

Daniel 11b: The Israel of God

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the message of Daniel 11 and 12, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of a number of images. What is "the Israel of God"? And what is the "glorious Holy Mountain"? This syllabus will attempt to give a kind of summary of these points in the section which follows.¹

THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

Spiritual Israel is not the same as physical Israel. The very name was created through a spiritual struggle. Jacob had his name changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28) as a result of his struggle with "an angel" whom he recognized to be God (Genesis 32:31). He became a kind of spiritual father to those who belonged to God.

Paul recognized that not all who are of Israel are Israelite. (Romans 9:6). In other words, a person cannot automatically be considered to be part of the Israel of God just because he was born into the physical nation of Israel.

In Romans 11 Paul spoke of two olive trees. One was a cultivated tree. One was a wild tree. The cultivated tree represented Israel. The wild tree represented the Gentiles. But Paul makes two main points about these trees. The wild tree has some branches which are grafted into the good tree. This means that some of the gentiles have become part of Israel by accepting Jesus Christ. On the other hand, some of the regular branches from the good tree are pruned off. This shows that some of the original people of Israel do not remain as part of the Israel of God.

In Galatians 3:27-29 Paul points out that there is no more difference between Jew and Gentile. If we belong to Christ, then we are the children of Abraham. That would make us a part of spiritual Israel. Jesus Himself made a similar distinction. In the argument about Abraham's true descendants (John 8:33-58) he challenged the thinking of the religious leaders. They tried to appeal to their ethnic connection to Abraham as a

¹There are two excellent resources for the concept of the Israel of God. A very scholarly reference is Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983). A more user-friendly version for lay people is the book by Russell Burrill, *The New World Order: What's Behind the Headlines?* (Keene, TX: Seminars Unlimited, 1992).

reason for their being special (John 8:33). But Jesus brushed this aside. He acknowledged their ethnic connection (John 8:34). But He went on to show how this was not enough.

Jesus went on to suggest that they were not really Abraham's descendents since their actions did not agree with this (John 8:39-41). They retorted that God was their father (verse 41). But Jesus indicated that our actions indicate who our true father is (John 8:42-47). If you step back and look at the whole picture, it becomes evident that Jesus made a distinction between *ethnic* Israel and *spiritual* Israel. In keeping with this concept, Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world . . ." (John 18:36).

When the prophecies of Daniel refer to Israel, they do not refer merely to physical Israel. They refer to the Israel of God. This is the people of God through history, including those who belong to Him from original Israel and those who have been "grafted in" or "adopted" from being gentiles.

In a similar way, other aspects of the dream in Daniel 11,12 have to deal with spiritual powers. God was the original "King of the North" (Psalm 48:1,2). Satan tried to usurp this position (Isaiah 14:13). And so the *King of the North* comes to represent a power that seeks to usurp the power of God. As Babylon attacked Israel from the North, so a power in the last days would have Babylon-like qualities and would attack the people of God. Like Satan, the great usurper, this power tries to take the place of God. It may even present itself in very religious ways.

When God's people faced Pharaoh of Egypt, they discovered that he had a total disregard for the true God (Exodus 5:1,2). "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice. . .?" And so, this kingdom which was South of Israel, came to represent spiritual powers that disregard God and His power. The *King of the South* includes those who do not have a regard for God. Whether atheist, agnostic, or just plain anti-God, they disregard God and His leadership.

With these things in mind, Daniel 11:40-45 begins to come to life. Whatever the specific details may include, a few things are clear. There will be a power that seeks to move people against a belief in the true God or against a true worship of the true God. This is the king of the South of the last days. But the king of the North "will come against him like a whirlwind . . ." (Daniel 11:40).

Whatever actually happens, we will not be able to see the details clearly until they have been fulfilled (cf. John 16:4). One very possible way to understand this is that the anti-God forces of the king of the South represent *secularism* or *secular nations*. This may even represent *secular forces* within the United States (cf. Revelation 13). But these powers are completely overwhelmed by a union of church and state. This king of the North power will have Babylon-like qualities. Like Babylon of old was able to defeat ancient Egypt, so this last day Babylon will defeat last day Egypt. And it will happen quickly. God's people will find themselves facing the same kinds of trials that Daniel and his three friends faced in Babylon. And once again, God will give power to His people to resist overwhelming forces aligned against them.

Edom and Moab were people distantly related to Israel. They were also neighboring countries. It may be that when the King of the North attacks the King of the South that there will be people who are not actually God's people, but who have some things in common with God's people (Daniel 11:41). These will escape the fury of the king of the North. While it is nice that they escape such problems, it is sad to see that they also do not find themselves among the people of God.

But this end time King of the North will be removed by God Himself (the true King of the North and King of the East). The approaching signs of Jesus' coming will bring distress to the usurping power (Daniel 11:44).

SPIRITUAL INSIGHT / PRACTICAL APPLICATION

As a spiritual Jew, I have the same responsibilities that God brought to the Jews. Yes, the ceremonial laws have been replaced by the things which fulfilled them. But the people of God are expected to live like they belong to Him. We have the responsibility to share with the world the good news of our Lord and Savior who cares about each individual.