

The Deliverance of Old Jerusalem

An Awe-Inspiring Fulfilment of Scriptural Prophecy

We make no apology for re-telling, in detail, the story of the deliverance of Jerusalem because what has been described as "the most amazing event of our times" was an awe-inspiring fulfilment of Scriptural prophecy which should have awakened the Church to the imminence of the Second Coming of our Lord. The narrative may also be found useful by those who would WAKE UP their neighbours to the significance of the Age in which we are living.

As a direct result of their persistent and wilful disobedience, the people of the kingdom of Judah had incurred the awful penalty of punishment for "seven times," a period which the late Dr. Grattan Guinness successfully demonstrated was 2,520 (7x360) prophetic "days" or - on the basis of a year-for-a-day reckoning - 2,520 years.

History records that the first captivity took place in 604 B.C. The "seven times" punishment would therefore end in the year A.D. 1917. The prophet Daniel, however, was Divinely inspired to prophesy that Judah would be restored in the year 1335 (DAN 12:12) - a "sealed" prophecy which would not be understood, we are told, until "the time of the end" when knowledge or understanding would be increased (DAN 12:4).

Now, there may have been some mystification about the year in which Jerusalem would cease to be "*trodden down of the Gentiles*" (LK 21:24), but God's servants, the prophets, had revealed some tantalisingly enigmatic information about *how* Jerusalem would be

freed from the grip of its Gentile oppressors. Thus we read:

"As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it."

One should not be surprised by the mysterious symbolism of this prediction because prophecy is not written so that it can be exploited by the opportunist for personal profit. Neither is it intended to tickle the ears of the merely curious or to be used as a kind of almanac. Prophecy is rather like a series of milestones to be looked for and duly noted *when passed*. Even the faithful watchers are not permitted to know the exact period or time when a particular prophecy will be fulfilled; but they are allowed to have sufficient knowledge to enable them to note the portents when things are *about to happen* and immediately to recognise an event as fulfilling its appropriate prophecy.

With the foregoing in mind, we should note that the inspired prophet, Haggai, provided the faithful watchers with the day and month on which Jerusalem would be free of its Gentile oppressors when, twenty-four centuries ago, he wrote:

"And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD... Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month..." HAG 2:15,18

The ninth month in the Hebrew calendar is Kislev - corresponding to part of November-December in the Christian calendar. Because

the Hebrew year is lunisolar the date varies in relation to the Christian solar year - just as Easter does. But, over two thousand years before the event, Haggai pointed to 24th Kislev which, in 1917, fell on the 9th December. (It should be noted that Haggai's prophecy gave the day and the month, *but not the year.*)

To summarise the details revealed by Scriptural prophecy: it was known that, as the "seven times" punishment of Judah would be completed by 1917, the deliverance of Jerusalem could not take place before that year. However, Daniel's prophecy had pointed to the inexplicable, enigmatic date of 1335. What seemed definite was that, whatever the year in which Jerusalem would cease to be trodden down by the Gentiles, the actual date would be 24th Kislev in the Hebrew calendar. The reference to preserving Jerusalem "as birds flying" was inexplicable.

Fulfilment was Significant

It is now a matter of history that Jerusalem was delivered by British and Empire forces under General Sir Edmund Allenby on 9th-11th December, 1917, in circumstances which were, to say the least, unusual but which fulfilled in the most minute detail a number of Scriptural prophecies made more than two thousand years earlier. One cannot study these prophecies in relation to the unusual circumstances in which they were fulfilled without a feeling of awe for the prescience of Almighty God and a sense that the delivery of Jerusalem was intended to convey to God's servant people that the punishment laid on Judah was at an end and that the "Times of the Gentiles" referred to by our Lord was also at an end (See Luke 21:24).

In turning to the details of the prophecy, the first question that arises is: was there an explanation for the reference to the year 1335?

We have been told that this enigma was not cleared up until the day on which British and Empire soldiers had actually occupied Jerusalem. A member of General Allenby's staff went into the street to buy a newspaper and was given, as change, a 10-millimes Egyptian coin engraved in Arabic and English. It then became obvious that the year 1335 in the Mohammadan lunar year was the equivalent of 1917 in the Christian solar year!

"As Birds Flying ..."

This prophecy becomes clear when one realises that the description "As birds flying" was a reference to military aircraft which had been used for the first time and on a large scale in the Great War of 1914-18.

Allenby had under his command five squadrons of "SE5s" and Bristol fighters and there can be no doubt that, in reconnaissance, photography, machine-gunning, and in spotting for artillery, the airmen played a vital part in Allenby's advance from the Nile. As Lord Wavell points out in his book, *'The Palestine Campaigns'* (London: Constable), the enemy airmen had been "almost driven out of the skies."

But to appreciate the uncanny manner in which aircraft fulfilled the prophecy that Jerusalem would be defended and delivered "*as with birds flying*", it should be recalled that Allenby had ordered that there was to be no fighting either in Jerusalem or in its immediate environs. He had almost entirely surrounded the city, but had left the Turks with a way of escape to the north-west with the intention of being able to engage and destroy them at Lifton. The other part of the plan was to coerce or demoralise the enemy into evacuating the city under such pressure that he would have no time to cover his retirement by destroying either roads or buildings.

In this task the 14th (Bomber) Squadron played a decisive part. During the 7th December it flew a number of sorties over Jerusalem at such a low altitude as to convince the Turkish soldiers that its bombs would bring down the stone buildings upon them. The Turks became so thoroughly demoralised that they began to evacuate the city without waiting for orders. By the end of the next day, the city was nearly free of the enemy, but Turkish artillery had been concentrated north and west of Jerusalem. Ammunition was being brought up with the intention of shelling the city when the 14th Bomber Squadron began to destroy the batteries with such accuracy that the gunners fled in panic. Jerusalem was thus saved exactly as Scripture had prophesied that it would be saved: "*As birds flying, so will the LORD of Hosts defend Jerusalem.*"

When we look at the 14th (Bomber) Squadron we are also confronted by circumstances

which were, to say the least, unusual and without precedent. The squadron was formed in 1915 and was sent to Egypt with the objective of co-operating with the Arab columns under King Feisal who were operating in Arabia and Transjordan. Lawrence, it is understood, invited King Feisal to give the squadron a suitable motto. A free translation of the Arabic text, which is thought to have been taken by Feisal from the Koran, is: *"I spread my wings and keep my promise."* But however this unusual motto originated, there can be no doubt that it reflects something unique in warfare: to *protect* an enemy position. That was God's foretold method of protecting Jerusalem and, as the motto of the 14th (Bomber) Squadron reminds us, He kept His promise. In so doing He pointed to a greater deliverance for the servant people to come.

There was another unique aspect of the deliverance of Jerusalem which might almost be described as miraculous. In a struggle which became world-wide and which set new and horrifying records in the destruction of life and property, Jerusalem was the only involved city which, to the joy of its inhabitants, came through the war untouched by shot or shell. In his book, *'How Jerusalem Was Won'*, W. T. Massey relates that women threw flowers into General O'Shea's car when he drove into Jerusalem on the 9th December formally to accept the surrender of the city. Major Gilbert, another eyewitness, tells us that "some of the older people kissed the guns and gun carriages."

The Witness of the Prayer Book

After Jerusalem had been delivered, it was discovered that the date and the manner of deliverance had been marked for more than two centuries in the Lectionary of *'The Book of Common Prayer'* - the fixed Table of Lessons appointed to be read in church on each day of the year.

On the 8th December, the morning lesson was from Isaiah 31, verse 5 of which, already quoted, contained the reference to *"as with birds flying"* - a reference to the decisive part to be played by aircraft. The evening lesson for the same day - Isaiah 32 - contained this verse: *"And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places."* (ISA 32:18).

"A Quiet Habitation"

The morning lesson for the 9th December tells us that: *"...thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed. And ... the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."* (ISA 33:20 & 24).

The morning lesson for the 10th December ends with these words: *"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"* (ISA 35:10). The evening lesson jumps five chapters in order to provide these prophetic words: *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned..."* (ISA 40:1-2).

The lessons for the 11th December are equally significant and just as prophetically accurate, providing the Lord's faithful witnesses with proof irrefutable that Almighty God not only exists, but that He is a Living God and that the Holy Bible is His inspired Word.

On that day, General Allenby *walked* into Jerusalem at the head of the delivering Israelitish troops, not as a great lord, but as a leader of the armies of the servant people - the host! What great significance this act foreshadowed for the coming deliverance of prophetic "Jerusalem", by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

How the "Impossible" Happened

As a footnote to the thrilling story of the deliverance of Jerusalem, we would draw attention to what J. M. Stears discovered when, in the early sixties, he researched the events leading up to the deliverance. He wrote:

"There is a curious fact concerning this event, which emphasises God's overruling power. The Turks had a saying which seems to remind us of the incident recorded in 2.Kings 7:1-18, where the "impossible" happened. In their boast that the sword of Islam should hold sway over the land, they used words to imply the impossibility of overthrowing their dominion, saying: "When the waters of the Nile flow into Palestine, then will a prophet of the Lord come and drive the Turks out of this land," signifying that as surely as it was impossible

for the waters of the Nile to flow across the many miles of desert to Palestine, so was it impossible that men could drive them out.

The "impossible" happened those centuries ago at the gate of Samaria and the "impossible" happened in this case. In order to supply our troops crossing the desert, the waters of the Nile were brought by our engineers through a pipeline, which they laid under the Suez Canal and across the desert, and the "waters of the Nile flowed into Palestine" at a rate of many thousands of gallons a day. Not only so, but the great leader who drove the Turks out was named Allenby which, in its Arabic version, became *Allah-en-Nebi*, or "prophet of God," and by this Arabic name he was known throughout Palestine. So the waters of the Nile did flow into the Holy Land and the leader named "Prophet of God" did drive the Turks out of the land.

The deliverance of Jerusalem was accomplished in forty days (31st October - 9th December), a familiar period in the history of that country. About that time, however, the

situation on the Western Front became so serious that the cream of Allenby's army was brought back to serve in France, so that Allenby had to wait until new reinforcements were trained and organised into an efficient fighting machine. His next advance began on the 18th September, 1918 and, again in forty days, the objective was achieved, the Turks being driven right out of the land. So, exactly to date, the Gentile domination of the Holy Land had ended: the "seven times" (i.e. 2,520 years) punishment had run its course exactly as foretold in the Bible.

Britain did not annex the conquered territory, but administered it under mandate from the League of Nations until the 15th May, 1948, when British forces were withdrawn, British administration having become impossible as the result of terrorist action by Jewish fanatics. In 1949 the Jewish State was recognised by the British Government; it continues to be a disturbing element in the community of nations.

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