

Jerusalem Symbolism

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(44) "But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. (45) He will pitch his royal tents between the sea and the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him." (Dan 11:44-45, margin)

Introduction

In Dan 11:44-45 earth's last king of the North sets out from Egypt to put down the only remaining pocket of resistance to his rule.¹ If he went north and east from that starting point, as two separate directions, his troops would be marching toward the Mediterranean and the Red Sea respectively. But nothing is there. In this passage "the north and the east" means northeast.² The king has just come from the northeast on his way down into Egypt, so for him to go northeastward now means that he is retracing his steps. The resistance he now learns about is behind him, in territory he thought was completely subdued (see vs. 41).

The term "Jerusalem" is not used in Dan 11:44-45, but that is where the king goes. It is the first major city northeast from the bridge of land separating the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, which provides the only land access between Asia and Africa. If we can agree on these details of symbolism in the passage at the outset, my purpose below is to show what they mean. What does the angel mean by tacitly alluding to Jerusalem in this way? To find out we must ask how biblical writers use the term "Jerusalem" generally (as well as other kinds of city symbolism) to describe the condition of God's people at various times in history.

It is not the case that a biblical writer's intent is automatically limited to the literal city every time he uses the word "Jerusalem." In Revelation we have both New Jerusalem (Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10), for example, and also Great Babylon (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). Both figures are used to describe the church. The fact that literal Babylon no longer exists does not reduce its validity as a biblical symbol for the end time and the fact that literal Jerusalem does exist should not prevent us from seeing its legitimate symbolic meaning.

Some Preliminary Definitions

The name "Jerusalem" is significant in Scripture for a reason. That reason is not merely that Jews, or citizens of the nation of Israel (later Judah), lived in Jerusalem. It is not even that Israel, who lived there, received covenant promises from God. Rather it is that God gave covenant promises to Israel. This might seem to be a rather fine distinction but it is one that has immense exegetical implications. There is a difference between receiving and giving. Here I wish to emphasize the role of the Giver. Israel was that body of people through whom God preserved a knowledge of Himself in a world which otherwise would not have known or cared about Him. Jerusalem was that place where the worship of the true God had its center. The Lord gave knowledge and national existence. These are not things that Israel had independently--apart from God (see Deut 7:7).

Testing the definitions

The above spiritually oriented definitions (of "Jerusalem" and "Israel") could not be tested unless Israel at some later time failed to preserve a correct knowledge of God or if Jerusalem ceased to be the place where the true worship of God had its center. I submit that at the time of Christ's death both of the above conditions were met. One does not preserve a correct knowledge of the Father by rejecting the Son.

First century Jewish leaders failed to see Christ as the fulfillment of their various ceremonies and so, although they continued observing those ceremonies after He died, they were devoid of meaning. After the real Lamb of God had come, there was no longer any need for animal sacrifices to point forward to His coming.

Those who accepted the fulfillment of Israel's promises in Christ became the heir to Israel's blessings after Christ. They had the promises because they accepted them. At the same time, Israel abdicated its role as the unique vehicle for preserving a knowledge of God by rejecting His Son. Ever since then, wherever the gospel is preached, there is the true worship of God.

There is no longer any need for a temple in Jerusalem because Christ "serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man" (Heb 8:2). Here is the context for His command to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). By the

same token it is also the context for His assurance that, "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt 18:20). Truth no longer has a geographical center. Rather than being shifted from Jerusalem to some other place, the concept of localizing the worship of God no longer applies. The only useful distinction now is between heaven and earth--not between this part of earth and that part.

Significance of the definitions

Let me point out how on one occasion Christ lashed out at the Pharisees, criticizing their spiritual blindness. The passage is quoted below.

(16) "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' (17) You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? (18) You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' (19) You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? (20) Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. (21) And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. (22) And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. (Matt 23:16-22)

Christians are quite willing to accept the idea that the Jewish leaders of Christ's day were blinded by their traditions. But the same line of reasoning could be brought closer home. Which is greater: Israel itself, or the One who called Israel into existence? Jerusalem, or the worship that had its center there (see Ps 48:1-3)?

If Israel was a holy people because they represented a holy God, and then ceased to represent Him, what implications does that have for the people? And if Jerusalem was the place where a knowledge of God was preserved in true worship, and then the cornerstone of that system of truth was rejected, what implications does that have for the city and its temple? What is the significance of Dan 9:24-27, which predicts both the death of the Jewish Messiah and the destruction of the city which rejected Him? Is there any relationship between these two events? If so, what is the nature of that relationship? Or did the angel temporarily lose his train of thought while conveying the above prophecy? Perhaps the above two ideas are placed side by side gratuitously and are actually unrelated.

I submit that throughout the Bible the significance of both Israel and Jerusalem is a derived significance. If its source is removed, its effects cannot remain. If its source goes elsewhere, the significance that formerly derived from it goes as well.³ The covenant promises to Israel do truly apply to the church, because the trust and obedience in evidence when those promises were given initially apply to the church and to no other body of people. What point was Paul trying to convey when he wrote, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29)? This is different from saying, "If you belong to Abraham, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." That is just what Paul is not saying. To claim that the Jewish people are chosen of God with or without acknowledging the Son of God is the same type of error exactly as the one Christ was attacking in Matt 23:16-22.

City Symbolism

What I am talking about in this paper is not Israel so much as Jerusalem, and not Jerusalem so much as the city symbolism of which it is one example. Another example of biblical city symbolism is Babylon. There is a close connection between the two.

Jerusalem

I submit that a secondary application of such passages as Isa 22:1-14 can be made to the church, not on the basis of homiletical license, but on the basis of sound exegesis. Verses 8-13 are quoted below.

And you looked in that day
to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest;
(9) you saw that the City of David
had many breaches in its defenses;
you stored up water
in the Lower Pool.
(10) You counted the buildings in Jerusalem
and tore down houses to strengthen the wall.
(11) You built a reservoir between the two walls
for the water of the Old Pool,
but you did not look to the One who made it,
or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.

- (12) The Lord, the Lord Almighty,
 called you on that day
 to weep and to wail,
 to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth.
- (13) But see, there is joy and revelry,
 slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep,
 eating of meat and drinking of wine!
 "Let us eat and drink," you say,
 "for tomorrow we die!" (Isa 22:8-13)

The situation described in Isa 22 is one of great need. Foreign armies are at the gates of the city and Jerusalem is under seige. The people try to mount a defense but do not include God in their planning. They do not take their danger seriously enough to call on Him for help. God looks for mourning and repentance among His people but finds revelry in its place. They enjoy themselves while enemies go about destroying their city.

Babylon

In my view Dan 5 may be considered parallel to Isa 22. There Belshazzar feasts while Cyrus' general Gubaru is at the gates of Babylon. Belshazzar considers himself secure and mocks the danger. Again, in Rev 18 Babylon the Great says to herself, "I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine" (Rev 18:7-8).

There is no mistake here. Jerusalem represents the church. But both good and bad are found within her. Babylon is used to represent those elements within the church that are in spiritual decline. The impure woman of Rev 17 and 18 is not a godless world power or an evil individual. It is the same church that John had seen earlier, in Rev 12, under widely different circumstances.⁴ That is why he is so surprised to see her. Over time she has undergone a dramatic change. The impure woman represents the vast majority of professing Christians as Christ sees them with divine insight just before His return.

Paul once told the church in Corinth, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Cor 11:2). But the virgin Paul had in mind becomes a harlot in the prophecy.⁵ The merchants of the earth have made commerce of her affections and routinely penetrated her defenses (Rev 18:11-19). She herself is intoxicated from her many adulteries (Rev 17:2) and cannot discern her danger (Rev 18:7).

God looks for repentance and finds only revelry and spiritual drunkenness. It is not a pretty picture at all, but it is firmly biblical. Tracing the above symbolism back to Isa 22 helps us to understand both the earlier prophecy and these later ones.⁶

Jerusalem symbolism in Dan

11:44-45

There will be those who apply the last verses of Dan 11 to the current military confrontation in the Persian Gulf.⁷ My response to such exegesis is, What did it mean last year? And what will it mean next year after this crisis has given way to something else? Earlier there were those who believed that World War II was Armageddon. Before that World War I was Armageddon. In retrospect it is clear that not one or all of these wars was Armageddon. And if there is another world war, that will not be Armageddon either. We will continue being tossed about from one page of the newspapers to another until we finally get hold of what this prophecy is talking about. The final attack by the last king of the North in Dan 11 is not directed against Israel. It is directed against the remnant church. God is trying to tell us something here and we would do well to discern His intent.

In Dan 11 Jerusalem symbolism is applied to the church as an object of persecution rather than of reproof. This is the opposite counterpart of Babylon symbolism, but the two go hand in hand. At the end of Dan 11 we are not dealing with predictions that have already been fulfilled and whose accuracy we can document from secular history. Instead we have yet another description of the unbelieving world's final assault on the church (11:44-45) just before Christ comes (12:1-3).⁸

Discussion

It is possible that the Holy Spirit never in any passage had anything more in view than an organized collection of stones located at slightly more than 35° east longitude and slightly less than 32° north latitude when He caused the prophets to write about Jerusalem anciently, but it is unlikely. God's Word is an expression of God's thought and His thoughts are more expansive than ours (see Isa 55:8-9). He speaks to a situation, but does not confine Himself to it. As a general rule we have taken the Scriptures too lightly. It is not that God's words are filled with hidden mystery, but rather that they reflect the thinking of an infinite mind.

(1) In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and various ways, (2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Heb 1:1-2)

It is not the case that "in these last days" God decided to change the topic. When He speaks of spiritual things through His Son and in doing so penetrates "the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12) He is not displaying a new awareness of our fallen condition or revising the goals He had set for mankind previously.

Anciently God preserved a knowledge of Himself through one people, but it was never His intent that the benefits of knowing Him should be confined to one people.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (Ps 24:1)

In the same way, the cattle on a thousand hills are His (see Ps 50:10). Are there a thousand hills in Palestine? And in any event, "Is it about oxen that God is concerned" (1 Cor 9:9)? We should be careful not to make the God of the Old Testament into the type of local deity that He was forced to send prophets to keep Israel from worshiping throughout the Old Testament. "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too" (Rom 3:29)? And if He is, when did He assume that role?

What was the nature of the blessings God promised Abraham and what insight can we gain concerning them from statements such as, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward" (Gen 15:1)? What application does Paul make of these promises in regard to circumcision (see Rom 2:28-29; Gal 5:1-12) and the promised Seed (see Gal 3:1-4-7)? All these things have a spiritual dimension. The promise concerning land (see Gen 15:18-21), which defines the territorial limits of what would one day become literal Israel, is literalism's strongest argument. But in other places even this promise is stated more broadly: "All the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever" (Gen 13:15). These specifications relate on one level to Gen 15 but on another level to Ps 24 ("The earth is the Lord's, and everything it it" [vs. 1]).

If "land" in Gen 13 and "earth" in Ps 24 refers only to the land of Israel, we make God into a local deity whose jurisdiction does not extend beyond the territory "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--(19) the land of the Kenite, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, (20) Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, (21) Amorites, Canaanites, Gergashites and Jebusites" (Gen 15:18-21). But in

this event why would God send Jonah to Ninevah? Ninevah lies on the Tigris, outside the above territory. Away with such limitations! The promise to Abraham concerning land is ultimately a commitment on God's part to give the whole earth (not just one part of it) to those who love and obey Him.

Conclusion

A hermeneutic of wooden literalism need not be inconsistent, but where it is consistently applied it is not spiritual, nor is it ultimately biblical: "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). God's Son is the center of God's thought as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of both testaments.⁹ He is the touchstone that makes true interpretation possible. Without Him, i.e., without making Him central not only in our lives but to the passages we interpret, false interpretation becomes inevitable. Under such circumstances it is radically unavoidable. There is no way to tell the truth about God apart from the One who embodies that truth. It is not embodied in Israel independently of God.¹⁰

The final attack in Dan 11:44-45 is not just one more entry in an endless list of human wars. Christ says, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come" (Matt 24:6). It is not an attack by this country on that country, or any consortium of countries. It is Satan's ultimate effort to obliterate the remnant of God who fly in the face of human authority--and his own--by making God's Word their only basis for religious faith.

This does not become an issue, incidentally, until human laws are framed that contradict that Word.¹¹ When human laws flatly contradict God's law, then the confrontation will be unavoidable. A person will either obey God or obey men. The choice will be clear and people will make it intelligently. When they have done so the two sides in the battle of Armageddon will be fully mustered. The sheep will be separate from the goats (see Matt 25:31-46). "And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not" (Mal 3:18). Then Christ will come.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

¹Previously, in vss. 40-43, the king of the North had swept down from the North. Here he is retracing his steps.

²See Hardy, "Toward a Typological Interpretation of Dan 11:40-45," *Historicism* No. 22/Apr 90, p. 12.

³Taking a blessing that had formerly belonged exclusively to A and giving it without distinction to A, B, and C is not the same as cursing A. What Christ did at the cross was to make the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant available to any and all who would appreciate and receive them. These blessings were still freely available to Jews after the cross, but only on the basis of faith--which is precisely the same basis on which they are available to Gentiles (see Rom 11:2, 11). Here is the meaning of Christ's parable in which day laborers served their master for different periods of time but all got the same pay (see Matt 20:1-16).

⁴See Hardy, "A Brief Note on Rev 12:1 and 17:3-6," *Historicism* No. 9/Jan 87, pp. 42-44.

⁵See *ibid.*

⁶On the close connection between Isaiah and Daniel see George G. Nicol, "Isaiah's Vision and the Visions of Daniel," *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979): 501-5.

⁷Clifford J. Goldstein has written well against this position. See *idem*, "Iraq in Prophecy?" *Adventist Review*, NAD Edition, October 4, 1990, pp. 12-13 (1220-1221). "Of course, the situation in the Middle East is dangerous, and it could bring about an economic collapse that sets the stage for final events. But to take the precious prophecies that have given our church a distinct message and turn them into Saddam Hussein's battle plans is a perversion of historical Adventist interpretation, a misuse of Ellen White, and a subtle attempt at sabotaging the truths on which our church is founded" (*ibid.*, p. 13).

⁸See Hardy, "Dan 12:1-3 in Relation to Dan 11:44-45," *Historicism* No. 23/Jul 90, pp. 2-7. See also, "Toward a Typological Interpretation of Dan 11:40-45," *Historicism* No. 22/Apr 90, pp. 2-97.

⁹See the Editorial to *Historicism* No. 14/Apr 88.

¹⁰The belief that physical Israel are God's chosen people with or without reference to any spiritual relationship with God on their part has certain similarities to the belief that life goes on with or without reference to the body. It is a prophetic counterpart of sorts to the natural immortality of the soul. Both teachings are equally wrong and for the same reasons. In this connection bear in mind that the olive tree of Rom 11:11-24 is not Israel but God. Paul compares Jews to mature branches capable of being broken off and Gentiles to shoots of branches capable of being grafted in. But in either case, apart from "the nourishing sap of the olive root" (Rom 11:17) there can be no spiritual life, and therefore no spiritual blessing.

¹¹Roe v. Wade is widely considered to be such a law. Admittedly, Roe v. Wade allows killing by parental consent, but it does not require anyone to destroy life. There is an important distinction here. The analogy here would be to a federal law making it permissible to observe a day of rest other than the one God commands. But that is already legal and no Seventh-day Adventist has any objection to the fact. What I am talking about are laws that would make it a crime against the state to obey the fourth of God's Ten Commandments. Here the analogy with abortion breaks down.