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THE TREADING DOWN OF JERUSALEM BY THE GENTILES.

BY THE REV. W. J. L. SHEPPARD, M.A.

AS the very kindly critic of my book, *The Lord's Coming and the World's End*, put it at the close of his review in the *MARCH CHURCHMAN*, what is needed with regard to prophetic interpretation is "discussion without recrimination." It is a happy phrase, and it is in the spirit of that phrase that I write this article.

There is one Text of Scripture which during the last fifteen months has, perhaps, been more quoted than any other in addresses and writings on the question of the near approach of the Lord's Return. That Text is the second half of St. Luke xxi. 24: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Not only is its quotation markedly frequent, but it generally seems to be quoted with a certain assumption of finality, as if the fulfilment of this prophecy at least was beyond dispute, since no one could doubt our Lord's reference to General Allenby's entry into Jerusalem in December, 1917.

I venture to think that this assumption is at least open to question, and that a careful examination of our Lord's words may at any rate disclose some uncertainty as to their fulfilment in the way now very widely understood. I do not say that this interpretation of the words is absolutely wrong; I only contend that it is not so certain as many think it to be. I do not want to dogmatize, but I want to discuss.

There are three outstanding points in our Lord's prophecy which seem to me to have received little or no attention from their interpreters, but which have a vital bearing on the truth of the interpretation now given to His saying. They may be capable of a solution which fits in with that interpretation, but even so they are well worthy of notice.

First:—What is the exact force of the word *πατομένη*, translated "trodden down"? Does it necessarily imply *oppression* by a non-Jewish race, or does it only convey the idea of such a race holding power and authority over the city? Can we get any guidance on this question from the other instances of the use of

the word in the New Testament? The verb *πατέω* is used only in four other passages: St. Luke x. 19; Revelation xi. 2; Revelation xiv. 20; and Revelation xix. 15. In the last two of these passages the word is used literally of treading the winepress, and therefore not being figurative, is so far different in use as to afford no clue. In Revelation xi. 2 the words are obviously a direct repetition of our Lord's prophecy which we are considering, and therefore throw no light on the exact meaning, since what they mean here they will mean there. There remains our Lord's one other use of the word in St. Luke x. 19—"I have given you authority to tread upon (*πατέῖν*) serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy." Can any possible sense of oppression or persecution be read into the word there? Must it not simply imply the possession of the supreme authority and power? Then is it an unjustifiable assumption that such may be the meaning in St. Luke xxi. 24, and that our Lord was foretelling government by another race but not necessarily oppression? In that case the emphasis of the first part of the prophecy would not lie on "trodden down" but on "Gentiles," as indeed the order of the Greek appears to indicate. But if this be so—and this is the important point—the prophecy as yet must remain unfulfilled, for—unless we hold the extraordinary British-Israel theory—the British are Gentiles equally with the Turks, and most certainly General Allenby's victory did not end Gentile *dominion* over Jerusalem, although it may have ended Gentile *oppression*, so that in what is at least a possible—and, to my mind, the probable—sense of our Lord's words, Jerusalem is still "trodden down of the Gentiles."

In view of this it is extremely interesting to read the statement of Mr. Percival Landon, which appeared in the press some weeks ago, to the effect that Zionists do not desire that the Jews shall become the governors of Palestine, but that one of the Great Powers, preferably Britain, shall control the country as mandatory for the League of Nations. He also points out that the Jewish population is at present only about a fifth of the whole inhabitants, whose rights they have no desire to infringe. If this be so, then the removal of Gentile rule is not yet even in sight.

The second point is concerned with the second part of our Lord's saying—"until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." What is the exact meaning of that sentence? What are the "times of the

Gentiles" ? Godet well points out that it cannot possibly mean, as some have declared, the time of Gentile dominion over Jerusalem, since this would make our Lord's prophecy tautological, and almost meaningless, if He only declared that Jerusalem would be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of Gentile dominion ended. Must not the phrase have much the same meaning as " the time of thy visitation " in St. Luke xix. 44, that is, the day of God's offer of mercy and salvation, and so be parallel with the Apostle's teaching in Romans xi., that the fall of the Jews from God's favour brought in the day of salvation for the Gentiles ? Then " the times of the Gentiles " would mean the Gentiles' day of grace and opportunity, that is, the present time in which we live. But in our Lord's prophecy the cessation of the two things He refers to—the down treading of Jerusalem and the times of the Gentiles—are simultaneous ; when the one ends so also ends the other. Yet no one could contend that the day of grace for Gentiles has now closed. If therefore the fulfilments of the two halves of the prophecy are, as they obviously are, coincident, and if it is certain that one has not yet taken place, it seems that we may feel sure that neither has the other. So that, looked at from this point of view, it would also seem that, whatever our Lord meant by the treading down of Jerusalem, it cannot yet have ceased.

Yet a third question remains. Are we quite sure that, in speaking of Jerusalem in His prophecy, our Lord was speaking of the actual city ? It is not like His teaching to ascribe such definite importance to any locality, so that the mere capture or the deliverance of a city should mark the determination of an age-long epoch in God's dealings with mankind. When the Samaritan woman began to discuss the rival merits of Jerusalem and her own locality as places of worship, His reply indicated that Jerusalem was of no more importance as a locality than any other, despite the glories of its past history, and its connection with the chosen race. His words to the woman certainly imply that the attachment of a special sanctity to particular cities or places is of those " rudiments " which marked the Older Dispensation and which have disappeared in the fuller light and higher teaching of the New. The Jerusalem of Palestine is, indeed, and will ever be, a city of historic and sacred memories, but beyond this it would seem, in the view of the New Testament writers, to have no special interest for the Christian ; he

is ever pointed away from the old city to the new Jerusalem, whether we understand by that the Church of Christ on earth, or the eternal heavenly abode, or both. St. Paul himself, Hebrew of Hebrews as he declares himself to be, plainly states that for him, as for all Christ's people, the old Jerusalem is superseded by the new—not the captive city in Palestine but “the Jerusalem that is above” and that “is free” is the Mother City which now claims his and their hearts and hopes. (Gal. iv. 25, 26.) May not our Lord, then, be speaking of Jerusalem here in the same way as in St. Matthew xxiii. 37, where quite certainly it is not the city but the people of whom He speaks, using the name of the capital city as representing the nation itself; it could only be the Jewish *people* who killed the prophets, or who could hail Him with the cry, “Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” just as in St. Luke xix. 42-44, although the actual siege of the city is foretold, yet it still stands for the people, who alone could have known the things that belonged to their peace, or recognized the time of their visitation. If then “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles” refers, not to the condition of the actual city, but to the lot of the whole Jewish race, it is a wonderful description of their history for centuries, scattered among the nations of the earth, entirely under their dominion and in their power. If this be the true interpretation of our Lord's words, then it seems to me to make those words a far more striking and solemn declaration than if He were merely announcing an incident in the history of a now comparatively insignificant city. But if this be the real meaning of the saying, then most certainly the treading down of Jerusalem by the Gentiles is not only being continued still, but there is no indication of its approaching end.

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