

Who's Who in Prophecy #1

by: Ronald L. Dart

When you study the Old Testament prophets, it's clear that they are often speaking about the last days of man on the earth or maybe more accurately, the last days before the return of Christ in God's dramatic intervention in man's affairs.

When you read the prophets, they only seem to talk about ancient countries in the Middle East: Israel, Moab, Ammon, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon. You would get the impression, reading along, that the rest of the world doesn't matter, that the Middle East is the only place where anything important is happening on the world scene. In fact, it seems that the most powerful force in the modern world, the English-speaking people in general, the United States in particular, are not even players at all at the end time, that is, unless we are overlooking something very important.

United States and the British Commonwealth In Prophecy

For a long time there have been those who have made the case that the United States and the British Commonwealth are actually the ethnic descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph, the son of Israel. In other words, Israel in prophecy, the United States and Great Britain.

Even the British Royal family have sometimes believed that they were the physical descendants of King David of Israel and sat on David's throne. In its earlier forms, this theory was no more racist than the society around them was racist, but in later years it has become identified with identity movements that are flagrantly racist. The original appeal, I think, had a lot to do with a simple match between what Israel was supposed to look like in the latter days, and which modern nations matched that pattern. The match was close enough to allow a lot of credence to the theory.

So what are we to make of this? When the Bible speaks of an ancient people in the latter-day context, how are we supposed to take it? Obviously, we ought to be looking at the intent of the writer, but the man who wrote these prophecies down had no idea that his prophecies would be over 2500 years before their final fulfillment or more than that.

Our question also has to ask what was the intent of the Holy Spirit that moved men of old to write these things down?

The Prophets Identify Nations In at Least Five Different Ways: Geographical

As I see it, the prophets seem to identify nations in at least five different ways, so this question is not quite as simple as it might first appear. Probably the most obvious is geographical.

Let me give you an example. In the 11th Chapter of Daniel, there's a comprehensive prophecy that begins in Daniel's day and continues all the way down to the time of the end in chapter 12. It has been variously interpreted from time to time, but there's a fairly broad assumption that in the latter days, the very last days of man, the events described in Daniel 11 verse 40 will happen.

Here's what it says, "At the time of the end shall the King of the South push at him and the King of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and horsemen, and many ships. He shall enter into the countries and overflow and pass over. {41} He shall enter into the glorious land." Here we could not possibly be talking about anything except Palestine.

"And many countries shall be overthrown, but these shall escape out of his hand, Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon. {42} He shall stretch forth his hand upon the countries and the land of Egypt shall not escape." Notice the land of Egypt. Now most readers would be inclined to think that this is a reference, not necessarily the ethnic Egyptians, but to the geographical plot of land that has historically been known as Egypt.

The people who live in Egypt today seem to be dominantly Arab. They do not seem to be the original ethnic Egyptians, and so nevertheless, whenever we see "the land of Egypt shall not escape," we feel fairly safe in assuming that he is speaking geographically. And when he speaks of the 'glorious land' we think they are speaking geographically.

The prophet does not use the same terminology for Edom, Moab and Ammon, in fact he refers to the children of Ammon, which suggests an ethnic identification but there's another obvious distinction here. Moab and Ammon were men who could have descendants. Egypt is not a man, it is a geographical designation and so as a consequence, we look for a geographic designation in prophecy.

Egypt also looms large in Old Testament prophets, because it had played a huge role in Israel's history, but it does seem odd as you get down toward the end time that it still is playing a giant role in Israel's history. If you want to see how big that role is, drag out a concordance, a biblical concordance, and look up Egypt and Egyptian and different versions of it and just see how many different places Egypt is talked about by all of the Old Testament prophets.

So when we read about a nation in prophecy, we have to consider whether the Scripture is talking about the nation as a geographic designation of a piece of land.

Ethnically

The second possibility is that the prophecy is speaking of people ethnically even if they migrated away from their original geographic location. Now this becomes a lot more difficult. Take the prophecy that we just read,

Daniel 11 verse 40, "At the time of the end shall the King of the South shall push at him and the King of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and horsemen, and many ships. He shall enter into the countries and overflow and pass over. {41} He shall enter into the glorious land and many countries shall be overthrown, but these shall escape out of his hand, Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon." Now this sounds, for all of the world, like an ethnic description, the children of Ammon.

The prophecy, when you read it in its context sounds like an invasion from the north that does not cross the Jordan River to the East, but continues right on through into Egypt and possibly Ethiopia in the South.

Now historically, Edom, Moab, and Ammon were all given an inheritance by God across Jordan from Israel and on to the South. The question you have to ask is, are these the same people? Ethnically, it's impossible to say. Perhaps God in His heaven has a genealogical computer that would even put the Mormons to shame, but lacking access to that, we can't really be sure.

It should be noted however, that just because Alexander the great came through an area like this, the whole area did not become ethnically Greek. The people tended to stay put. They started paying their taxes to Alexander instead of somebody else, but the Moabites still married Moabites and Ammonites still married Ammonites. The people were tribal and they tended to stay within their tribes, and so consequently they probably stayed the same people.

Now when the Muslims came along and swept through the area and left everybody speaking Arabic, just because their language had changed, didn't necessarily mean that their ethnicity, their customs, their culture, had itself given way entirely to the Islamic culture. People still tended to marry their own people. They tended to stay within their families and their culture. The people from Turkey to India speak Arabic and share the same religion, but even they know that they are not all the same people.

It may be that Edom, Moab, and Ammon are still the same people that have always occupied the Transjordan. There is one prophecy in the Bible, in fact, that suggests it. It is Jeremiah chapter 48 verse 11, "Moab has been at ease from his youth, he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity. {49} Therefore, his taste remains in him and his scent has not changed." Bit by bit, the spread of Islam by the Arab world, coming after centuries of wars and migrations across the land have left the issue in doubt, and perhaps, this is as it should be.

It is frustrating to the 'would be prophets' who want to know what is going to happen and when it's going to happen, but the purpose of real prophets is to help us understand what is happening and why it is happening, not so much what and when.

There are a lot of uncertainties in prophecy, which 'would be prophets', they pretend to erase them. They put together arguments and all kinds of proof texts and they sort of act like that there are no uncertainties here, but they never really quite make it. In fact, the door is still left open for us to figure out, what is this talking about and what are we supposed to learn from it and how might it affect us personally as we come down to the end of the age.

Who Is Israel?

Now perhaps the most important question to be asked, about the ethnic identity of nations at the end time, is who is Israel?

The problem with identifying Israel at the time of the end is much more difficult because they were all deported from their land and most of them never came back.

The people often called the 'lost tribes of Israel' are the ten tribes of the North that were carried away into Assyria long before, maybe one hundred and 20 years, before the fall of Jerusalem. The prophets said they would be scattered among the heathen. Now that being the case, them being scattered, you wouldn't expect to be able to trace them one by one and know where all of them ended up, would you? It is not like one of the great migrations of history where a whole people moved together from one continent to another. It was not like that at all.

Here's a situation where they are to be scattered among the heathen. Nor, would you expect to find them at the end time all together again someplace, not knowing who they are. Unless, of course, God brought that about by some miracle. After all, He does have that giant genealogical computer.

If Israelites in captivity, had children by their captors, those children would be deemed Israelite by God, if their father was an Israelite. So if God tracked everybody's genealogy, then God would know where every single last one of the Israelites went, and where they ended up. Wouldn't He?

Well, we have reason to believe that God does keep track of all these things. Ezekiel chapter 11 verse 14. Ezekiel is a prophet who was in Babylon, by the rivers of Babylon, to whom God began to speak some one hundred and 40 years after Israel had gone into captivity in the North.

Verse 14 of Ezekiel 11, "Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, {15} Son of Man, your brethren, even your brethren the men of your kindred, and all the house of Israel

wholly, are they to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, "Get far from the Lord for this land is given to us as our possession."

Now if you don't have any background you might miss the point of what's being said, the term 'house of Israel' in this context is talking about that division of the ten northern tribes to the north that had separated in a Civil War from Judah in the South. The men in Jerusalem were of the 'House of Judah' and they said to the 'House of Israel', "Get away from us for we have the whole land." In other words, the 'House of Judah' was going to lay claim to all of Palestine, including Samaria in the North.

Verse 16, "Therefore say, thus saith the Lord God, although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I will be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries to where they shall come." Now what this seems to imply is, that even though the northern tribes of Israel were scattered far and wide among the heathen, all among the countries, and that is plural, God says, "I will be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they have gone." Which means He knows who they are and where they are.

"Therefore say, {17} Thus saith the Lord God, I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel." Now I will not take the time to develop it right now, but contextually this is clearly talking about the last days, the time of the return of Jesus Christ. Now for God to do this, He has to know where they are. He has to be able to go out and find them and be able to bring them back, so I conclude God knows who every one of those Israelites are and where they are.

In verse 18, He continues, "They shall come here, and they shall take away all the detestable things and all the abominations from there, {19} And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them. I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh, {20} That they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Now this is really looking way out in the future at the time when God finally brings all of Israel back together again in one place. So the idea of gathering a scattered people is not at all far-fetched. There is an ethnic Israel out there apart from the Jews who are also out there.

The question is whether they are still scattered or whether they have come together somewhere on the planet to fulfill the old promises made to the patriarchs. It seems to me that making that judgment based on ethnicity alone is an exercise in futility because we just don't have the data and the truth is, most people who believe that the English-speaking people are Israel believe it for a different set of reasons entirely.

Typologically

I have said that nations are identified in prophecy geographically and ethnically. Let me add a third way, typologically. Now typology is the study of biblical types and anti-types and I apologize in advance for bringing terms like this into play, I know they are strange perhaps to many of you.

Most of us are familiar with the term prototype. Car makers create prototypes of cars they hope to make in the future. Aircraft manufacturers build prototypes of airplanes so they can work out unforeseen problems before beginning the manufacture of the airplane on a larger scale.

The word 'typology' comes from the Greek and means first type or first model. In the Bible we use type and antitype, which roughly means model and later model or perhaps pattern and later pattern. A great deal of biblical prophecy is fulfilled more than once. Thus type and antitype, first fulfillment and later fulfillment.

I had heard about typology a lot in my life and I didn't really know whether it was biblically-based or if it was just something we took on faith in reading the Bible. There is a prophecy in Isaiah chapter 41 verse 21, which actually says as much, "Produce your cause, says the LORD, bring forth your strong reasons says the King of Jacob, {22} Let them bring forth, and show us what will happen." Okay, is that what you want to know, what is going to happen in the future?

"Let them bring forth and show us what shall happen, let them show the former things what they be that we may consider them and know the latter end of them." Type and antitype. He goes on to say, "Or declare to us things to come, {23} Show the things that are to come hereafter that we may know that you are gods, yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together." "Show us the type," says God, "so we can understand the antitype." "Show us the early fulfillment of a prophecy so we can understand what's going to happen in the future."

Are the English-Speaking People Israel?

Now this is why I would say that if you are going to understand the future, you have to look at the past, and that all prophecy is rooted firmly in history. This is why some people think the English-speaking people are Israel. They have looked at the past and they believe we fit the mold. Take this passage, for example, it is in Genesis chapter 12, verse 1, "Now the Lord had said to Abraham, "Get out of your country and from your kindred and from your father's house, unto a land I will show you, {2} And I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing, {3} And I will bless them that bless you, and I will curse him that curses you and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Now the promise was not merely that Abraham and his descendants would be blessed. Abraham was promised that all families of the earth would be blessed through him and his descendants. So take a look around the world today. What nations or groups of nations have consistently been a blessing to the world around them. It's hard to make much of a case for Israel with its capital in Jerusalem being a great blessing to the nations around them. I think they would be a blessing in the region if the rest of the nations around them were not trying to destroy them all the time.

But in the blessings on the nations category, little Israel is not much of a player, but the freedom loving English-speaking people of the world certainly have been! Whenever there's a famine or an earthquake in various parts of the world, big planes come rolling in with supplies of food and with clothing and blankets and tents for the people who been made homeless. What is the insignia on those airplanes? Sometimes it may be United Nations, but usually it is American. It may be Canadian. It may be British and the people behind it and the money behind it are coming from the English-speaking people of the world.

When the whole continent of Europe was sitting under the heel of a great oppressor at the beginning of World War II, when Hitler had control of virtually everything in Europe at that time, when he was holding Europe slave and was killing people in their thousands and their millions, who were the people who were able to come to the rescue at great lost and great cost to themselves and save the world from Hitler? It was Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, the English speaking people. Wasn't it?

It has been God's intent all the way down through history that He have a people that he could use to be a blessing in the world. All the way from Abraham's day (Genesis 14), when there came a time when some Kings came down from the north and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and carried off all their people captive, including Lot, Abraham's nephew, that Abraham put together a private army out of his own people, went after those people, defeated those Kings, rescued the hostages, restored all the property and sent them back to their land in peace. Who saved their necks? Abraham. He was a blessing to the people around him.

In the world, as evil as this world turns out to be, it's important that God have a people somewhere, that He can actually touch and use to bless the nations around Him. God said that Abraham's descendants would be that blessing and we are!

Now this is not enough to build a conclusive case for most people, and those who attempt to make the case have much more to offer in terms of typology and how it applies in the 21st. century. For now, read Genesis 49 to see what was to characterize the tribes of Israel in the latter days and make up your own mind.

I don't have anything in print on the subject but if you want to know why so many think this way, drop us a line or give us a call and we will tell you where you can get more detail on this matter.

When you get through with all of this, I doubt that you will feel you have proof beyond a reasonable doubt, but you may feel that you have a viable theory of prophecy that helps to make sense of a lot of end time prophecies.

Politically or Governmentally

We have seen three ways the Bible might identify nations and prophecies having to do with the end times: geographically, ethnically and topologically. There are two more actually, the fourth way, the Bible identifies nations in prophecy is politically or governmentally. The common expression for this in the Bible is: 'The House of.' The expression can mean a literal house, a family, a ruling family, a dynasty or it could mean a government.

For example, shortly after the death of Solomon, there was a rebellion in Israel over taxes. The kingdom narrowly averted Civil War, but it did wind up splitting into two kingdoms. In the north with its capital in Samaria was the 'House of Israel', composed of ten tribes led by the tribe of Ephraim. In the South, with its capital in Jerusalem was the 'House of Judah', which was composed of three tribes led by the tribe of Judah. Now these are governmental entities not necessarily just ethnic. The 'House of Judah' were not all Jews, many people were of other tribes as well. Now, after a little over 200 years of the divided kingdom, Assyria invaded the 'House of Israel,' destroyed Samaria and took all ten tribes captive. There were refugees who fled down into Judah, they retained their tribal identity but they became part of the 'House of Judah', and consequently were commonly called Jews, even though they may have been Ephraimites, or Manassites, or one of the other 10 northern tribes.

About 140 years later, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the 'House of Judah' captive. Now mind you, they took a lot more than just Jews captive. There were Benjamites, Levites, and probably little remnants of the other tribes as well that went right along with them into captivity.

2 Sticks to Become 1 Stick

Among those taken to Babylon was a prophet named Ezekiel. Listen to this fascinating prophecy about Israel at the time of the end. It's found in Ezekiel 37 beginning in verse 16, "Moreover, Son of Man, take one stick and write up on it for Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions." This means basically Judah, Levi, Benjamin and of course the others that had gone into captivity with them and had come back out of captivity with them as well.

"Take another stick and write up on it for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions." So we have two groups, 'House of Israel' and the 'House of Judah'. Verse 17, "And join them one to another into one stick, and they shall become one in your hand. {18} And when the children of your people shall speak to you saying, "Will you show us what you mean by this?" {19} Tell them this, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will take the stick of Joseph in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and I will put them

with him, even with a stick of Judah and make them one stick and they shall become one in my hand. {20} And the sticks whereon you write shall be in your hand one before their eyes, {21} You shall say to them, "Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen where they have gone, I will gather them on every side and bring them into their own land. {22} And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel and one King shall be to them all. They shall no longer be two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms anymore at all."

Now there is an implication in this and that is this, that as we come down toward the end time, the 'House of Israel' exists as a separate entity from the 'House of Judah'. And if they exist, then where are they?

Continuing in verse 23, "Neither, he says, shall they defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions, but I will save them out of all their dwelling places wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them. They shall be my people, and I shall be their God." And then he gives us a kicker, {24} "David my servant shall be king over them."

But hold it. David was dead. Long since dead. What is he talking about? What he seems to be talking about is a restoration of the 'House of David' as a ruling family over the 'House of Israel' or perhaps, since we are looking down to the return of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, He is looking at a resurrected David leading all the tribes of Israel.

But I'm out of time. Until next time I'm Ronald Dart and don't forget, you were born to win.

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