophesied and will occur in the future, contrasting their current state with the blessings promised under the new covenant. Darby highlights that while the church enjoys heavenly blessings, Israel's restoration will fulfill God's promises made to them. He cites various prophetic scriptures to illustrate the certainty of Israel's future glory and the role of Jerusalem in God's divine government. Ultimately, he underscores the importance of understanding these prophecies to avoid misapplying them to the church.

Transcript

Romans 11.

Of the two great subjects, besides our individual salvation, of which the Scriptures treat, as already stated (namely, the church and the government of the world), the latter leads us at once to the Jewish as its centre, as the church is of the heavenly glory under Christ; under whom as their head all things in heaven and earth are to be gathered together in one. That government will extend over the whole earth, but the royal nation and seat and centre of government will be the Jewish people. To Jerusalem, as the centre alike of worship and government, all nations will flow. So it was ordained from the beginning, as we learn from this remarkable passage, "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", Deuteronomy 32:8-9.

I may now turn to the direct declarations of the prophets, which leave no shadow of doubt on their restoration and blessing; and that as a people, with Jerusalem for the centre of their dominion and glory.

That these prophecies have never been accomplished the passages themselves will prove; but there are certain general considerations that affect this question, which I will here notice. That Israel as a people were not brought into their promised blessings when Christ first came, is evident. It was the time of their casting away, and the grafting in of the Gentiles - the reconciling the world; and their receiving again is set in contrast with it. Jerusalem was destroyed, not rebuilt; the people scattered, not gathered.

Their restoration after the Babylonish captivity is sometimes alleged to be the fulfilment of these promises; but it was far indeed from accomplishing them. Their blessings are to be under the new covenant; but the new covenant was not established then. They are to be under Messiah, but Messiah was not then. The Jews were still in captivity, so that Nehemiah speaks thus: "Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it. And it yieldeth much increase to the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins. Also they have dominion over our bodies and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress".

Further, when Christianity was introduced, not only was Jerusalem destroyed in judgment, but the Gentiles were in full glory and triumph. When the Jews are re-established according to prophecy, they are judged and brought under.

I will now quote the prophecies which predict this establishment of the people. You will see its connection with Christ, with the judgment of the Gentiles, with the new covenant, and even with the resurrection. It will be the sparing of a remnant, in the first instance, which will become a great nation. I first quote Isaiah, who furnishes us with some very remarkable prophecies on this subject. After describing the universal evil and the judgment of this nation, he closes his introductory prophecy thus, "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain", chapter 4:2-6.

Thus the glory will be restored to Zion when the Lord shall have purged away her guilt by judgment. Two causes of judgment are there stated: the unfaithfulness of Israel to her first calling; and their unfitness to meet the glory of the Lord when He appears. In this last (chapter 6) that judgment which the Lord recalls is pronounced, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed". The prophet then enquires, "How long?" The answer is, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land". Then it is added, "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they have cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof". Nothing could more strikingly depict the long winter of Israel's desolation; but here God would in the remnant give a principle of restoration and blessing, as Paul shews in Romans 11.

... I have passed over a remarkable chapter in the midst of the Gentile series, to which I must now return, [Isaiah] chapter 18, difficult in expression, but very plain in its purpose. Messengers are sent by a mighty protecting power to a nation scattered and feeble - a nation wonderful from the beginning. The Lord summons all the inhabitants of the world to attend. He holds Himself aloof in His dwelling. The Jews come back, looking for full national blessing in a carnal way; just as it seemed blooming they are cut down again, and the beasts of the field, the Gentiles, summer and winter on them. Still at that time a present is brought of this people to the Lord, and then from them to Him in the mount of Zion. We learn thus their return by some political movement, their subsequent desolation in their land; yet they are brought to the Lord, and they themselves bring their offering to Jehovah in Zion.

You will find in chapter 29, and remarkably in chapter 32, and largely in chapters 34 and 35, the Spirit's testimony to the final restoration of Israel. ...

In Micah we have a beautiful description of what Israel will be in the world in that day under Christ. They will not be added to the church one by one, and merged as blessed in it; they will be gathered as Israel; chapter 5:3. Then Christ will be their strength against the Assyrian their foe, when owned in the land. Then they become as dew in the world, the freely flowing blessing of God, but as a lion among the beasts of the forest to all that oppose them and the counsels of God in them (verse 8), while all evil is purged out from them and the heathen judged, as we have never seen (verses 9-15).

In Zephaniah 3 we have another passage full of instruction as to the Lord's ways with this people. First, Jehovah's long and gracious, but useless, patience (verse 7). So the godly ones had to wait till judgment came on the nations, would subdue them, and bring in blessing. In Israel there would be a poor and afflicted and sanctified remnant (verses 12-13), but peace should be their portion. Then Zion, Israel, and Jerusalem are called to rejoice with all their heart; Jehovah was in their midst: they would not see evil any more. God would rest in His love - the blessing so great that His love would be satisfied and in repose. Blessed thought! still more blessedly true of us when Jesus shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. Then all that afflict Israel will be undone, and the people made a praise among all peoples of the earth (verses 14-20).

In Zechariah, the whole of chapter 10 describes the restoration of Israel in the latter days, speaking of each division of the people, Judah and Ephraim; then chapter 11 tells of Christ's rejection; and in chapter 12 all the nations gathered against Jerusalem are judged, and she becomes a burdensome stone for them (so that it has no application to past events), and there is a detailed account of how Jehovah will save the people: "In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem. The Lord also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah". Then there is the mourning over Christ's rejection, and they look on Him whom they have pierced. They are sifted (chapter 13:9), and two thirds cut off, and the third part pass through the fire. The last chapter (14) closes this striking history with full details of what shall take place. The Lord comes. His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives. At evening time, when men would expect darkness, it will be light. Living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem. Jehovah shall be King over all the earth; He alone shall be owned. Jerusalem shall be inhabited in her place; there shall be no more utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

The testimonies I have cited are amply sufficient to show, to every one who receives the testimony of God's word as true, the certainty of the restoration of Israel to their own land to be blessed under Christ and the new covenant. The circumstances of the return of Israel and Judah are distinguished. Of the former, the rebels are cut off outside the land, which they never enter; of the latter, in the land: the residue of these last passing through the fire. This involves the history of Antichrist and the Gentiles, which will be spoken of when the prophecies as to them are considered. But Israel and Judah are united under one head. Further, in the series of events which usher in the blessing, the Gentiles are gathered against Israel and are judged, and afterwards blessed in connection with, and subordinate to, that people. Jehovah is King over all the earth. It is noticed, too, that these events take place at the epoch at which the resurrection does. Peace reigns, and the curse is removed: Jerusalem is never defiled any more, nor does Israel lose its blessing.

Such is the establishment of the divine government of the world at the close. Of this government Israel is the centre, according to the fixed purpose and unchangeable calling of God. They reject now the gospel, but are beloved for the fathers' sake: they will believe when they see. We have brighter blessings, because we believe without seeing; and this is one thing which renders the understanding of the prophecies, as to the Jews, important. Not only is it precious to us as a part of Christ's glory, but our clear apprehension of the application of prophecy to them hinders our misapplying it to the church. This takes its own heavenly character. It is witness of sovereign grace, giving it a place with Christ where no promise was; Israel, the testimony to God's faithfulness to His promises - Jehovah, who was and is to come. Israel will, indeed, be the royal people, the centre of Christ's earthly power and dominion, but they will be reigned over. We, by pure grace, shall reign with Him, suffering first with Him. The church has its place with Him, Israel its own blessing under Him according to His promises of old.

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