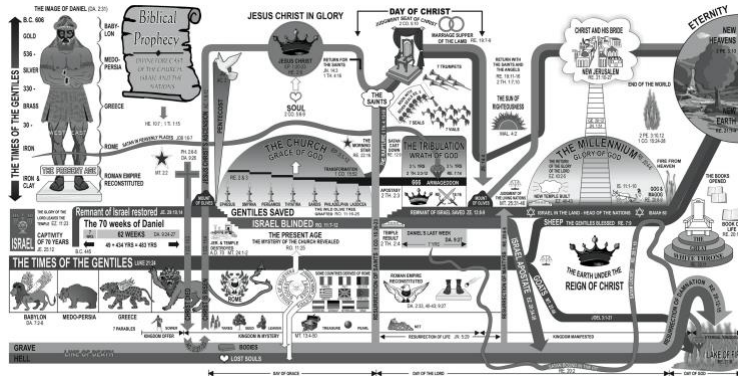


AFTER THESE THINGS

4.11 The Importance of Prophecy



A summary of the 11th Lecture by J N Darby on the Present Hope of the Church – Geneva 1840 entitled ‘Summing Up, and Conclusion’

AFTER THESE THINGS

4.11 The Importance of Prophecy

Prophecy and the Truth

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Prophecy and the Truth

Prophecy has two ends:

1. To detach us from the world.
2. To make us intelligent of the character of God, and His ways towards us.

Satan opposes the truth, and that must include prophecy. He says,

1. 'Follow morality, not doctrine; otherwise you might be freed from his power'. Or
2. 'Neglect prophecy, because in it is found the judgment of this world', (of which he is the prince.)

Prophecy throws light upon the dispensations of God; so that we understand the freedom of our souls towards Him. Dispensational error confounds the law and the gospel, and past economies or dispensations with the present one.

If we judge ourselves according to the law, we cannot find peace. Many Christians are troubled through not fully understanding the difference between the position of the saints of the old (law) dispensation and the saints of the current dispensation of grace. The study of prophecy clears things up such points and enlightens the faithful as to their walk and manner of life. For, while it always maintains free salvation by the death of Jesus, prophecy enables us to understand the difference between the standing of the saints now under grace and those of a former time under law and promise.

Hope acts upon our hearts and affections. As we become more intelligent as to the future, our enjoyment of Christianity must increase. If we ignore prophecy, our thoughts do not go beyond the present. God in His word has given us what His intentions are for the future. Prophecy outlines things to come; it is the scriptural mirror. If we refuse to study what God has revealed as to the future, we inevitably fall back on our own ideas.

Some cite the scripture, '*I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*' (1 Corinthians 2:2) to justify our ignoring prophecy. Paul doubtless wished to set himself at variance with the know-all 'kings' in that city. We are not to limit ourselves to the knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified. We must also know Jesus Christ glorified, Jesus Christ at the right hand of God; we must know Him as High Priest; as Advocate with the Father. We ought to know Jesus Christ as much as possible. '*Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.*'¹ (Hebrews 6:1).

¹ The word τελειότης/teleiotés/Strong-5047 suggests the *combination* of truths (stages of spiritual growth), the culmination of which also supports future consummation. (Strong's definition).

God has a perfect plan for the future: the more we enter into their minute details; the more perfection appears².

How God has revealed Himself in Prophecy.

Revelation 12 gives us final combat between Christ, the last Adam, and Satan. The fight was either for the earthly object (the Jews) or the heavenly object (the Church).

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun... and she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. (v. 1,4)

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon... and the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan... And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ. (v. 7,9-10)

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (v. 17)

For the crisis of the combat between Satan and the last Adam to be understood, scripture had to develop the history of the first Adam - hence so much of scripture concerns man's failings. We, Christians with the life-giving Spirit and living during the church-time period separating the first coming of the Lord from the second, are to have a better understanding of the eternal counsels of God. The Church is being gathered by the action of the Holy Spirit to have part in the glory of Christ at His return. Then, at the Rapture, the Church is taken from out of all nations, and united to Him.

Christ found the first Adam in a state of ruin – entirely lost. The

² I am very conscious of having left out many 'minute details' that JND covered in his lectures and other papers. This book is no substitute for the 1,529 pages of the four 'Prophetic' volumes of J N Darby's Collected Writings edited by William Kelly, plus his other notes and the Synopsis.

whole state of man, before and after the deluge, under the law, under the prophets, only served as a clear attestation that man was lost. He had failed altogether, under every possible circumstance, until, God having sent His Son, the servants said, *'This is the heir; let us kill him'* (Luke 20:14). Sin abounded, but the grace of God over-abounded (See Romans 5:21).

Prophecy in the Old Testament

When Israel had transgressed in every possible way and circumstance, under Ahaz in the family of David, prophecy commences in all its details, having these two features:

1. The manifestation of the glory of Christ, showing that the people had failed under the law.
2. The manifestation of the coming glory of Christ, to be the support of the faith of those who desired to keep the law.

The word of God, predicting that the Messiah was to come and suffer should have touched their conscience. Isaiah 53 is still a stumbling-block for them. It ought not to be so with us.

Prophecy and the Church

Prophecy applies itself properly to the earth: its object is not heaven. Through not seeing this, Christians have been misled, thinking that they can enjoy earthly blessings, whereas we are called to heavenly blessings. For the want of taking hold of this exhilarating truth, the church has become so weak.

The church is a kind of heavenly economy, during the period of the rejection of God's earthly people, it has its joy in heavenly places. The Lord, having been rejected by the Jewish people, is become wholly a heavenly Person. This is Paul's doctrine. It is no longer the Messiah of the Jews, but Christ exalted and glorified.

It was necessary that Christ should buy the church: the price was His blood. We see that Boaz, a type of Christ, bought the inheritance by taking Ruth (strictly speaking a type of the Remnant of Israel brought in by grace) as wife. See Ruth 4:5

The Church, has no title to the inheritance, because until we are in the glory we can have nothing, possess nothing, except only *'the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until*

the redemption of the purchased possession.' (Ephesians 1:13-14). We see the church glorified, even though the Lord Jesus has not abandoned any of His rights upon the earth.

As to the saints of the church, in the patience of God, the children of God are gathered together. The Lord will come at any time to call His ransomed people. The church will then go immediately to meet the Lord, and the marriage of the Lamb can then take place.

Until that time Satan is the prince of this world, by usurpation.

Calling and Government

Having considered the rights of Christ and of the church, let us consider how Christ will make them good. In the Jews, the calling of God and the government upon the earth were united. But Israel failed, and God transfers government, according to His will, to the Gentiles. However, Israel continued to be God's chosen people: for the *'gifts and calling of God are without repentance'*. (Romans 11:29) The calling of God for the earth is never transferred to the nations; it remains with the Jews. If I want an earthly religion, I ought to be a Jew.

Once the government is transferred to the Gentiles, they become beasts, the oppressors of the people of God: first, the Babylonians; secondly, the Medes and Persians; thirdly, the Greeks; then, the Romans. The fourth monarchy consummated its crime at the same instant that the Jews consummated theirs, being accessory to killing the Son of God and King of Israel. Gentile power is in a fallen state, just as the Jews, are. Judgment is written upon both government and calling, as they are in man's hand.

At the time of the Rapture, the government of the fourth monarchy will be still in existence. It will then come under the influence and direction of Antichrist; and the Jews will unite themselves to him, in a state of rebellion, to make war with the Lamb.

The Battle in Heaven

At the appropriate time, Satan, who up till now has been in heaven, will be dispossessed and expelled and cast down to earth. He will

not yet be bound.³ He will excite the whole earth and will raise the apostate part of it, that which will have revolted against the power of Christ coming from heaven. Satan will unite the Jews with this apostate prince against heaven, along with both secular and spiritual heads of both the Gentiles and the Jews. The Wicked One, having joined himself to the Jews, and placed himself at the centre of government of the earth in Jerusalem, will be defeated at the coming of the Lord of lords and King of kings. Although the Lord will have come to the earth, and the power of Satan in Antichrist destroyed, the earth will not yet be brought under His rule. Therefore, the Saviour must clear the land so that its inhabitants may enjoy the blessings of His reign without interruption. Satan will be bound until *'he is loosed for a short season'* (Revelation 20:3).

The Lord will purify His land from the Nile to the Euphrates. The people will come into security in the land. Before the end of the seven-year period, another enemy namely Gog, will come up, but only for destruction.

The Lord's Return

We now discover a much more calm and intimate relationship between the Lord Jesus and the Jews. This is what will take place when *'his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives'* (Zechariah 14:3) It is the same Jesus: not as the Christ from heaven, but as the Messiah of the Jews.

The world to come will follow the judgments. The Lord's glory will be manifested in Jerusalem, the report of which will be announced to the other nations. These will submit themselves to Christ; they will confess the Jews to be God's blessed people. Blessing will extend from Jerusalem to wherever there are men to enjoy its effects. The throne of God, established at Jerusalem, will become the source of happiness to the whole earth.

³ In his lecture Darby stated that as soon as the Rapture had taken place battles would commence and Satan would be cast out of heaven. This would undoubtedly be the case if the period between the Rapture and the Appearing was only 3½ years. As stated in the Prophetic Timeline (Section 1) it is the author's position and that of the majority of premillennialists that this period will be seven years and Satan will be cast out halfway through. See 'Are there Two Half Weeks in the Apocalypse?' JND Collected Writings vol 11 (Prophetic 4), page 168.'

The blessing will be without interruption because the government in heaven will be the security of the goodness of God. Darby writes 'Behold the heavenly Jerusalem, witness in glory of the grace which has placed her so high! In the midst of her shall flow the river of water of life... Meanwhile, upon the earth, is the earthly Jerusalem, the centre of the government, and of the reign of the righteousness of Jehovah her God; will be the place of His throne - the centre of the exercise of justice'.

The glorified church will fill the heavenly places with its joy. In the midst of her flows the *'river of water of life, ... and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, ... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations'* (Revelation 22:1-2) . *'The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish'* (Isaiah 60:12). Christ will fulfil all the functions of High Priest after the order of Melchisedec.

Conclusion

Darby acknowledged that he had not covered many aspects of prophecy in these lectures, for example, the persecution of the Jews. He felt he had covered the larger features of prophecy, especially making the distinction between the dispensations, very clear, also conveying something of God's character and perfect work. If we see God's works in their minute details, the more does perfection appear.

He concludes: 'May God perfect in us, and in all His children, in separation from the world. This ought to be, before God, the fruit of the expectation of the church. May we know more these of its expected heavenly blessings, and be aware of the terrible judgments which await all that which keeps man bound to this lower world; for judgment will come upon all these earthly things. May God also perfect the desires of our hearts, and the witness of the Holy Spirit!'