

Dispensational Outcomes in Isaiah (Jehovah's Salvation)

By Steve Sebastian

In 1840, John Nelson Darby delivered a series of 11 lectures in Geneva, Switzerland. These lectures were later published in a book titled "The Hopes of the Church in Connection to the Destiny of the Jews and the Nations, as Revealed in Prophecy." During those lectures, Darby said, "at the end of the age... the Jews *will be* returned to their own land, though without being converted..."

[brethrenarchive.org/media/360136/the_hopes_of_the_church_of_god_in_connec.pdf (pp. 75-76)]

On what basis did Darby predict that the Jewish people, having been scattered across the world for nearly two thousand years, with no common homeland or common language, would eventually return to their own land, without having been converted to Christ? Was Darby a prophet? Did he receive special revelation from God? No! Darby simply attempted to make sense of Bible prophecy literally, not allegorically or metaphorically. By interpreting the Old Testament prophecies at face value, Darby concluded that God has future plans, specifically for the Jewish people, which differ from His plans for the church. Darby recognized that when Bible prophecy is interpreted literally, not allegorically as centuries of Catholic and Protestant churches and theologians had taught it, it plainly describes different dispensations (economies) for Israel and the church. "A concise definition of a dispensation is this: *A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose.*" [Charles C. Ryrie, "Dispensationalism," Moody Press, 2007, p. 33]

In this study, I will show that by consistently applying a literal, grammatical, and historical hermeneutic to the prophecies of Isaiah, we will recognize God's specific plans for judging, redeeming, and exalting Jerusalem and all Israel, during a future earthly reign of their promised King and Savior. During that dispensation, known to premillennial dispensationalists as the kingdom age, Christ will be glorified by crushing the Gentile nations and by justifying *all the seed of Israel* (Isaiah 45:25), and not through the presence or work of the church on earth.

Prophecy In General

"Prophecy applies itself properly to the earth; its object is not heaven. It was about things that were to happen on the earth." [brethrenarchive.org/media/360136/the_hopes_of_the_church_of_god_in_connec.pdf, p. 156]

Let's consider this statement for a moment. Bible prophecy is not about heaven. It pertains to the future events God has planned for the earth and its people, and God has made these prophecies available for thousands of years to anyone who wants to read them. But reading them is one thing. Understanding them is another. In Isaiah, we read that, although these prophecies were given specifically to His people Israel, the meaning would be hidden from them.

...Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 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 (Isaiah 6:9-10).

But Isaiah 29:18 says that, in time, God will lift this blindness. *And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.*

While today this blindness is God's plan for the Jews at large, it is not His plan for the church. God wants believers to understand Bible prophecy, being revealed to the believer through the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

Here are several ways a proper understanding of prophecy helps us:

1. We will not be deceived or misled by those seeking to recruit us for their own purposes.
2. We will be able to conform our lives towards that which will be important in the future.
3. We will have an anchor of hope when passing through dark and troubling times.
4. We will have the ability to properly assess the world around us as it truly is.

The Methods of Interpreting Prophecy

There are the two methods that theologians use to interpret prophecy: the “literal, grammatical” method and the “anything-but-literal, grammatical” method, which I will call the non-literal method. This method applies various techniques for interpreting prophecy like the allegorical, moral, metaphorical, and spiritual. Applying the non-literal method to prophecy reduces it to a mainly symbolic narrative, which cannot be understood by simply reading the text or its context. The method drives the meaning.

However, if you want to understand what the author meant through what they actually wrote, there is only one valid method. The author’s intended meaning must be derived by applying a literal, grammatical method. A literal view of prophecy carefully observes the words, phrases, references, metaphors, figures of speech, etc. in order to accurately interpret the mind of the author through what they have written. When figures of speech or metaphors are used, they should be interpreted through their immediate context in order to enhance, not hide, the plain, literal meaning of the author’s text.

A literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy consistently concludes that God has promised a redemption and blessings specifically to the house of Jacob (Israel) in a future age to come. Even a prominent Presbyterian amillennial theologian, like Oswald Allis (1880-1973), had to admit, “the Old Testament prophecies, if literally interpreted, cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age.” [Oswald T. Allis, “Prophecy and the Church,” Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1945, 1947, p. 238]

The Prophecies of Isaiah

As Darby and others pointed out, Bible prophecy is meant to be interpreted literally, not symbolically. Keeping this in mind, we find three basic themes developed in Isaiah’s prophecies relating to God’s dispensational plan for Israel. These are judgment, redemption, and kingdom. These themes, first presented in chapters 1 and 2, are expanded throughout the book. Judgment is expanded to describe the Judge, which includes not only His judgment of Judah and Jerusalem, but the whole world. Redemption is expanded to describe the Redeemer, and includes not only His redemption of Israel’s people, and the land, but also the entire earth. Kingdom is expanded to describe the King and His righteous kingdom, over both Israel and the entire earth. Some of these prophecies were fulfilled during, or not long after Isaiah’s time, and many more were fulfilled at Christ’s first advent. Yet, many of these prophecies have yet to take place.

A Brief Summary of the Jewish Eschatology in Isaiah

In 3:14, God announces and begins judgment of Judah and Jerusalem. Judgment continues through the Lord’s first advent until God brings a short and intense period of suffering that ends at the Lord’s second advent. This period of judgment produces, among other things, a small and faithful remnant of Jews who are redeemed (4:4) when the Lord returns to earth and physically defends them at just the time when the world’s Gentile armies and Satan are gathered to destroy Israel (25:9). Upon His return, the Lord breaks

the Gentile powers (59:18-19) and sets up His throne, in order to judge the earth's surviving population (2:4). The Lord rewards those who acted righteously towards Israel and the Jews, but destroys all those who acted unrighteously, including the unrighteous Jews and Lucifer (1:28; 3:14; 11:4; 14:12). He resurrects the saints of the Old Testament (26:19) and restores Israel to its full, promised boundaries of the Nile to the Euphrates Rivers (27:12), gathering in all the sons of Israel and exalting it above the nations that sought to destroy it. The Lord, the promised Jewish Messiah, then physically rules the nations from the throne of David atop Mount Zion in the newly restored, holy city of Jerusalem (Isaiah 9:7).

Now let's examine the three manifestations of God's dispensational plans for Jerusalem and the Jewish people.

Judgment

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Isaiah 1:1). A literal interpretation of this verse indicates that Judah and Jerusalem are the primary context throughout the book. When other people, nations, or cities are discussed, they should be interpreted in light of God's revealed plans for Israel, with Judah as the head tribe, and Jerusalem, their holy city.

In verse 2, heaven and earth are called as witnesses to God's judgment, *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.*

This verse outlines the seriousness of Judah's situation. Nearly a thousand years earlier, Moses prophesied about this pivotal judgment, committing it in the form of a song to be remembered (Deuteronomy 32:1-47). But before Moses presented it to the people, he said, "*For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD...*" (Deuteronomy 31:29), then the song begins, just like Isaiah 1:2, *Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth...* The song (1500 B.C.) then accurately describes the future sin, judgment, and redemption of Israel, which will begin some 1,000 years in the future, during the days of Isaiah (700 B.C.).

Israel no longer respected God or feared His judgments, and now a prolonged period of judgment was about to begin. How did this happen? Isaiah 29:13 tells us "*...For as much as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.*" They no longer feared God because, in place of His Word, they were teaching the precepts of men (see also Isaiah 30:9). This judgment continues today. Isaiah 1:27 says, *Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.* God's judgment will continue until the day that all of Zion (Jerusalem) is thoroughly purged of sin and her people are made fully righteous. Is Zion today a righteous city before God? No. This means that the end of their judgment is still in the future.

The Judge

Isaiah 5:16 says, *But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.* "Lord of hosts" appears in Isaiah 62 times in 60 verses. According to Strong's, "host" means "a mass of persons...especially regularly organized for war (an army); by implication a campaign..." ["Strong's Exhaustive Concordance," 1890] When the Lord of hosts brings judgment and does not simply declare guilt, He engages in warfare against unholiness and unrighteousness (Isaiah 6:3). He uses Gentile nations to carry out the judgment of His people. That is why they are warned not to

fear the nations but to fear the One who uses the nations as tools of His judgment against them. Isaiah 8:13 says, *Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.* He judges Israel and Jerusalem by bringing various “hosts” against them until He is ready to *finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins* (Daniel 9:24).

As the “Lord of hosts,” God will also punish those whom He uses to persecute and oppress Israel during His judgment, because they always glorify themselves while persecuting the Jews. The world will be judged for its wickedness and its evil against God and His people. God said, *“And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob”* (Isaiah 49:26), *“And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible”* (Isaiah 13:11).

Redemption

At the start of the kingdom dispensation, God will fully redeem a righteous remnant of Israel and the city of Jerusalem (Isaiah 4:3-4). The whole earth will also be blessed, but only Jerusalem and its people will be called holy, *And they shall call them, ‘The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken’* (Isaiah 62:12). In that day, all the redeemed of Israel will come to Zion with *everlasting joy*. Isaiah 35:10 says, *And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Once God’s people, the Jews, are redeemed, they never again rebel against the Lord. *“As for me, this is my covenant with them,” saith the LORD; “My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and forever”* (Isaiah 59:21).

In Isaiah 66:2, God said, *“...to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”* When someone reads God’s Word in a plain, literal way and takes it seriously with a humble heart, they will tremble. Why? Because they will come face-to-face with His holy righteousness, and realize that without His redemption, they will face His eternal wrath in hell.

Did you catch the Superbowl this year? Did you see the “He Gets Us” ads about Jesus? Did you hear them say that the reason you should put your faith in Jesus is so you do not burn in hell for eternity alongside some Grammy nominee? Nope. They did not say that. They spent millions of dollars lying about how Jesus is just like us, but did not spend a dime telling this generation to “Repent.” Repentance is the clear message of the Gospel. Stop putting your faith in *the precept(s) of men* or else hell awaits. Believers should never embrace any teaching, nor align ourselves with any group, that does not teach the clear and literal meaning of God’s Word, as this was the very thing that led Israel into rebellion and the judgment of God.

A Side Note about Jerusalem’s Redemption

The Jerusalem of the kingdom dispensation is very different from the Jerusalem in Revelation 21. The kingdom age Jerusalem is redeemed by judgment, purged of blood, and made holy for Christ’s reign. Isaiah 4:4 says, *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.*

But in Revelation 21:10, we read, *And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.* The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, never having been stained by sin or blood. The different Jerusalems clearly describe different time periods, with a kingdom-age Jerusalem, being *purged* of blood, followed by a new heavenly-borne Jerusalem, never having seen bloodshed. This means that the kingdom age and the age that follows are each different from any dispensation up until now. Jerusalem has always been a city marked by sin and bloodshed.

The Redeemer

Isaiah is full of chapters and verses that declare the Lord as Israel's Holy Redeemer, saving the poor and humble from among His people (Isaiah 11:4; 49:7, 26; 60:16). But only one section focuses on exactly how the Lord redeems them (and mankind), despite the fact that everyone is guilty of sin and under condemnation.

Isaiah chapter 53 describes how the Lord, the mighty Redeemer of Israel, places the sins of the people onto a poor, despised, rejected, *man of sorrows* (v. 3). Verse 6 says that even the poor and humble are guilty. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* This servant, the *man of sorrows*, becomes their Passover Lamb for all (v. 7).

Without the aid of the New Testament, the connection between the Lord and the suffering servant is hidden. In all Old Testament prophecy, the identity of this Servant is kept from the Jews until the final day of judgment, when the blindness of the humble remnant of Israel is lifted, and Jesus Christ, the *man of sorrows*, Israel's Redeemer, is revealed. Isaiah 25:9 says, *And it shall be said in that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

The Kingdom

A literal interpretation of the kingdom age cannot take place without a Jewish people, a Jewish land, and a Jewish Messiah. In contrast, all non-literal interpretations remove a Jewish Messianic kingdom and replace it with Christ reigning over the nations as head of the church. This is a common bond between all non-literal interpretations, but is not supported by the New Testament. Hymns like "We're Marching to Zion," or Christians reciting 2 Chronicles 7:14, "*heal our land,*" are examples of how many believers see the church replacing Israel.

Non-literal Interpretations = Christ rules the nations as head of the church. The millennium is for the church.

Literal Interpretation = Jewish Messiah rules the nations. The millennium is for Israel, but includes the church.

The unconditional land/seed blessing made to Abraham, and the promise made to David and his throne, belong to Israel and its Messiah, being fulfilled during the kingdom age with a remnant from all 12 tribes returning to the land from out of the nations (Isaiah 14:1-2). The faithful saints of the Old Testament who died waiting for the Messiah's promised reign are also resurrected (Isaiah 26:19).

I recently heard a reformed preacher define a kingdom as "a community of people working together towards a common goal." This is either purposefully misleading or just plain dumb. A kingdom is a domain ruled by king—a sovereign. In the coming age, one kingdom and one King will rule the nations *with a strong hand*, but His own people will be gently led as a shepherd leads his flock (Isaiah 40:9-11).

The Gentile nations that refuse to serve the Jewish nation will be severely punished, *For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish...* (Isaiah 60:12a).

The King

In a true kingdom, the king does not serve the people, the people serve the king. He hands down laws, he judges, and he provides wealth and protection for those in his kingdom (Isaiah 33:22). But all kingdoms eventually break down due to flawed kings, unfaithful subjects, unrighteousness, injustice, and compromise. However, God had promised Israel that He would eventually provide a righteous King on earth. John Walvoord writes, “Next in importance to the Abrahamic covenant in the Old Testament doctrine of premillennialism stands the Davidic covenant—the promises of God to David that his seed, throne, and kingdom would endure forever.” [bible.org/seriespage/17-kingdom-promises-david]

This is the Christ’s earthly throne and kingdom promised to Israel, beginning at the millennial kingdom age. It is Judah’s throne on Mt Zion, and Jesus, the final and everlasting Jewish Messiah, will reign upon it.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever... (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Conclusion

As we watch the world scramble about, trying to negotiate peace, pursuing equity and justice, and becoming more violent and delusional in the process, we should keep in mind that unrighteous people cannot create a righteous world. This is our world—*The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace* (Isaiah 59:8).

The church cannot fix this sinful world, they can only point sinners to the way of salvation. The only hope for anyone in this rebellious world is to repent and put their faith in the Savior Jesus Christ. One day soon, He will come to judge sin and establish a righteous kingdom on earth.

Purpose of the Dispensations

God’s dispensational purposes for Israel and the church are to reveal His glory through mankind, both on earth and in heaven—on earth through Israel, and in heaven through the church. But, eventually, the two are brought together under Christ in the new heavens and new earth (Ephesians 1:9-10).