

DUELING PROPHECIES (LUKE 21)

(The following is an excerpt from the Alexander Thomson article 'Kingdom of the Hebrews'. The full article can be found at: www.thedifferentiator.net/hebrewkingdom.html.)

Paul knew full well that the earthly and material Hebrew Kingdom would come in its own good time, but we claim most emphatically that none of the writers of the New Testament expected the Millennium within the first century, as has been very illogically reasoned by some.

As proof of this we must carefully examine the 21st chapter of Luke, bearing in mind that here we have a prophecy made by the Lord before His death. No subsequent statement in the Scriptures can set this prophecy aside. God never requires setting aside previous statements He has made, or correct them, as we often must do. He may amplify or repeat in fuller form, but His Word can never be found defective.

Some of those listening to the Lord had asked Him about the time when the huge stones of the Sanctuary would be disrupted and the Holy Place demolished. The Lord replied that false Messiahs would come, and they would hear of wars and disturbances as occurring first, before the consummation arrived (verses 8 and 9). Then He told them (v. 10) that nation would be roused against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There would be (v.11) great earthquakes and famines and pestilences, frightful sights and great signs from heaven.

All these things lie still in the future. The Lord then continues, in v. 12, to answer their question regarding the time when the Temple would be destroyed. He steps right back to a time long before the last days and describes events which took place within a generation in the first century. "But before all these things they will be laying hands on you . . .and persecuting you..." Then in verse 20, "Now whenever you may be perceiving Jerusalem being surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation has drawn near. Then let those in Judea be fleeing into the mountains . . .seeing that these are days of vengeance. . ." Then comes the time when Israel will be "led into captivity into all the Nations" (v. 24), and "Jerusalem will be trodden by Nations until eras of Nations may be fulfilled. And there shall be signs in sun and moon and constellations and on the earth. . . perplexity . . .fear and apprehensiveness. . . for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then they will be viewing the Son of Mankind coming in a cloud. . ." From verse 12 to the middle of verse 24 events are described which happened well "Before all these things" spoken of in verses 8 and 9, and verses 25-27. We might say, nineteen hundred years before these things. The Lord is here prophesying events which took place before and about the year A.D. 70. The words were uttered a good few years before Paul came on the scene, but it is hardly credible that Luke would not share his information with Paul later.

That generation was not to pass away until all things the Lord prophesied might be occurring. He did not say, till all things would be fulfilled. They were to be set in motion, come into being, as indeed, eras of Gentiles are still being fulfilled.

In other words, all throughout the period covered by the book of Acts, certain terrible events were looming over the guilty nation of Israel. One of these events was the desolation of Jerusalem. Surely that generation which put to death the Lord of Glory must have been the most

hardened and wicked that Israel had ever produced. One of the more immediate of the impending judgments was the desolation of the City and "days of vengeance," followed by a captivity into all the nations. It might be argued, of course, that all these events are to be fulfilled only towards the close of the current age. Would this mean that the Jews are once more to be led captive out of Palestine and scattered among all nations?

The Lord dropped no hint that a change of heart in Israel (i.e. repentance) would stay the execution of this doom impending over the nation. We ought to understand verse 32 in the light of verse 28, "Now at these things beginning to be occurring." The events from verse 12 onwards commenced to take place very soon after the crucifixion, while the second half of verse 24 is still occurring. The Lord's prophecy is even now being fulfilled.

Even if the Nation had repented during the Acts period, the Lord could not have returned to them and set up a Millennial Kingdom. Peter's speech in Acts 3:20-21 proves this. What Peter promises is seasons of refreshing from the Lord's face, followed by the dispatch of the Lord, but under the proviso that heaven must receive Him until "times of restoration of all which God talks through the mouth of His holy prophets from obscurity." There is as large a parenthesis between verses 19 and 20 as there is between verses 11 and 12 of Luke 21, or in the middle of verse 24 of the same chapter.

I do not think anyone could place the captivity into all nations at any other time than the first century A.D., just when history places it. And it must be understood that such a huge event is not one that could happen in a few days. Nations cannot be completely uprooted or replanted within a brief time.

It is necessary also to make do allowance for the expression, "eras (or seasons) of nations." This surely implies a very long period. Not eras of the nations, in general, but eras of individual nations, One after the other.

Had Israel repented in the first century, before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, and had their Kingdom been "restored," are we to understand that the seasons of Gentiles were to interrupt the Kingdom? Was the reign of Messiah to be disrupted in some way?

The prophets in Israel knew there was to come a period of unknown duration and character, intervening between the sufferings of Messiah and the glories of the Kingdom. According to 1 Peter 1:10, they searched out what particular era the spirit of Messiah within them made evident, testifying beforehand to the sufferings in store for Messiah. As to the defection of the chosen nation, there never was any secret. What the Prophets were deeply concerned about was the nature and extent of the interval between the murder of Messiah and the events which were to follow in the history of the nation.

That the Christ was to be slain and rise on the third day the disciples ought to have known, as they had been plainly told. But even after His resurrection they were just as ignorant about the immediate fate of the nation. Apparently, they had paid little heed to the discourse narrated in Luke 21.

It is quite true that in Acts 1:6-8 the disciples appeared to believe there was a possibility of the Israelitish Kingdom being restored "at this time." The Lord lets them go on in their ignorance. Often, He preferred His listeners to think out things for themselves. It was not for them to know the times or the seasons just yet. The fact that they were to go off and proclaim a message must not be taken as implying that the Kingdom was coming in their day.

We might ask the important question, was it likely that God would restore the earthly, material, political Kingdom of Israel, before the people of the Kingdom had entered His spiritual Kingdom?

A much more important matter centers around that frequent title, The Son of Mankind, so often used by the Lord. Jerusalem will not be acquainted with the Lord until she shall say, "Blessed is He Who is coming in name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:39). But it is just as true that Israel shall not see Him again except as the Son of Mankind. He is to come again as Son of Mankind (Matt. 24:27-44). The nation that could not tolerate Paul after he had mentioned His commission to Gentiles (Acts 22:21) was totally unable to receive as Messiah Him who was Son of Mankind. The mob which martyred Stephen could tolerate him only until he declared that he beheld the Son of Mankind standing at God's right hand. (Act7:56). When the Lord asked His disciples Matt. 16:13 "Who are men saying the Son of Mankind is?" He was asking a very difficult question. Peter rightly declared Him to be the Christ, the Son of God, the living God. But this does not tell us whether he understood the expression "Son of Mankind."