Jeremiah - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Prophetic 1, Prophecy, On the Extended Scope of

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(From the Christian Witness, Plymouth, Jan., 1834.)

IT appears to me that the result of prophecy has been much obscured, and particular passages much more difficult of interpretation, by narrowing their scope and applying them only to the antichristian character of the last primary evil. Hence, the subject being wrongly assumed, the application has been forced and unknown. The antichristian form of the Roman empire engrosses the mind, so that even when prophecy is applied to the Jews, nothing further is seen. But this is a confined view ' all the nations of the earth are engaged in this scene. Thus Gog the chief prince of Magog, and his army and followers, formed no part of the Roman empire. The Medes and Persians formed no part of that empire; yet all these do form a part of the great prophetic drama of the latter day. I purposely refrain from entering into details here; if I am permitted, I hope to open out my views upon it, at some future time. I merely now make these few remarks, in the hope of enlarging the sphere of observation. The immediate moral position in which we are, may involve us in direct concern with the last exhibition of power of the Roman beast, even Antichrist, destined, I do not doubt, to close the scene and his career in Jerusalem-the mountain of God, where he has, craftily and to his own destruction, set his seat. But this is but one out of many. He thus becomes one, the first (I apprehend) of those powers, who, round the great center of divine providence, the Jewish land, are brought, as the inhabitants of the earth, under the judicial process of that righteous providence which shall set the Son of man on the throne of the kingdom of the earth, in the righteousness and peace of God's own government in Him.

As regards the full moral responsibilities of the Christian Church, the apostasy and judgment of the anti Christian power is clear and decided, as well as solemn and affecting to the believer, but deliverance and joy withal. But when we turn our eyes to the earth, to the dealings of God with its nations, we find, when He divided to the sons of Adam their inheritance, " He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel," Deut. 32:8. In this, of course, the beast will take his part; doubtless, he may lead in the career of evil, but let us enlarge our view a little. Were all the nations of the image in the last beast? Clearly not. The Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and (I suppose) about the Firths of Forth and Clyde, and the Irish Sea, form the geographical bounds of all that could ever be taken within the grasp of the last beast, unless perhaps part of Hungary and Transylvania. I am not saying that all this will be under Antichrist,1 or how far it may be, but merely that the last beast extends no farther than this. But besides this, there is in the image, part of the subject of latter day judgment-the arms and the breast; the Medo-Persian power not included within these limits. This then, besides the actings of the first power, we must find scope for in the scenes of the latter day, as one of the nations that must act upon the Jews, and in the land. The omission of this may cause great confusion in the application of passages, which, having the Jews and the land in view, must include the account of the vicissitudes arising from this also.

Further, Gog and Magog (who form, I imagine, no part, not only of the beast, but of the image, yet take a conspicuous part in the scenes of the latter day, as the witness of the power of God) must be let into the scheme of prophecy; and till we have developed the sphere in which these take their parts, we cannot appropriate the special prophecies which may have their ultimate fulfillment in these very powers. I do not doubt we shall find much detail of movement within the territorial limits of the beast, which are not the action of its body, as immediately headed by Antichrist, as well as the final suppression of smaller nations, within the limits of Israelitish territory, as given of God; but into these details it is not my purpose to enter. That which I would press upon your readers is this- that (while the scene in which we are individually engaged leads us to contemplate directly the growth and operations of Antichrist,2 our most important concern), if we would interpret Scripture fully, we must see that this is but conducive to a system and scene of which the land of Israel is the focus and center, and in which all the people of the earth are concerned and called in question. The length, the circumstances, the particulars of the great day of tribunal of judgment on the people and nations, beginning at Jerusalem, we may reserve to the Lord's mercy granting us other opportunity. I believe Antichrist to be the first of it, and of a character distinct from the rest-the close to be the clearing of the land and its limits, with the exception, perhaps, of God. But the fact surely seems indisputable and definite, and must widely affect the study and application of scriptural prophecies. To these I would next direct your attention.

SCOPE OF PROPHECY

(From the Christian Witness, Plymouth, July, 1835.)

There are two great subjects connected with prophecy-the hope of the Church and the order and accomplishment of that system of earthly government which, with the Jews as its center, has formed the great subject of ancient prophecy, its proper subject as a literal and distinct testimony of what should happen in the earth. As it is written, "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; Israel is the lot of his inheritance."

There is another point, the connection of the two, the passage from the failing dispensation (failing as in man's hand) in which we stand, into that which is to come; the portion of the remnant in the Gentile body and of the restored Jewish people, which, it seems to me, from involving both, induces greater difficulty of judgment than either considered apart. The moral state too both of the Christian remnant and of the Jewish remnant is so immediately involved in the question- their responsibilities and the divine judgment concerning them-that responsibility in estimating their place I feel sensibly increased. Nevertheless the faithful word is our sure and only guide, and wherever this directs us, the Spirit shedding light on it to our souls, we shall find the light and power of life in it. Nor will its connection with our responsibilities weaken its importance and value to us. I should value therefore exceedingly any light upon this subject. But though I have thought in the study of the word on many things connected with it, I do not feel my mind so distinctly ascertained of that portion of the mind of God as to state myself at

present anything concerning it, though quite alive to the inquiry.

I would state very briefly as to the second point what would enlarge the basis on which our inquiries into Scripture may be conducted; and, by extending the limits of that which is certain in things revealed, increase our power of spiritual judgment, both within those limits and also as to those things in which we may be yet untaught. The essential difference of the government of the world during the four beasts is not, I think, sufficiently considered. During this time, there ceased to be, properly speaking, Jews and Gentiles. That which had given importance to the Jews, was that they were God's people. Otherwise " have not I brought (says God) the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?" This removed, they were but as one among the nations made of one blood in all the earth, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him.

It is true this distinction, once constituted, was never and never is to be recalled; "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." And hence the Jews, or people of Israel, always constituted a distinct subject of government in the divine mind, never lost sight of and kept continually for the purposes formed therein for His glory, whatever the circumstances were through which they were passed. But they ceased to be the immediate manifested object and center of the divine government upon earth, the moment "Loammi" was written upon them. They ceased to be the scene in which God displayed His character as a recognized people, and from which, as identified with Himself, He exercised righteous judgment on surrounding nations, accounted but as strangers meddling with the place of His sanctuary.

Identical with this inscription of "Loammi" (for a little season and still reserved for mercy, and it counted long to Jehovah) was the setting up of the Gentile power, the kingdom of the beasts which should arise out of the earth. This is matter of common knowledge and has been noticed in the Witness; and the whole history of the Jews connected with Nebuchadnezzar makes it too plain to one familiar with Scripture to need the evidence in detail here. But the inscription of "Loammi" being set upon the Jewish people, their present distinction as God's people from the other nations of the earth ceased (not in purpose nor in providence, but as the subject of manifested government and revelation). And, though for the purpose of the manifestation of Messiah there was a suspension of the final accomplishment of these things, and a partial restoration, or rather setting in such a place as that they might be the subject of Messiah's restoration, the rod that was upon them of the stranger was never taken off, let it be light or gilded. There was no Jewish history, but of the fact of their rebuilding under the favor of the Persians, and of the rejection of Messiah under the government of the Romans and Herod; and then they are lost to historic scripture after the death of Stephen, forbidding that which was now come to the Gentiles to go to them, and wrath come upon them to the uttermost.

In the setting up of Nebuchadnezzar as the golden head of the image, the man of the earth, " the times of the Gentiles " began, and Israel was lost. It was not Ammi and Goiim,3 but government left in the hands of the Gentiles, now exercising it in the covetous greediness of selfwill, and the apparent government of God, in principle, lost, though never, of course, in providence.

With the four beasts connected with this state of things, every reader of prophecy is familiar. But it is taken notice of here as coextensive with Israel's (whatever their circumstances) being "Loammi," not God's people, and, consequently, the distinction of Jew and Gentile lost in present manifested exercise, unless in priority of judgment.

I think we shall find a very distinct division of prophecy connected with this subject, and appropriation of it, mach calculated to clear the ground on which we stand.

There are three prophets connected with this state of Jewish rejection-Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Each have their separate portion of testimony, and their several place of giving it. Jeremiah prophesied in the place and habitation of the rebellious people. "The sin of Judah was written with a pen of iron, and the point of a diamond." Ezekiel prophesied by the river of Chebar, among the captives. Daniel in the midst of Babylon, when the golden representative head had been set up.

In Jeremiah we shall see, therefore, the sin of the people proved, and they made Goiim (heathen) of; and then, after various judgments on all the nations, the new covenant with Israel and Judah, their captivity brought again; in a word, " Loammi," and Ammi as to both in restoration; while the history of their present wickedness is given and their necessary captivity, ashamed of Egypt as they were ashamed of Assyria.

In Ezekiel we shall find the sign of the glory departed, the consequent disallowance of the remains of the people in the land, then the setting aside of every other power previous to Nebuchadnezzar, and the fact of his prevailing as king of Babylon over the last of them; but then a passing by the whole history of, or any allusion to, the beasts: and after setting aside the previous nations by the king of Babylon, the immediate recurrence to the principles of God's dealings with the house of Israel, their restoration and deliverance as one stick in His hand; and, consequently, the heathen knowing that He, Jehovah, did sanctify Israel when His sanctuary was in the midst of them for evermore. And what subsequently happened of Gog, prince of Magog, is a coming up against "my people Israel." Thus way is made in the suppression of previous powers (and of Israel) for the introduction of the beasts, but they are wholly omitted; and the prophet passes over (after the principles of God's dealings are discussed) to the restoration of the people and God's dealings among the heathen, as with them as His people.

Daniel precisely fills up this gap. Nebuchadnezzar is seen as the golden head in the outset, and a king of kings to whom the God of heaven had given a kingdom; and, wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven had He given into his hand, and made him rule over them all. He was the head of gold. Then the character and proceedings of this system and of the four beasts are given, but no mention of anything before or after, nor of the Jews or Israel as God's people at all. It is "the times of the Gentiles," of the four beasts, in which God's people are "Loammi"; and when mentioned, it is not "My people," but "thy people," addressing Daniel.

This gives the subjects of these books, I think, great clearness, and shows the character and importance of the time subsequent to the renewal of the distinction between God's people and the heathen. The convulsions and trouble preceding this are of the utmost importance, and have their place; but they are to be viewed as a distinct subject from Israel acknowledged of the Lord. Israel is still lost in the midst of the nations rising one against another. Jerusalem may be taken; but He is not come whose right it is; and, therefore, though it may be the occasion of the Lord's fighting against these nations, still it was not Jehovah-Shammah (Ezek. 48:35) that was taken; nor could that be, as the final postmillennial confederacy and Hezekiah's typical trial prove.

I would advert to a few passages illustrative of what I have stated, and then allude to one or two consequences.

First, as to Jeremiah, up to chapter 24 we have the sin of Israel, and specially Judah, continuously proved. In chapter 25, is the judgment; recapitulating the testimony-showing immediate judgment also on Babylon, the type of all the nations. The judgment, however, actually runs

thus, " Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand and cause all the nations (Goiim) to whom I send thee to drink it. Then took I the cup at the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the Lord had sent me; Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation "; and then the rest, to " all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth, and the king of Sheshach after them." But this definitely involves Judah and Jerusalem in the indiscriminate and common name of Goiim-" judgment beginning in the house of God." (See verse 29.) Then, after various details to chapter 30, in that chapter we have the new and sure promises connected with God's purpose concerning the nation to the end of chapter 33. The rest is historically probative or relative to Egypt, till chapter 46, when we have the word against the Gentiles, but restoration to many of them.

In Ezekiel, chapter 24 divides the book. We have the utter rejection of the city. The glory of the Lord is seen at the outset in its full providential governing power; and in chapter 10 its departure from the city and temple: then in chapter 25, getting rid of other nations-these within and surrounding the land. Then two are mentioned who would fain have been beasts in the earth-Assyria and Pharaoh-Necho. The first, however, had fallen. What was the latter better? He should fall; " So was Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord God." Then in chapter 32 we have their common dirge. Here the prophet closes. Instead of pursuing the history of the earth then farther, which must have brought in the beasts, he turns at once to the shepherds of Israel. All but the beasts are disposed of; these Daniel is occupied about in Babylon, not Ezekiel at Chebar. Restoration under the Lord's salvation from evil shepherds is the only remedy. So in chapter 33: 4 and in chapter 34: 7. The restoration follows; then Gog against Israel as God's people, settled on their own mountains no longer waste, but dwelling in peace; Israel now no longer "Loammi," as chapters 36, 38. The judgment on Seir (chapter 35) seems special.

Of Dan. 1 have already said enough, it is manifestly the history of the unnoticed period, the times of the beasts and their doings and character; the account in Babylon of all that belonged to it, or arose out of it, while Israel was no more a people, and power was recognizedly in the hands of those who knew not how to use it, who had beasts' hearts and left to be so and not man's till the due times had passed over it.

We have then these three agencies to look for, connected with Israel, and at the close of these times, when the great concentrated crisis comes to take effect. First, the heathen as looked at under Jeremiah, nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom, in which Jerusalem and the Jews have a place in the secret enmity perhaps of the wicked one, knowing what is to be and happen there; and surely in the providence of God. Yet still as one of the Goiim, merely mixed up in the troubles with all the rest, only the first to drink the cup. Secondly, the beast (or beasts) then in his power, having his own specific and distinct character as such. That which constitutes the power may be heathen perhaps in race; but it is not merely this but a beast. And lastly, we have the renewed position of Israel as God's people, and the heathen definitely distinguished from them, and opposed to them as such; and God acting on this principle. The other prophets give many details as to them; their proper statements are, of course, of the Jews as Jews, and treating the heathen as such, and therefore not concerning the beasts at all. And I suspect if Antichrist be mentioned in them, he is spoken of in his professed character as " the king "; and the state of the people merely alluded to on the critical time of change, when the summons of the Lord is addressed on the coming of the heathen, when the Lord is just about to go forth, rejected indeed by the, nations, but listened to by the remnant.

Thus Joel describes some Goi (nation) going up against the land, etc., and summons the inhabitants of the land, and alarms Zion, and sounds for the gathering. When there is this cry, then the Lord is jealous for His land and pities His people; and the answer to them (not before so called), and blessing, and consequent judgment on all the heathen, is described.

So, in Zechariah, we have the city taken by the nations gathered together, and against those nations the Lord will go forth and fight. This is the only place where this taking is mentioned, unless Joel 2 and once perhaps in Isaiah; and not, I conceive, alluding to Antichrist or the willful king, but omitting or leaving out the whole history of the beast and his doings, which stands on other ground. His place, I conceive, rather holds the place of the covenant with death, made with the scornful men which dwell at Jerusalem, which is disannulled.

But I will not enter farther into details. I have mentioned these passages as immediately affected by the considerations I have offered. If one could see the Jews and Jerusalem (as shown in the paper, under the title of " Jerusalem," in a previous number) as the great subject and center of earthly government and prophecy, we should better understand the force of nations, and then, looking at Israel as lost in them and mixed in their troubles, and the object of their hatred; then the subject of the willful king's special though wicked interference; and subsequently, on his destruction, as the scene of the Lord's deliverance and power, who then holds it in His hand as His weapon against the nations (now again recognized as in opposition to Ammi, " my people," and He therefore putting them under His feet), we should see much of the prophecies more distinct and more simple.

Though I acquiesce in and value the general scope of the article I have alluded to, let me just say that it seems to me in some of its details to have overstepped the limits of evidence.

I cannot see that Dan. 7, 8 and Rev. 13 are necessarily identical, however analogous the language may be. The connection of Dan. 7 with Rev. 1 cannot doubt. The proof of the identity of chapters 7 and 8 arises not from direct interpretation, but the necessity, if both be universal, and at the same time, that they should be the same. The argument is good enough (though I distrust and feel difficulty in all illative reasoning about Scripture), but depends, and is justly made to do so, on the universality of both, and also the sameness of time. But I cannot see the universality in chapter 8. Thus " by him the daily sacrifice shall be taken away," should (I apprehend) be from him, though this by-the-bye. I entirely recognize the working of Antichrist as the head of the last beast,4 or the last head of the beast in Jerusalem in his place in his close; but it seems to me there is not enough scope given to the other actors in that scene, who derive their importance, not from present associations, but their then connection with, and opposition to, Jewish interests. 5

I have felt that the consideration of the office allotted to these three prophets I have here spoken of, reduced and simplified the ground on which we could judge these things. It is but one narrow point of the subject; still if, by interpretation in which the Lord leads and will justify us, any part of the subject is cleared, so much is positively gained. What may be imperfect or erroneous in it the saints will soon detect, if they wait for the revelation and instruction of God. I do confess it has cleared a good many details, but its ground is quite independent of them, and I am reluctant to write on them; as undue determination of them seems to me the ground of our difficulties, the ascertainment of them always a step in our knowledge.

Letters 3, Revised Version of the New Testament, The

You have a more favorable opinion of the Revision than I have. It is not that many passages have not been rightly corrected—many as I did myself, so that I cannot complain; and I think there are many well composed. But there is, it seems to me, no acquaintance with the mind of God, and great fundamental truth lost or marred. Look at Rom. 1: "a righteousness of God by faith," is not known to scripture. It is "revealed by [on the principle of] faith." So (Col. 1:16) "in Christ all things were created." They are wholly ignorant of the commonest force of in Greek: so again: "Grieve not that holy Spirit of promise in which you are sealed." (Eph. 4:30.) Now all this baffles a plain man, and on fundamental truths; and the word of God is for plain men. They are wholly ignorant. Of the force of English tenses; as the difference of 'saw' and `have seen.' Both are past, but the shade of difference practically often of importance. They have not an idea of 'have.' The English auxiliaries vary the force without changing the time, or have two times, the participle and verb. 'Has' is present; 'was' present at another time, known from the phrase, not the word. I was comforted when it came out, finding several things good, and though the criticism of the Greek text vulgar, and the fashion, yet what was infidel or loose avoided. But when I read a chapter or two, I found it, with just corrections, for practical use a total failure. The Americans have generally the advantage of them....

The brethren were going on with top-gallant sails set, and that does not do for us; but God has been separating the precious from the vile, and He does well what He does—better than man. I have undiminished confidence in the result. The Lord is doing what He made my motto in starting, Jer. 15, "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." He will, He must, accomplish His own purpose; may we be found only in the way of it.

I have been in sight of death, so to speak, and it was a useful experience as realizing things; but I am a great deal better, though broken in physical strength, thank God not in mind. I find my service of God poor, as in me it all has been, and Christ indeed now everything.

July, 1881.

Letters 1, Opposition

I am almost surprised that after so many years' service you should be afraid of knocks. There is a difference of natural character in this besides grace, but if I have a decided judgment and course I trouble myself very little about what people say. If it is for Christ's sake it is our glory. It is not insensibility I look for, but that with Christ all that should be taken for granted. Faithfulness will always bring it. I will not say it is faithfulness, for sometimes God sees good to exercise us thus, but I have had knocks enough to be used to them. I used years ago to think of poor Jeremiah, who felt these things very much. "I. have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me" [Jer. 15:10]; but I think little of it now one way or another, and do not hear a tenth part of it, so much the better, so do not be uneasy for me. If there be anything to learn from it, and judge in self, it is all a great gain. I have been very ill, first worn out, then a sharp attack on it. This made it uncertain whether I should not have to go to England as unable to work. Thank God I am better, and have through His goodness recovered much strength, and have again returned to the thought of returning if spared by the West Indies-if so, I suppose straight to Kingston; however, that is in the Lord's hand, if He allows me, for I feel that my health got a pretty rude shake. If I do go it would be in winter to spring. My thought would be a visit; a prolonged stay for work I should hardly feel up to....

Our meeting, for we are at our annual Guelph meeting, has had something of a new character, as many from the States who were getting into truth were there; it was a serious, quiet and close study of the word, with a happy spirit of communion among brethren....

We have only to labor on, dear brother, and commit the work to Him who alone does it and carries it on in His own wisdom. Our work has a definite character in New York separate from evil, false doctrine, and the world. May the gracious Lord keep it so. This is a great point in that country. I feel devotedness to the Lord as belonging to Him a capital point in these days: we are His, bought with a price, and to manifest the life of Jesus in all our ways.... I have looked on my visit to the West Indies as a kind of finishing of my course as to outward activity, and have feared my own will in it, for I desired to see you all, and leave it in the Lord's hands as seems to Him good, but if He will, I will see you again. Kind love to all.

Your affectionate brother in Christ.

Guelph,

July, 1867.

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