

"THE FUTURE GLORIES OF JERUSALEM"

from

Plain Sermons *On Subjects* *Practical and Prophetic*

by Alexander McCaul

"Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field; and Jerusalem shall become heaps; and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest. But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Micah 3:12; 4:1, 2.

To the mere spiritualizing rationalist, Jerusalem, with all its sacred associations, presents no point of peculiar interest or importance. The recollection, that it was once the city of the great King, and that thither the tribes went up; the belief that there the co-equal Son of God offered up the one eternal and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is neutralised by the reflection that God is every where present, that prayer can every where be heard, and that locality added nothing to the virtue of Christ's atonement. But there is in the heart of man certain prophetic feeling—a sort of presentiment of truth,—one of the fragments of that heavenly nature, which he possessed before the Fall, which often apprehends the Divine will more correctly than the reason of the philosophizing idealist; and this sentiment has ever kept alive in the Christian church a holy reverence for that place which God formerly honoured with his presence, and intends to make the future theatre of his glory. The devotion which erected a church over the holy sepulchre, and the fanaticism that led forth the hosts of Christendom to the Crusades, and the curiosity which guides the modern traveller to the holy city, are all, like the groans of creation spoken of by Paul, anticipations and presentiments of a glorious futurity; they are the public expressions of the inward conviction of mankind, that though Jerusalem is trodden down of the Gentiles, it is not to be trodden down for ever, but only until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled; and would go far to prove to the calm observer of God's dealings with men, that Jerusalem shall one day possess in reality that holiness and that importance which it has ever held in the prophetic aspirations of the Christian church, and the prophetic theology of the Jewish people. But God has mercifully delivered us from the uncertainty of sagacious conjecture and the indistinctness of internal presentiment. It has pleased him again and again, in the sure word of prophecy, to make known his intentions respecting the holy city, and, as in the text, to reveal the future destiny of Jerusalem. The importance of this subject to us may be estimated by the important place which it holds in prophecy; and the frequent repetition of the Divine declarations commend it especially to our consideration. I shall therefore endeavour,

First, TO EXPLAIN; and,

Secondly, TO UNFOLD THE CONTENTS OF THIS PROPHECY.

It might seem almost impertinent, or at least superfluous, to explain a passage so familiar to the minds of Christians, especially when three hundred years have rolled away since the Reformation unsealed

the volume of the Bible, and presented it to the people in a language which they understand. But sad experience teaches us that since the Reformation the study of the Bible has made but little way, and that, excepting the peculiar points of controversy with the Church of Rome, the most zealous Protestants have been content to receive and propagate the old Romish interpretations of Scripture, and remain stationary on that very spot of exposition where the Romish doctors left them. Thus the most popular Protestant commentator of the day still treads in the steps of the Romanists, and expounds the words of the text of the Christian church.

“As Solomon’s temple, the centre of Israel’s worship, was placed upon a mountain, to which the people resorted with their sacrifices from distant places; so (he says), the church of Christ, and its instituted worship, are represented as a temple built upon a mountain. The establishment of his religion, by the abrogation of the Mosaic dispensation, and on the ruins of idolatry; and the adornment of his kingdom above all the kingdoms of the earth are here predicted, under the emblem of the Lord’s house being established on the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills! The calling of the Gentiles, the success of the Gospel in the Apostle’s days, and especially that far more extensive propagation of it which is yet to come, are predicted under the image of all nations flowing to the mountain of the Lord’s house; when apostles and evangelists of the Jewish nation went forth to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, ‘a law went forth out of Zion, and the word of God from Jerusalem.’ ”

So says this commentator, and such is the popular belief of the day.

And yet common sense asks, how is it that the words of the Bible mean the very opposite of what they express. The Bible says, that all nations shall flow to the mountain of the Lord’s house: the commentary, that the Lord’s house shall go to them. Consistency asks, Why is one verse to be interpreted grammatically and another allegorically? When the Prophet says, “Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem,” the spiratualizers admit that Zion and Jerusalem here mean the literal city, and that the prediction was accomplished when Jewish apostles and evangelists really went forth from the metropolis of Judea to preach the Gospel. If so, what reason can be assigned for the allegorical accomplishment of the remainder? Pious reverence for the word of God asks, how can mortal man presume to alter the declarations of the Almighty; to add to and diminish from his revelation; and to assert that God did not mean what he expressed, but something else entirely different? Christian sobriety asks, where did God authorize us to discard our judgment, and to make an unbridled imagination the interpreter of prophecy.

Few will be found hardy enough to assert that, in interpreting Scripture, we are to pay no regard to the context; and yet if we consider the context with attention, we shall find that, not the Christian church but, the literal Jerusalem was intended by the Holy Spirit in the passage before us. We have, in the first place, the admission already alluded to, that from the literal Jerusalem the law was to go forth. We have, in the second place, the prophet’s declaration, that the Jerusalem of which he spake was that city whose population went in captivity to Babylon. For he says, in the tenth verse, “Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered.” We have, thirdly, the express instruction that the mountain of the Lord’s house is that same mountain which had been desolated and ploughed up by foreign invaders. In iii. 12, he says, “Therefore shall Zion, for your sake, be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest;” and then immediately adds, “But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains.”

Who that has not the most determinate obliquity of mental vision, can possibly suppose that the very

same words are in one verse to be taken in one sense, and in the very next verse in another sense? Who would tolerate such laxity of speech in a man, or have any respect for the honesty of an individual who in his promises used words sometimes in one sense and sometimes in another? And shall we impute to God, the source and fountain of truth, a principle which would destroy the reputation of a fallen sinner? Others may call this spirituality, and prize such an interpretation as hidden wisdom. I am free to confess, that to my mind it has the aspect of deceit, and that to ascribe it to God appears very little short of blasphemy. God is not a double dealer. He does not flatter with his lips, nor speak with a double heart. If in declaring that Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and that Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest, he means the literal Jerusalem,—when he uses the same words in the following verses, he still means the same place. He is all-wise, and cannot be deceived; he is all-gracious, and will not deceive the meanest of his creatures.

But this prophecy also occurs in the book of the prophet Isaiah, and it is therefore necessary to see in what sense he understood these words. If he gives an intimation that the words are not to be understood in their plain sense, but figuratively, we cannot complain either of deceit or obscurity, and shall be willing reverentially to bow to an inspired interpretation. But if Isaiah limits the sense to the literal Jerusalem, then we have an additional reason for adhering to the grammatical interpretation.

Now, the prophet Isaiah has prefixed to the words of the text a title to prevent all mistake in its application, and the title is, “The word that Isaiah, the son of Amos, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem;” the very same title which he also prefixes to the first chapter in which he confessedly speaks of the Jews and the literal Jerusalem. If, then, Isaiah says that this vision refers to Judah and Jerusalem, how can that man, who denies the assertion of the Prophet, flatter himself that he believes the word of God? It is a strange sort of faith which leaves a man at liberty to reject the plain asseverations of the Most High. It may be the faith of a Rabbinit, but surely no Protestant Christian will assert that the traditions of the most pious of men are to be preferred to the declarations of the word of God. It cannot be urged that the following context is such as to shew that the Prophet is speaking of the church. The three chapters that follow all speak of the literal Judah and Jerusalem. He goes on to say, “Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers;” words which cannot be interpreted of the spiritual Israel. In the third chapter he announces the ruin of the literal Jerusalem, saying, “Behold; the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the prudent and the ancient. Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen:” whereas the promise to the church is, “I am with you always, to the end of the world.” The gates of hell shall not prevail against her. The context, therefore, of the two prophets agrees, and proves that in the words of the text God is speaking not of that undefined thing which men now mean when they say the church, but of the literal Jerusalem.

Having, then, ascertained the place, our next inquiry must be directed to the time of which the prophet speaks. Does the prophet announce that which happened in the days of the Apostles, or events which are still future? In answering this question I lay no stress upon the expression, “In the last days,” because it is ambiguous. Taken strictly, it signifies any period posterior to the time in which the prophet lived; taken as it is used, it may be interpreted of the days of the Messiah generally, including the whole period between his first and second advent. I have no wish to press words beyond their usual import, nor to found your faith on any expression which is of doubtful interpretation.

The facts of the case, as contained in the Acts of the Apostles, compared with the prophecy, shew that the prophet was not speaking of them or their times. The only feature of resemblance is, that by their instrumentality the law went forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. The fulfilment of a prophecy is however not to be inferred from a partial resemblance, but from the minute and entire accomplishment of the whole, and this cannot be shewn in the prediction which we are considering.

On the contrary, the very opposite of all that is here announced, happened in the Apostolic age. Jerusalem was not then established and exalted, but cast down and destroyed. The nations did not come up to Jerusalem, but some inhabitants of Jerusalem went forth to preach the Gospel to the nations, and the rest were led into captivity in heathen lands. The Lord did not judge the nations, but Jerusalem. The nations did not then cease to learn war for ever, for their history from that time to this is a narrative of war and bloodshed. From the birth of Christ, yea from the fall of man to the present hour, a time of peace and piety, such as is here described, has never been seen in this world; and therefore the commentator to whom I have already referred, is obliged to say, "We may assuredly expect, ere long, such a general promulgation of the Gospel, as will *literally* fulfil the terms of this prophecy, in the universal prevalence of peace and industry; and then war shall never more be either a science or an occupation." Here we have a simple confession that the history of the apostolic times, and of the world since, does not answer to the language of the prophecy, and consequently that it refers to events still future.

We proceed, therefore, to consider, more particularly, the blessings promised in the text.

The first is, that Jerusalem shall again be peculiarly the place where God shall dwell and shall be worshipped. The prophet says, "In the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills." Some persons say, that, to be consistent, those who assert that the literal temple-mountain and Jerusalem are here intended, must also suppose that there is to be a physical elevation of the place above all the mountains of the earth. We do not, however, contend for a literal interpretation of single words, but for the grammatical sense of sentences and whole passages. Figurative language may be employed, and yet the sense intended be real, and fulfilled in the person or place spoken of, and not allegorically. Thus God said to Abraham, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth," where the words "dust of the earth" are figurative, and yet the promise was fulfilled, not to an allegorical but, to the real Abraham. So Christ says, "The son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men," where "hands of men" is evidently a figurative expression for "into their power;" and yet it was not an allegorical Christ, nor allegorical betrayal, but the real Christ was really betrayed.

The grammatical sense is to be discovered by the context and the usage of the language in other passages; and thus we find that the word here translated "elevated above the mountains," signifies peculiarly honoured, and elevated in dignity; as it is used in Isaiah lii. 13, where the English version has the word "extolled." "Behold my servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." Here also the words are figurative, but no man can deny that they have been really fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. So in the text, when it is said that the mountain of the Lord shall be exalted above the hills, it means that it shall be peculiarly honoured, as being the place where God shall again put his name, and condescend to dwell as he did of old. Much light is thrown upon the text by the similar passage in Ps. lxxviii. 16, where David says, "Why leap ye, ye high hills? This is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever." Hills, high places, and mountains were the places especially where the heathen nations worshipped their idols, as may be seen from various passages of the Old Testament. There it is announced that the holy hill of the temple shall be preferred before them all, and shall be the dwelling-place of the true God. In like manner the promise, that "It shall be established in the top of the mountains," signifies that it shall be made the chief of mountains in honour and dignity. The literal rendering would be, "shall be established in the head of the mountains." But that head is commonly used for chief, may be shewn from abundance of passages in the Old Testament, of which I will now cite only one (Ps. cxxxvii. 6), "If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth: if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy," where you will read in the margin of your Bibles, "above the head of my joy."

Words used figuratively, therefore, do not compel us to adopt an allegorical interpretation of the whole

passage: neither does the assertion of the grammatical principle compel us to take each single word in its literal sense. The context and the usage of the language must decide in each particular case. In that before us, we have proved by independent reasons, that the prophet is speaking of the literal Jerusalem, and of that particular mountain whose temple had been destroyed; and by the comparison of Scripture language we learn that this mountain and city are yet to be restored to their ancient dignity; for of them it shall yet be said, in the words of the Psalmist: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King." And such is the doctrine of all the prophets. Isaiah says distinctly, "The Redeemer shall come to Zion;" and God says, by that prophet, "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious." Jeremiah says, "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord." Ezekiel declares, "The name of the city from that day shall be The Lord is there." Zephaniah says, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments; he hath cast out thine enemy; the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more." Zechariah says, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord."

If it be asked what is meant by the Lord's dwelling in Jerusalem, I would say, that which is meant by God's promise to dwell in the Holy of holies. Read his words in Exodus xxix. 42, and the following verses: "This shall be a continual burnt-offering throughout your generations, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel; and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar: and I will dwell among the children of Israel." It was no mere luminous cloud that dwelt between the Cherubim; but the reality of the Divine presence, the angel of the Lord, the eternal Son of God, as may be inferred from His words to Moses. "Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail, before the mercy-seat which is upon the ark, that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat." (Lev. xvi. 1.) And still more from the peculiar promise given to that man of God: "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord than he behold." Zechariah also tells us that it was before the angel of the Lord that the High Priest ministered in the Holy of holies: "He shewed me Joshua the high priest standing by the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." By considering and combining these and similar passages we learn that it was a real manifestation of the Lord that was there vouchsafed, and the reality of the Divine presence which dwelt in Zion. And such it shall be again. Christ shall dwell with his people as he did of old, and in the place where he was condemned for blasphemy, because he said, "I am the Son of God," he shall be worshipped and honoured as the LORD, Jehovah, the very and eternal God.

But Jerusalem shall not then be only the place whither the tribes of Israel go up, but also the religious metropolis of the world. The conversion and restoration of the Jews to the favour of God, and to the position which he destined them from the beginning, shall be, as St. Paul tells us, Rom. xi. 15, as life from the dead to the rest of the world. When the mountain of the Lord's house is thus exalted "all people shall flow unto it, and many nations shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." It did once go forth more effectually from that holy city, than from any place where God has been pleased to set up his church. Jewish apostles and disciples accomplished, in a few years, more for the evangelization of the heathen, than has ever been effected since by any or all that have succeeded them as ambassadors of Christ. But yet all, that was then done, was but as the first drops of the coming and abundant

shower, when compared with that which is here predicted. The law of the Lord shall go forth again, and all nations shall be converted: "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord even as the waters cover the sea." Jerusalem shall then be in reality what Rome has affected to be, "the mother and the mistress of all churches," and the centre of religious unity to the world.

The pretensions of Rome, and the degree to which those pretensions were acknowledged, were the external manifestation of the inward convictions of the church respecting God's will and purpose; another of those internal presentiments of a blessed futurity. But man was not willing to wait, and Gentiles did not choose to acknowledge that the place of honour was reserved for Jerusalem and the Jews. They endeavoured to fulfil the prophecies themselves, and thus turned a glorious truth into a revolting falsehood, and a stupendous blessing into an awful curse. But God's purposes are not to be defeated by the folly and wickedness of men. The word of prophecy still stands sure, and in due time shall be accomplished. "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills: and the people shall flow unto it."

This is not the only place where we are told that the nations shall go up to worship at Jerusalem. Isaiah, lxvi. 23, says, "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord." Zechariah says (viii. 20), "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go up speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts. I will go also: yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." And, when Jeremiah announces that Jerusalem shall yet be the throne of the Lord, he adds, "And all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart." The church shall then be co-extensive with the world, and the peace of God shall universally prevail. The Divine manifestation of a centre of unity, and the re-instatement of God's ancient people in the place destined for them, and for non other, will take away all cause of dissension, and all possibility of ambitious self-exaltation. All the families of man, so long divided, shall know each other as brethren, sons of God, and members of Christ's church. National animosities shall cease as well as religious difference. "The Lord shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off: and they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

What a contrast, brethren, to the present unhappy condition of mankind, in which the greatest portion of the world is still ignorant of Christ's salvation, and those that are called by the name of Christ are far from living as brethren. The heathen are idolaters, the mass of the Jews blasphemers, and nominal Christians hateful and hating one another. Who is there that does not long for this happy period, and desire to hasten the coming of the day of God? Who is there that does not ask, what are the means, if there be any, whereby the happiness of man and the glory of God can be accelerated? The anxious inquirer will find that the word of God gives but one answer, and points out one only condition upon the fulfilment of which depends the realization of his hopes, and the happiness of the world—and that is the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem to the favour of their God. When the light returns unto Zion, then darkness shall cease to cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; then the heathen shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising.