

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

ST. LUKE. VOL. II.

LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE XXI. 20–24.

20 And when ye shall *see* Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

21 Then let them which are in Judæa flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

22 For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

23 But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.

24 And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

THE subject of the verses before us is the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans. It was meet and right that this great event, which wound up the Old Testament dispensation, should be specially described by our Lord's mouth. It was fitting that the last days of that holy city, which had been the seat of God's presence for so many centuries, should receive a special notice in the greatest prophecy which was ever delivered to the Church.

We should mark, in this passage, *our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge*. He gives us a fearful picture of the miseries which are coming on Jerusalem. Forty years before the armies of Titus encompassed the city, the dreadful circumstances which would attend the siege are minutely described. The distress of weak and helpless women, the slaughter of myriads of Jews, the final scattering of Israel in captivity among all nations, the treading down of the holy city by the Gentiles for eighteen hundred years,—are things which our Lord narrates with as much particularity as if He saw them with His own eyes.

Foreknowledge like this is a special attribute of God. Of ourselves “we know not what a day may bring forth.” (Prov. xxvii. 1.) To say what will happen to any city or kingdom in forty years from the present time, is far beyond the power of man. The words in Isaiah are very solemn: “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.” (Isa. xlvi. 10.) He who could speak with authority of things to come, as our Lord did in this place, must have been very God as well as very man.

The true Christian should continually keep in mind this perfect knowledge of Christ. Past things, present things, and things to come, are all naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The recollection of the sins of youth may well make us humble; the sense of present weakness may make us anxious; the fear of trials yet to come may make our hearts faint: but it is a strong consolation to think that Christ knows all. For past, present, and future things we may safely trust Him. Nothing can ever happen to us that Christ has not known long ago.

We should mark, secondly, in this passage, *our Lord's words about flight in time of danger*. He says respecting the days preceding the siege of Jerusa-

lem, "Then let them which are in Judæa flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto."

The lesson of these words is very instructive. They teach us plainly that there is nothing cowardly or unworthy of a Christian in endeavouring to escape from danger: there is nothing unbecoming our high vocation in a diligent use of means in order to secure our safety. To meet death patiently and courageously, if it comes on us in the path of God's providence, is a duty incumbent on every believer: but to court death and suffering, and rush needlessly into danger, is the part of the fanatic and enthusiast, not of the wise disciple of Christ. It is those who use all means which God has placed within their reach, who may confidently expect God's protection. There is a wide difference between presumption and faith.

We should mark, thirdly, in this passage, *our Lord's words about vengeance*. He says, with reference to the siege of Jerusalem, "These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

There is something peculiarly awful in this expression. It shows us that the sins of the Jewish nation had been long noted down in the book of God's remembrance. The Jews, by their unbelief and impenitence, had been treasuring up wrath against themselves for many hundred years; the anger of God, like a pent-up river, had been silently accumulating for ages; the fearful tribulation which attended the siege of Jerusalem, would only be the outburst of a thunderstorm which had been gradually gathering since the days of the Kings. It would only be the fall of a sword which had been long hanging over Israel's head.

The lesson of the expression is one which we shall do well to lay to heart. We must never allow ourselves to suppose that the conduct of wicked men or nations is not observed by God. All is seen, and all is known; and a reckoning day will certainly arrive at last. It is a mighty truth of Scripture, that "God requireth that which is past." (Eccles. iii. 15.) In the days of Abraham "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full," and four hundred years passed away before they were punished; yet punishment came at last, when Joshua and the twelve tribes of Israel took possession of Canaan.—God's "sentence against an evil work" is not always executed speedily, but it does not follow that it will not be executed at all. The wicked may flourish for many years "like a green bay-tree," but his latter end will be that his sin will find him out. (Gen. xv. 16. Eccles. viii. 11. Psalm xxxvii. 35.)

We should mark, lastly, in this passage, *our Lord's words about the times of the Gentiles*. We read that He said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

A fixed period is here foretold, during which Jerusalem was to be given over into the hands of Gentile rulers, and the Jews were to have no domin-

ion over their ancient city. A fixed period is likewise foretold which was to be the time of the Gentiles' visitation, the time during which they were to enjoy privileges, and occupy a position something like that of Israel in ancient days.—Both periods are one day to end. Jerusalem is to be once more restored to its ancient inhabitants. The Gentiles, because of their hardness and unbelief, are to be stript of their privileges, and endure the just judgments of God. But the times of the Gentiles are not yet run out. We ourselves are living within them at the present day.

The subject before us is a very affecting one, and ought to raise within us great searchings of heart. While the Nations of Europe are absorbed in political conflicts and worldly business the sands in their hour-glass are ebbing away; while Governments are disputing about secular things, and Parliaments can hardly condescend to find a place for religion in their discussions, their days are numbered in the sight of God. Yet a few years, and the "times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled." Their day of visitation will be past and gone; their misused privileges will be taken away. The judgments of God shall fall on them: they shall be cast aside as vessels in which God has no pleasure; their dominion shall crumble away, and their vaunted institutions shall fall to pieces. The Jews shall be restored. The Lord Jesus shall come again in power and great glory. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and the "times of the Gentiles" shall come to an end.

Happy is he who knows these things, and lives the life of faith in the Son of God! He is the man, and he only, who is ready for the great things coming on the earth, and the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom to which he belongs, is the only kingdom which shall never be destroyed. The King whom he serves, is the only King whose dominion shall never be taken away. (Dan. ii. 41; vii. 14.)

NOTES. LUKE XXI 20–24.

20.—[*When ye shall see, &c.*] From this verse down to the end of the 24th, our Lord's prophecy is entirely confined to the last days of Jerusalem, and the duties of His disciples during that eventful period. Here at all events there is no reference to His second advent, and the last siege of Jerusalem, after its future restoration. The siege by Titus and destruction by the Romans are exclusively the subject under our eyes.

[*Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know.*] The following historical facts are well worthy of notice: they show in a remarkable manner how the words of our Lord in this verse were accomplished. It appears that three years before the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, the Roman army under Cestius Gallus made a sudden attack upon Jerusalem, but most unaccountably and without any apparent reason, withdrew again, although the city might have been taken with ease. The consequence of this attack was that a large number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem took alarm, and withdrew from the city as soon as the Roman army had retired. To use the words of Josephus, they swam away, as from a ship about to sink." Among those who escaped were the Christians, some of them retiring to Pella, and some

to Mount Libanus. The result of this was, that when the last great war, under Vespasian and Titus, broke out shortly afterwards, the Christians almost entirely escaped its desolation.

It seems a high probability that the Christians remembered the very words of our Lord which we are now considering, and that the remembrance of them was the preservation of their lives. They saw in the advance of the Roman army under Cestius Gallus the predicted sign of “desolation drawing nigh.” They at once acted on the advice of their Master, and so escaped the miseries of the final siege.

21.—[*Flee to the mountains, &c.*] Major remarks, “These were the mountains to the north-east of Jerusalem, towards the source of the Jordan, which was in the territories of Agrippa. He continued faithful to the Romans; and hence the Christians avoided the destruction which overspread Judæa.”

22.—[*Days of vengeance...things written fulfilled.*] The “vengeance” spoken of here appears to me to be the righteous retribution of God on the Jewish nation, for all their sins against Him from the time when they first entered Canaan. I cannot confine it to “vengeance” for the sins of the nation during the last few hundred years of their existence after the Babylonish captivity. The words of our Lord in Matt. xxiii. 35, 36, appear to confirm this view.

The “things written” appear to me to include all the heavy judgments foretold in the Old Testament as coming on the Jews, and to begin with the 26th chap. of Leviticus.

23.—[*Woe...them with child, give suck, &c.*] The miseries of women in the siege of Jerusalem are specially foretold in Deut. xxviii. 56.

[*In the land.*] Here, as in many other places in the Gospels, “the land” seems specially to mean the land of Palestine.

24.—[*Fall by edge of sword, &c.*] Josephus records that there perished in the siege of Jerusalem, by sword and by famine, no less than eleven hundred thousand Jews.

[*Led away captive, &c.*] Josephus records that in the course of the war ninety-seven thousand Jews were made captives. Most of them were sent as slaves into Egypt, or dispersed over the provinces of the Roman Empire, to be cast to the wild beasts in the amphitheatres.

[*Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles.*] This expression means that the city of Jerusalem shall be possessed by Gentile nations, and cruelly oppressed as a captive city, until the Jews shall be restored to their own land. How literally and exactly these words have been fulfilled all readers of history know. In spite of all the efforts of the crusaders, Jerusalem has almost always been a city trampled under foot and cruelly oppressed, by Romans, Greeks, Saracens, and Turks, from the time of Titus down to the present day.

[*Until...times of...Gentiles be fulfilled.*] This expression is variously interpreted.

1. Some, with Bishop Pearse, put a vague general meaning on it, and say it signifies “till the Gentiles have done all which God intended them to do.”

2. Some think, with Hammond, that it refers entirely to something already past, and that it was accomplished after the days of Adrian, when a Church composed of Gentiles, Christians, and converted Jews was set up at Jerusalem, and flourished for a short time.

3. Some think, with Whitby and Newcome, that it refers entirely to things to come, and that the time of the Gentiles will be fulfilled when they are all fully converted to Christianity.

4. The true view I believe to be this. The “times of the Gentiles” I regard as the period between the first and second advents of Christ, during which the Gentile nations have a day of visitation and enjoy the privileges of the Gospel.—These times will come to an end at last, as the old Jewish dispensation did, because of the hardness and unbelief of the Gentile Churches. They too, because they continue not in God’s goodness, will be cut off.—And when their time of visitation comes to an end, and they have been found as faithless and hardened as the Jews, then at last will the Jews be converted, and Jerusalem restored to its rightful possessors.

Our own times, be it remembered, are the “times of the Gentiles.” They are times which seem rapidly drawing to an end. When they do end, the conversion of the Jews and the restoration of Jerusalem will take place.