

Daniel's People and the Vineyard Parable

by John C. Witcombe

Daniel's people are referred to by the phrase, *thy people* in the following three verses:

“Seventy weeks are determined upon *thy people* . . .” Daniel 9:24

“Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall *thy people* in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days.” Daniel 10:14

“. . . and at that time *thy people* shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.” Daniel 12:1

Clearly, *thy people* of Daniel 9:24 applies to Daniel's literal kinsmen—the Jews. But what about *thy people* of Daniel 10:14 and Daniel 12:1? Is Gabriel still referring to literal Jews? Can we take the plain sense of Gabriel's words and believe that he is speaking about literal Jews in all three verses? Or does something happen from Daniel 11:22 onwards, post-Calvary in the text, which takes us from literal, historical, local actors to a global conflict, global players/forces, and a global resolution in Daniel 12.1? Because if *thy people* changes from literal to spiritual then we might decide that we must also spiritualize the kings of the north and south from the cross forward. So this is a very important question for which we must find a biblical answer.

I believe that the answer to this important question can be found in the vineyard parable:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. . . . These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.” Matthew 20: 1-8, 12

Let's define some terms. The vineyard represents the world:

“God claims the whole earth as His vineyard.” COL 301

The different hours mentioned in the parable represent different periods of earth's history:

- 1) 1st hour = Early morning 6:00 am
- 1) 3rd hour = about 9:00 am (Mark 15:25)
- 2) 6th hour = 12:00 noon (Mark 15:33)
- 3) 9th hour = 3:00 pm (Mark 15:34)
- 4) 11th hour = 5:00 pm
- 5) 12th hour = Evening 6:00 pm

“Through all ages Christ has come to His people, as He represents Himself in the market place at all hours of the day employing laborers for His vineyard, and He says to them, ‘Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go labor today in my vineyard.’” 15MR 81

“None of those called later in the day were there in the morning. They had not refused the call.” COL 399

Daniel’s people are represented by the very first group, the early morning laborers.

“The Jews had been first called into the Lord's vineyard.” COL 400

The Jews were to have taken the gospel into the entire world. This was to have been a global movement. Remember, the vineyard is the whole earth.

And they did have a global mission outreach. Jesus spoke of this global mission:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye **compass sea and land** to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” Matthew 23:15

“The Jews were God’s chosen people, **through whom He had purposed to bless the entire race**. From among them God had raised up many prophets. These had foretold the advent of a Redeemer who was to be rejected and slain by those who should have been the first to recognize Him as the Promised One.” {AA 374.3}

“Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house; Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; **that all people of the earth may know thy name**, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name.” 2 Chronicles 6:32, 33

The problem was Daniel’s people were not doing a very good job in the vineyard according to Jesus.

Let’s clarify right here who Daniel’s people are. They would have included Paul’s kinsmen according to the flesh of whom he had such a burden to see saved:

“That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:” Romans 9:2, 3

Daniel’s and Paul’s people would have also included proselytes such as Ruth and Rahab if they had been alive in their day. If Daniel or Paul were alive today, I believe that they would still have this same intense burden and interest for their kinsmen according to the flesh—for all 14.7 million of their kinsmen.

Why did the landowner have to go back to the market at the third hour to call another group of laborers into the vineyard? Had He failed to hire enough laborers?

Answer: The “chosen labors” were sufficient in number to complete the job. The problem was, they became insubordinate to the Owner and it became evident that the work would not get done by the end of the day with this work crew. Notice that the vineyard into which the third hour workers were call **is the very same vineyard in which the Jews were to have been laboring**. The mission from before and after the cross remains the same.

What group of people did God call into the vineyard when it became evident that the Jews would not be able to get the grapes harvested? Who might the third hour laborers represent?

Answer: The Apostolic Church

“Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” Romans 11:19-22

The third hour laborers soon laid down the banner of Christ, and departed from “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” The work in the vineyard was not going well. Paul warned them of the coming apostasy:

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.” 1 Thessalonians 2:3-7

But they were to be given their three hour probationary shift—from 3 to 6.

What group did God call into the vineyard when the apostolic church apostatized into the papacy? Who might be represented by the sixth hour laborers?

Answer: The Protestants.

“Romanists have persisted in bringing against Protestants the charge of heresy, and willful separation from the true church. But these accusations apply rather to themselves. They are the ones who laid down the banner of Christ, and departed from ‘the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.’” GC 51

The sixth hour laborers failed to continue the reformation. They failed to restore apostolic teachings, clinging on to many of the errors of the papacy. The second angel’s message of Revelation 14—Babylon is fallen — refers to the churches that clung to papal teachings. What group did the Lord call into the vineyard when the Protestant churches failed to move forward in restoring truth? Who might be represented by the ninth hour laborers?

Answer: I believe the last three-hour segment of the work day—from 9 to 12 has been given to a group of people identified in Revelation 10:8-11:

“And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.” Revelation 10:8-11

This was the Millerite movement of the 1830s and 40s. The group that arose from that bitter experience and who were to again proclaim the advent of Jesus became what is today known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This remnant movement is found in almost every nation of this world teaching the prophecies regarding the soon coming of Jesus. They too are to be given their three hour work period—9 to 12. There will be no overtime. When the twelfth hour comes the whistle will blow—probation will end.

Will this group succeed where all others have failed? No, they will have done no better than the groups who have come before them. This group will absolutely fail and the work in the harvest field will never get done . . . without special intervention.

If it was not for intervention right at the eleventh hour, we would have fared no better than those who have gone before us. However, at the eleventh hour, two hours into our three hour shift, a new group unites with the ninth hour laborers. Taking charge under the power of the Holy Spirit, they lead the ninth hour laborers through to victory. We who have stood in rank and file amongst the ninth hour laborers will be put to shame, and because of our failure, we will have to take a back seat to the eleventh hour workers—zealous souls from the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations.

“Stand out of the way, Brethren. Do not interpose yourselves between God and His work. If you have no burden of the message yourselves, then prepare the way for those who have the burden of the message, for there are many souls to come out of the ranks of the world, out of the churches even the Catholic church whose zeal will far exceed that of those who have stood in rank and file to proclaim the truth heretofore. For this reason the eleventh hour laborers will receive their penny. These will see the battle coming and will give the trumpet a certain sound. When the crisis is upon us, when the season of calamity shall come, they will come to the front, gird themselves with the whole armor of God, and exalt His law, adhere to the faith of Jesus, and maintain the cause of religious liberty which Reformers defended with toil and for which they sacrificed their lives.” The EGW 1888 Materials Vol. 1, p. 378

There will no doubt be many of Daniel’s and Paul’s kinsmen after the flesh that will be among the eleventh hour workers. Notice the following statements:

“We are plainly taught that we should not despise the Jews; for among them the Lord has mighty men, who will proclaim the truth with power.” Ms 87, 1907, p. 4

“Even though Israel rejected His Son, God did not reject them. Listen to Paul as he continues the argument: ‘I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew. Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, and digged down Thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.’” {AA 375.2}

“When this gospel shall be presented in its fulness to the Jews, many will accept Christ as the Messiah. Among Christian ministers there are only a few who feel called upon to labor for the Jewish people; but to those who have been often passed by, as well as to all others, the message of mercy and hope in Christ is to come.” {GW 398.1}

“In the closing proclamation of the gospel, when special work is to be done for classes of people hitherto neglected, God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. As the Old Testament Scriptures are blended with the New in an explanation of Jehovah's eternal purpose, this will be to many of the Jews as the dawn of a new creation, the

resurrection of the soul. As they see the Christ of the gospel dispensation portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perceive how clearly the New Testament explains the Old, their slumbering faculties will be aroused, and they will recognize Christ as the Saviour of the world. Many will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer. To them will be fulfilled the words, "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." John 1:12. Among the Jews are some who, like Saul of Tarsus, are mighty in the Scriptures, and these will proclaim with wonderful power the immutability of the law of God. The God of Israel will bring this to pass in our day. His arm is not shortened that it cannot save. As His servants labor in faith for those who have long been neglected and despised, His salvation will be revealed." {AA 381}

"The time has come when the Jews are to be given light. The Lord wants us to encourage and sustain men who shall labor in right lines for this people; for there are to be a multitude convinced of the truth, who will take their position for God. The time is coming when there will be as many converted in a day as there were on the day of Pentecost, after the disciples had received the Holy Spirit." {1MR 137.2}

Clearly, *thy people*, the phrase that Gabriel used to describe Daniel's kinsmen according to the flesh, means the same thing each time that phrase is used. *Thy people* has always included those Gentiles who take ahold of the faith of Abraham. It has always included those who have faith in Christ.

The angel is making it very clear to Daniel that his people will be delivered at the very end of time. Not all of his kinfolk will be delivered—only those amongst his people who have their names written in the book of life.

"...and at that time *thy people* shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."
Daniel 12:1

This belief that Daniel's people change from referring to literal Jews in Daniel 9:24 to only referring to spiritual Jews in Daniel 10:14 and Daniel 12:1, has caused Bible students to believe that everything post-cross in Daniel 11 must be spiritualized. If Daniel and Paul were alive today, I believe that they would take issue with this new definition of who their people are. If those who spiritualize the text had come up to Paul and told him that his kinsmen are not those after the flesh but his kinsmen are now the Christian church, if they told Paul that Israel's probation closed in 34 AD and now his concern and burden is to be directed towards the church, Paul would have told them to—well, I'll let you imagine what he might have said! I can assure you that he would not have been in agreement with them.

God did not turn from the Jewish people in 34 AD. It was the institution of Judaism that was rejected. It could not be used to carry the gospel to the world because it had rejected Christ. The new institution, the apostolic church was founded upon a Jew and His Jewish disciples. They stayed in the vineyard and Jew and Gentile were called into a new institution that would now be working in the same vineyard for the next three hours.

The eleventh chapter of Daniel is literal from start to finish. There is no point within this chapter where the angel Gabriel indicates by the words he chooses to use that we must now see everything that he is saying as no longer literal but now it must be seen as symbolic. I believe that this switch is being forced upon this chapter because of preconceived outcomes that people believe this chapter must produce. When Gabriel wants God's people to know that what he is saying is symbolic, he uses language that would be impossible to understand in literal terms. Lions with wings, four-headed leopards; these kinds of words are absent in Daniel 11. The language of Daniel 11 does not change within this chapter; therefore we must not change our method of interpretation from start to finish.

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