

Scriptures and Doctrine :: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy**J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy - posted by docs (), on: 2012/9/16 13:57**

J.C. Ryle (1816-1900). A Anglican beloved in his day who was the first archbishop of Liverpool and a man of God.

Concerning the vital subject of the destiny of Israel in Scripture he wrote:

1) Take up the subject because of the importance which it occupies in Scripture. Cultivate the habit of reading prophecy with a single eye to the literal meaning of its proper names. Cast aside the old traditional idea that Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Jerusalem, and Zion must always mean the Gentile Church, and that predictions about the Second Advent are to be taken spiritually, and first Advent predictions literally. Be just, and honest, and fair. If you expect the Jews to take the 53rd of Isaiah literally, be sure you take the 54th and 60th and 62nd literally also. The Protestant Reformers were not perfect. On one point, I venture to say, were they so much in the wrong as in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. Even our venerable Authorized Version of the Bible has many "tables of contents" which are sadly calculated to mislead, in the prophetic books. When the Revised Version comes out, I trust we shall see a great improvement in this respect.

Me: One thing that has helped me in trying to sort out what's what in prophecy is Brother Ryle's advice to keep in mind the literal meaning of the proper names one encounters in the Old Testament and prophecy. For so long I read and a understanding of sorts would come to me yet the real meaning still remained sort of ambiguous to me. What was really being said? If prophecy referred to the Christian and Gentile church and not Israel proper then hey, what could be wrong with that? Wasn't that where things were headed anyway? Well yes, but within a certain context. Reading of Jacob and Israel and Judah and Jerusalem and Zion and seeing them as allegories for something other than they meant helped keep it vague and ambiguous to me even though I didn't realize what was going on at the time. This way of interpreting even destroyed the meaning of the intended context of prophecy to be fulfilled in regard to national Israel. In many interpretation Israel returning to the land in the last days is allegorically seen as each individual returning to the faith. When you were young etc. you may have kept the faith of your father and mother but then you wandered but later returned to the faith so that is Judah or Israel returning to the land. That will preach of course in a allegorical manner but it is not what the original prophecies mean in regard to a return to the land in the latter days. It has even been passed down that the lion lying down with the lamb etc. is a metaphor for men's harsh temperments being tamed and some go so far as to suggest that it means Jew and Gentile learning to lie down and cooperate with one another at some time in the future. It comes from trying to replace the original meaning of prophetic language. So it has gone with the proper names - Jacob, Isarel, Judah, Jerusalem, Zion - and their "proper" interpretation." It's a keen observation in my opinion that if we insist on the literalness of Isaiah chapter 53 then why have chapters 54, 60, and 62 been spiritualized? What's good for one should be good for the other. I think that's part of what Ryle meant by spiritualizing things regarding the second advent since many of the things in places such as Isaiah chapters 54, 60, and 62 will occur at the second Advent and they regard national Israel restored. Seeing prophecy literally has been a major help to me in getting away from a ambiguous non clarity when reading prophecy. Why can't a literal fulfillment be the most spiritual fulfillment? Amen Mr. Ryle.

Re: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy, on: 2012/9/16 16:25

Amen.

Re: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy - posted by Areadymind (), on: 2012/9/16 18:17

Well said Mr. Ryle.

Re: - posted by EverestoSama, on: 2012/9/17 5:46

Looks like J.C. Ryle had the same outlook the first century Jews had on prophecy (which is a solid one to have). Good admonition for sure. The guy that I learned to study prophecy from spoke quite highly of J.C. Ryle. I can definitely see why now.

Re: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy - posted by twayneb (), on: 2012/9/17 8:00

Amen Bro. Ryle.

Re: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2012/9/17 10:09

AMEN and AMEN!

Thanks for sharing this, docs.

ginnyrose

Re: Some specific, some spiritual, some both and outside time., on: 2012/9/17 14:08

If we take the Old Testament prophecies of Canon as God-breathed, which we must, then we must take the prophecies of the New Testament likewise; Those of Jesus, and those recorded from the Apostles, and especially the book of Revelation.

It would be an impossible task to consume Revelation literally; IE: It is either received symbolically and spiritually, or it cannot be received at all.

There are many, many prophecies that are literal; they came to pass to the jot and tittle, but there are some prophecies that seem to intertwine around the two, the spiritual and the natural immediate, timely circumstance.

I think of the "Abomination that makes desolate."...and how so many have pegged Antiochus Epiphanes as the fulfillment of Daniel 11; which it appeared so, but Daniel 11, and the very same event, is obviously going to happen at the advent of the Great Tribulation...

So, how can the two be reconciled? We cannot be adamant, in an either or situation about prophecies, and frankly I do not care how the Jews interpret prophecy. The Holy spirit must enlighten a man, or the mind, or it will be wrong, or at best shallow. God may have 100 different insinuations in a prophecy, that ring like a bell weather through time...and when we see it, we will be amazed.

I want to say this about the Jews...Yes, there have been many specific prophecies to the Jews that must not! be spiritualized as to the Gentiles....but...The church HAS been grafted into ONE VINE.

"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

and to the Galatians who were plagued by Messianic Jews supposed superiority and elitism, PAUL wrote:

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

I am as much a part of God's heavenly family as any natural Jew, and ALL of the promises and prophetic proclamation to them, as a matter of faith, apply to me as well as any Hebrew ever. In this I tend to disagree with Ryle's seeming maxims.

Re: - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2012/9/17 14:36

I have seen people dismiss Revelation as being totally irrelevant, that it is all spiritual. One person went even so far as to ridicule the idea of streets being paved with gold! He believed he would get tired walking on streets of gold all day! I say he may be lucky to even get the opportunity to do so...SIGH Needless to say, I have no regard for any of his spiritual opinions.

Another lady one time read in Revelation the prophecy of the thousand year reign. She was utterly surprised and dumbfounded, "did you know this was there?" "Yes, madam!" I was appalled at her ignorance.

May I also suggest that this mindset spills over in how the rest of scripture is interpreted. For example, another person from this church scoffed at another for their sensitivity to the Spirit's leading in everyday affairs. As I consider these people's faith it is more a lack of it. They live by law and psychology. What is not logical under their mindset is to be discarded and eschewed. Scripture is irrelevant if and when it conflicts with their theories.

'Nuff said.

In Bible School we were taught one should allow scripture to interpret itself. If there is confusion, question about something, just keep looking and you find the answer to your questions. Obviously some is hyperbole, sarcasm, allegorical, prophetic and literal but the context will inform the reader how it is to be understood.

God bless.

Re: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy, on: 2012/9/17 14:53

Quote:
-----I want to say this about the Jews...Yes, there have been many specific prophecies to the Jews that must not be spiritualized as to the Gentiles....but...The church HAS been grafted into ONE VINE. Brother Tom

Whilst this is undoubtably true Tom it is important to remember that at the same time as the branch of the Gentiles was grafted into the one vine, the branch of Israel was cut off. Therein lies a separation. Not just God choosing Israel, but God cutting Israel off. Both make for a separation. Both make for prophetic distinction. One to Israel one to the Gentiles.

Re: Reply to amrkelly - posted by docs (), on: 2012/9/17 17:46

You said,

"Whilst this is undoubtably true Tom it is important to remember that at the same time as the branch of the Gentiles was grafted into the one vine, the branch of Israel was cut off. Therein lies a separation. Not just God choosing Israel, but God cutting Israel off. Both make for a separation. Both make for prophetic distinction. One to Israel one to the Gentiles."

I'm not quite sure what you mean by "the branch of Israel was cut off." I guess I wonder because so many take that so far as to make it seem as if the holy root of the vine is no longer Jewish and that isn't so. That may not be what you meant and I'm trying to be careful with my comments to you.

1 - I say then, God has not rejected His people has He? May it never be!...

2 - God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew...
(Romans 11:1-2)

God has cut off individual Jewish branches because of unbelief but He hasn't rejected His people or His covenant with them. It's still outstanding even as the controversy that surrounds it regarding the yet blind and estranged nation is still outstanding. The final eschatological outworkings of that covenant are still ahead. I don't know exactly which prophetic distinctions between Jew and Gentile you refer to but I'm more comfortable seeing myself saved and a fellow-heir because I was allowed to enter into a covenant made with THEM (the Jews). Yet God remains restless and won't rest until the final remnant of the natural branches are grafted in again and in my non-allegorical opinion that involves a literal nation also.

Thanks bro.

Blessings.

Re: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy, on: 2012/9/17 19:33

Quote:
----- I'm not quite sure what you mean by "the branch of Israel was cut off." I guess I wonder because so many take that so far as to make it seem as if the holy root of the vine is no longer Jewish and that isn't so. That may not be what you meant and I'm trying to be careful with my comments to you.

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Quote:
-----But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. Romans 11:17-18

It is written that Christ came unto His own and they knew Him not. But to as many as did know Him to them He gave the power to become the children of God. No doubt those who knew Christ from Israel could not be regarded as having been "broken off". My use of the word "cut" may be a mere semantic but the meaning is in the word "broken". Also it is clear that these same Jews who did know Christ received life and this life was Christ Himself; as do Gentiles receive Christ when they too are become believers in Him.

The veil which you have spoken of is however a cutting off (behind a veil) until the fullness of the Gentiles are brought in. Then when the veil is removed Israel will be brought into the light of Christ as a people according to the promises of God to Israel. Therein lies also the distinction of prophecies concerning Israel as a people and those, of both Jews and Gentiles having become the True Vine and the True Branches (True Israel) by the removal of the body of flesh in the removal of Christ's body through death. Wherein also there is neither Jew nor Gentile, nor male or female, but a new creature; by faith. The true vine is Christ Himself. Except that God first remove the veil Israel cannot bear fruit.

The branches on the other hand are olive branches and represent Israel whereas the root of the olive tree is also Christ and the life therein is Israel's relationship to God according to God's first choosing of Israel. Our being grafted in is specifically a reference to the Gentiles who are become through Christ grafted into the olive tree (Israel) in order to bear fruit arising out of faith. Israel is broken off and cannot bear fruit we also by faith are become the children of promise. "Now that you have become the children of promise".

I love Israel even as I love Christ so I love Israel.

Blessings in Him Brother

One is blessed and chosen, one is chosen and rejected., on: 2012/9/17 19:50

"I want to say this about the Jews...Yes, there have been many specific prophesies to the Jews that must not! be spiritualized as to the Gentiles....but...The church HAS been grafted into ONE VINE.." Brother Tom

..."undoubtedly true Tom it is important to remember that at the same time as the branch of the Gentiles was grafted into the one vine, the branch of Israel was cut off.

Therein lies a separation. Not just God choosing Israel, but God cutting Israel off. Both make for a separation. Both make for prophetic distinction. One to Israel one to the Gentiles.

Very relevant point! ARMKELLY!....and sobering.

Israel and the cut-off, and the Holy Seed of God through-out time., on: 2012/9/17 20:19

"I don't know exactly which prophetic distinctions between Jew and Gentile you refer to but I'm more comfortable seeing myself saved and a fellow-heir because I was allowed to enter into a covenant made with THEM (the Jews). Yet God remains restless and won't rest until the final remnant of the natural branches are grafted in again and in my non-allegorical opinion that involves a literal nation also." ...docs to AmrKelly

"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called."....and....."I say then, God has not rejected His people has He? May it never be!"...and...

" I say then, God has not rejected His people has He? May it never be!...
God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew."..
(Romans 11:1-2)

"I'm more comfortable seeing myself saved and a fellow-heir because I was allowed to enter into a covenant made with THEM (the Jews). "....docs

You were allowed to enter into a covenant that God made with Abraham, and "IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED." Isaac was before Jacob, or Israel, and God has never rejected His people who He foreknew, whether they were of the the seed of Jacob or not. There are many Gentiles that He foreknew.

This really tweaked the Jews, especially those of the ilk that murdered Him, because He inferred such a thing; IE: that they were not of Royal heavenly blood, when Jesus named them who they really were; Sons of Satan...

The majority of the Jews have rejected, and hate their Messiah, and have rejected Eternal life with Him, though He strove with the Nation of Israel, and it no doubt has the esteemed favor upon it as it endures its metamorphosis into receiving Jesus....and it will, in one day.

Many promises of God toward the Nation will be fulfilled on and before that day....but in the end, their will be ONE Bride, of Jews and Gentiles....as Abraham was a gentile so to speak once, and as Isaac was also, in whom faith resided....and of course the first Israeli; Jacob, and named Jew, from his son and Messianic forefather;JU-DAH.

Re: One is blessed and chosen, one is chosen and rejected., on: 2012/9/17 20:23

And what of Eph.2:1-22? Paul teaches in his letter to the Ephesians that God is forming one new man out of Jew and Gentile.. That one new man is the bride of Christ, the church. If anything the letter to the Ephesians stresses God's redemptive activity is to bring everything together, that is make them one in Christ. The church if you will.

Paul articulates in Galatians that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek. All are one in Christ Jesus.

Just my thoughts.

Bearmaster.

Re: - posted by EverestoSama, on: 2012/9/17 21:52

From what I gathered, I don't think he was implying that ALL prophecy must be taken 100% literally, but that if there is a literal fulfillment and meaning, it must be addressed first before going on to something deeper (though there are some things that are written in Jewish metaphor that must be understood outside of the literal, of course).

The book of Revelation is unique (but not exempt), because it's almost an Old Testament styled book written in New Testament times. It's more or less a collection of OT accounts, assembled and further revealed, showing its ultimate end times play out, and I think it's highly important to find what it's referencing, and what was happening literally at the time, and THEN go on to its spiritual indication, as yes, much of the book is written figuratively. However as you're reading it you can see to what events in the OT that it's pointing to, and I think it's important to read it side by side to see what played out and what God was communicating in the OT. But it's an interesting puzzle for sure.

In the early church there was a group of people who would spiritualize the texts, while ignoring and even sometimes negating the literal meaning. Today we call them the Gnostics. If I understood Mr. Ryle, this type of mentality was one he was trying to avoid.

Just my thoughts.

Re: J.C. Ryle on interpreting prophecy, on: 2012/9/19 5:51

Quote:
-----And what of Eph.2:1-22? Paul teaches in his letter to the Ephesians that God is forming one new man out of Jew and Gentile.. That one new man is the bride of Christ, the church. If anything the letter to the Ephesians stresses God's redemptive activity is to bring everything together, that is make them one in Christ. The church if you will. bearmaster.

Quote:
-----And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands, remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near; by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:1-22

The interesting thing about speaking of the Bride of Christ is the realisation that it is not the same in meaning as the Church. Similarly when we speak of the New Creature we are not speaking about Jews and Gentiles; even though it is Jews and Gentiles who receive this newness of life. Likewise when we speak about Israel according to the flesh we are not speaking about Israel according to the promise. Israel according to the flesh is a covenant made in Flesh (Jacob). Whereas Israel is according to the promise (Abraham) is written in the blood of Christ (Isaac) and fulfils the requirement of the Law. (Moses). There are many distinctions in the past and present and there will be in the future also. Perhaps one of the most startling distinctions can be seen in the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelations Chapters 21 & 22). Here the Bride is mystically likened to a city New Jerusalem, but at the same time the city is also shown to have a physical reality as well. The measure of it; whether (being 1500 miles in length, breadth and height); measured by angelic measurements or human measurements, it is a physical measure. This correlation of angelic as well as human measurements precludes any possibility that the thing being spoken of is not a physical city apart from the mystery also being spoken of. The angelic measure is included to reflect that it is angels who are building the physical city, whereas it is God Himself who is the One who works in us and through us according to His good pleasure. It is also worth noting that it is the bride who makes herself ready. On the one hand in Revelations we read "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (19:7-8) then we read in Revelations "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (21:2-4) Here is a distinction of the bride who has made herself ready by righteous acts of the saints, and later it is a bride who has been made ready as a dwelling place of God and the Lamb. The one is partial and includes those whose acts are righteous; being adorned with a white garment (as a bride) and the other is both a city as well as a people prepared by God, being the fullness adorned in every precious thing (the Glory of God). The one is the marriage feast of the Lamb, the other is a New Heaven and a New Earth and a New City and the fullness of His people.

The passage from Ephesians chapter 2 does not speak explicitly of the bride, it speaks of the church. The church will one day be revealed when the Lord returns and will reign with Him in the Kingdom, whereas the bride is in the church and must make herself ready for the bridegroom Who is coming as a thief in the night in the first instance. Yet in the last verse of the Ephesian passage we are told that we are being built into a holy dwelling of God. This speaks to the mystery to be revealed even the True Tabernacle of God in the New City. There are many distinctions which need to be made in wisdom, yet even if we had all the knowledge of it ourselves we would still fall short if we did not walk in that knowledge faithfully with a mind to be dressed in readiness.

Allegorizing plain sayings - posted by docs (), on: 2012/9/27 13:52

"For many centuries there has prevailed in the Churches of Christ a strange, and to my mind, an unwarrantable mode of dealing with this word "Israel." It has been interpreted in many passages of the Psalms and Prophets, as if it meant nothing more than Christian believers. Have promises been held out to Israel? Men have been told continually that they are addressed to Gentile saints. Have glorious things been described as laid up in store for Israel? Men have been incessantly told that they describe the victories and triumphs of the gospel in Christian churches. The proofs of these things are too many to require quotation. No man can read the immense majority of commentaries and popular hymns without seeing this system of interpretation to which I now refer. Against this system I have long protested, and I hope I shall always protest as long as I live."

"I do not deny that Israel was a peculiar typical people, and that God's relations to Israel were meant to be a type of His relations to His believing people all over the world."

"I would have it most distinctly understood that God's dealings with individual Jews and Gentiles are precisely one and the same. Without repentance, faith in Christ and holiness of heart, no individual Jew or Gentile shall ever be saved."

"What I protest against is, the habit of allegorizing plain sayings of the Word of God concerning the future history of the nation of Israel, and explaining away the fullness of their contents to accommodate them to the Gentile Church. I believe the habit to be unwarranted by anything in Scripture, and to draw after it a long line of evil consequences. Where, I would venture to ask, in the whole New Testament, shall we find any plain authority for applying the word "Israel" to anyone but the nation of Israel? On the contrary, I observe that when the Apostle Paul quotes Old Testament prophecies about the privileges of the Gentiles in gospel times, he is careful to quote texts which specifically mention the "Gentiles" by name. T

he fifteenth chapter of Romans is a striking illustration of what I mean. We are often told in the New Testament, that under the gospel, believing Gentiles are "fellow heirs and partakers of the same hope" with believing Jews (Eph 3:6). But that believing Gentiles may be called "Israelites", I cannot see anywhere at all."

(J. C. Ryle, "Are You Ready", p 107-8.)

Doc: What I think Ryle meant by believing Gentiles not being called Israelites is that when a Gentile becomes a Christian he does not become an ethnic Jew. He has entered into and may consider himself a part of true Israel but only because he has been allowed to participate in a covenant made with them (Israel). There is no Jew or Gentile in Christ doesn't necessarily nullify one's ethnicity. It's a very important distinction to bear in mind in my opinion. And interpreting prophecy regarding Israel in an allegorical fashion as pertaining to the Gentile church is a Gentile innovation that was not present or practiced during the early history of the church.