

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

DELIVERED

In the Twentieth Ward Meeting House, on the evening of Sunday, February 7th, 1875.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I WILL read the third paragraph of a revelation that was given in 1834. It commences on page 292 of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.

"But verily I say unto you, I have decreed that your brethren which have been scattered shall return to the land of their inheritances, and build up the waste places of Zion; for after much tribulation, as I have said unto you in a former commandment, cometh the blessing. Behold, this is the blessing which I have promised after your tribulations, and the tribulations of your brethren; your redemption, and the redemption of your brethren, even their restoration to the land of Zion, to be established no more to be thrown down; nevertheless, if they pollute their inheritances, they shall be thrown down, for I will not spare them if they pollute their inheritances. Behold, I say unto you, the redemption of Zion must needs come by power; therefore, I will raise up unto my people a man, who shall lead them like as Moses led the children of Israel, for ye are the children of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham, and ye must needs be led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched out arm; and as your fathers were led at the first, even so shall the redemption of Zion be. Therefore let not your hearts faint, for I say unto you as I said unto your fathers, mine angel shall go up before you, but not my presence; but I say unto you, mine angels shall go before you, and also my presence, and in time ye shall possess the goodly land."

It is many months since I met with the people here in this ward. I recollect when I was here last I partly promised to say something about the redemption of Zion. What I may be able to communicate to you in relation to that great event, regarded as of so much importance by this people, I am unable to say. I may not be able to throw upon the subject any special information more than what you are already in possession of. All that any of us know, and all that we possibly can know in relation to the future is that which God in his mercy reveals. The Lord understands the future as well as the past and the present, and his Spirit understands that which is to come, and the promise is that that Spirit shall be given to us through the prayer of faith, so that we may be able to comprehend in some measure the things of the future. The promise of the Savior to the ancient apostles was, that when the Spirit of truth should come he should guide them into all truth, and show them things to come. That same Spirit, imparted to the servants of God in the 19th century of the Christian era, is just as capable of opening up the future, lighting up the mind of man and showing him events that are to take place, as it was the first year after the crucifixion of Christ, on the day of Pentecost, or in any other former age of the world—it is the same from eternity to eternity, and it is just as needful for us as Latter-day Saints to know the things of God as it was for the former-day Saints to know them. The great and important thing with us is to exercise sufficient faith before the heavens, that God may pour out the spirit of prophecy upon us. The same faith will procure the same blessings, and the spirit of prophecy was considered by the ancient apostles as one of the best gifts, far greater than the gift of tongues or than the gift of interpretation of tongues. It was a spirit that was given for the edification of the Saints of the living God, and the same spirit is promised to all his servants who live faithful before him.

I well recollect, when I was but about nineteen years old—forty-four years last fall—that believing Joseph Smith to be a prophet, and being led by the Spirit, I went a journey of two hundred miles to visit him. I well recollect the feelings of my heart at the time. He inquired of the Lord, and obtained a revelation for your humble servant. He retired into the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in the

house where this church was organized in 1830. John Whitmer acted as his scribe, and I accompanied him into the chamber, for he had told me that it was my privilege to have the word of the Lord; and the Lord in that revelation, which is published here in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, made a promise which to me, when I was in my youth, seemed to be almost too great for a person of as humble origin as myself ever to attain to. After telling in the revelation that the great day of the Lord was at hand and calling upon me to lift up my voice among the people, to call upon them to repent and prepare the way of the Lord, and that the time was near when the heavens should be shaken, when the earth should tremble, when the stars should refuse their shining and when great destructions awaited the wicked, the Lord said to your humble servant—"Lift up your voice and prophesy and it shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost." This was a particular point in the revelation that seemed to me too great for me ever to attain to, and yet there was a positive command that I should do it. I have often reflected upon this revelation, and have oftentimes inquired in my heart—"Have I fulfilled that commandment as I ought to have done? Have I sought as earnestly as I ought to obtain the gift of prophecy so as to fulfill the requirement of heaven?" And I have felt sometimes to condemn myself, because of my slothfulness and because of the little progress that I have made in relation to this great, heavenly and divine gift. I certainly have had no inclination to prophesy to the people unless it should be given to me by the inspiration and power of the Holy Ghost; to prophesy out of my own heart is something perfectly disagreeable to my feelings, even to think of, and hence I have oftentimes, in my public discourses, avoided, when a thing would come before my mind pretty plain, uttering or declaring it for fear that I might get something out before the people in relation to the future that was wrong. But still, notwithstanding all this, there is one thing that I have endeavored to do, and that is, to inform my mind as far as I could by reading what God has revealed to both ancient and modern prophets, in relation to the future, and if I have not had many important prophecies and revelations given directly to myself, I certainly have derived great advantage and great edification from reading and studying that which God has revealed to others; and hence most of my prophesying throughout my life, so far, has been founded upon the revelations given to others.

We are told that Zion—this people, the Latter-day Saints, are called Zion—shall be redeemed and restored to the lands of their inheritances, and in consequence of this promise made to us by the Lord, many of us have felt much anxiety to know when the Lord would fulfill this great revelation, and some perhaps who were little boys and girls when it was given and now gray headed—for it is about forty-two years since—have not considered or reflected much about what God has promised to do with, or what blessings he has promised to bestow upon, this people. In their family prayers they have heard their fathers pray to the Most High to remember Zion and to redeem Zion, and to restore his people to the lands of their inheritances, and perhaps some of them have reflected upon the subject. Some may have thought it was merely a form of prayer which their fathers had learned, without any expectation of anything of the kind taking place, and they have felt careless about it, knowing nothing about whether Zion was ever to be redeemed or not. But those who have reflected upon the subject, and who have made it a matter of prayer and of deep study, in order to know the times and the seasons and the mode in which God would bring to pass this great event, have been full of hope, expectation and desire, and their constant prayer has been, before the family altar and in the public congregations, that the redemption of Zion might be brought about soon.

We are promised that after much tribulation comes the blessing. The Lord says—"I the Lord have decreed a certain decree that my people shall realize, that after their tribulations they shall be redeemed, and restored to the lands of their inheritances." Little did we sup-

pose when we were driven out from Jackson County, the place where God has promised to give his Saints their inheritances, and in the regions round about, that nearly half a century would pass over our heads before we would be restored back again to that land. This long period of tribulation, and the dispersion from our homes and inheritances, have been the cause perhaps of a great many going down to the grave without having the opportunity and privilege of returning to participate in the blessings that were promised. Now, it would be a source of comfort and consolation to those who are still living, to whom this promise was made, if they could be assured in their own minds that they would live here in the flesh to behold that day. But let me say a few words in relation to this. We need not expect, from what God has revealed, that a very great number of those who were then in the church and who were driven, will have the privilege of returning to that land. We need not expect anything of the kind. "Why not?" inquires one. Because the Lord informs us that but a few of those who were then driven out should stand to receive their inheritances. We read this, or indications thereof, in several revelations, the language being something like this—"You shall be persecuted from synagogue to synagogue and from city to city, and but few shall stand to receive their inheritances." Now if a great portion of those who were driven out should live and they should be restored back again, they might afterwards say—"This does not seem to agree with the revelation, here are pretty much all that were driven out." But this will not be the case. When you come to count up, a few years hence, those who were driven forth from that land, you will find that they will be very few indeed; there will, however, be some out of that number, but only a very few. There will be some that will live to behold that day, and will return and receive their inheritances, they and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, according to the promise.

We have a special promise in relation to that land given to us as Latter-day Saints, a promise which I believe I have formerly repeated in this house. It was first given on the 2nd day of January, 1831, at a general conference of pretty much all the Saints who lived in the State of New York, held in the house where the Church was first organized. The revelation was given in their presence, written by a scribe as the sentences fell from the mouth of the prophet Joseph. Among the great things then made known was the following—"I hold forth and deign to give to you greater riches, even a land of promise, a land upon which there shall be no curse when the Lord shall come; and this is my covenant with you, that I will give it unto you and unto your children after you, for an everlasting inheritance; and you shall possess it in time and possess it again in eternity, never more to pass away." If there are any strangers here I will say, for their information, that this is the reason why we call that land a land of promise. And though we have been deprived of it now for upwards of forty years, some of us hold deeds for portions of it which we purchased, paying our moneys to the United States officials, who sold it to us at the government price, but we were not permitted to live upon the lands thus purchased. You may think this rather a curious thing in this great American republic, one of the most liberal governments on the face of the whole earth; but if it is a strange thing it is known as the truth to thousands and tens of thousands that we were dispossessed of our inheritances. The land is still there, but it is occupied by those who do not own it.

Inquires one—"Why were you driven from that land?" I might answer you by repeating the words of our enemies, for they have published their reasons for driving us from our homes. One reason was that we pretended to speak in tongues, which was considered a mortal offence against religionists. This was one accusation that they brought against us, as you will find in their published declarations, in which they pledged their lives, their property and their sacred honor to dispossess us of our homes.

Another accusation was that we professed to heal the sick. What a terrible crime it was for a man to lay his hands on sick persons and

ask the Lord to heal them, and then if the Lord healed the sick they should not be worthy to keep their land, but should be driven from their homes and be deprived of their property!

Another reason was that, besides believing in the gifts of speaking in tongues and healing the sick, we pretended to foretell future events. They did not like that at all. To think that people should believe in that part of the gospel in the 19th century was too much for our enemies, and they said—"We can not have such people in our midst, to corrupt our morals, and to introduce the old fashioned religion that is taught in the New Testament. We have a religion that does away all these things, it does not believe in the order of things that the New Testament sets forth, and you pretend that this New Testament religion is to be enjoyed in our day; our wives and children must not be corrupted by it."

These were the main reasons for driving us, as set forth in their published programme. I did not know, in those days, that it was a crime for the Latter-days to believe in this part of the New Testament; I really thought that, in our country, the constitution guaranteed to us the privilege of believing the whole of the New Testament as well as a part; but it would seem to be otherwise, for forty years have passed away and we are still disfranchised so far as our property is concerned. We have appealed to the United States government to bestow upon us our rights as American citizens. Have they done it? Oh no; they have referred us, however, to those persons who drove us out of the State, supposing that they would have the magnanimity to restore to us our rights. Whoever heard of murderers, robbers and thieves turning round and restoring that to their victims of which they had plundered them? I scarcely ever heard of such an instance; there may be some few instances in history, but they are very rare, in which a person will repent and try to restore fourfold. The United States Government told us that we must appeal to those who had murdered, robbed and driven us from our homes, for the redress we sought. But we have had the revelation of the Lord pretty well fulfilled—"You shall be persecuted from city to city and from synagogue to synagogue, and but few shall stand to receive their inheritances."

We were driven from Jackson County in the State of Missouri in the Fall of the year 1833, and three or four months after that event the revelation was given from which I have read this extract, promising that, after much tribulation, we and our children after us should be restored to the lands of our inheritances.

Have we had much tribulation? Yes. Look at the many times we have been driven since that revelation was given. We were driven out of Clay County, then out of Kirtland, in Geauga County, now called Lake County, Ohio; and after that we were driven from Caldwell County, from Daviess County, Ray County and several other surrounding counties in the State of Missouri, and finally expelled from the State, leaving a great many thousand acres of land for which we hold the deeds to the present day. After that we settled in the state of Illinois, in Nauvoo. We were there but a few years when the Prophet, his brother and several others were killed, and again we were driven, and finally there was a treaty made with this people. Now, whoever heard of one part of the United States making treaties with another part of the United States? Or who ever heard of the people in one part of the country making a treaty with the people in another part? That treaty was in words like this—"You must leave all the States of the Union, you must not stop this side the Rocky Mountains, you must go beyond the Rocky Mountains; if you will do this you may depart in peace, but we will take your houses and lands and occupy them without remuneration, we will not pay you for them; but if you can get away without selling your property and you will agree to go beyond the Rocky Mountains you may have the privilege of going, otherwise we will kill you."

What were the crimes of which we were accused in the various places from which we were expelled? If any of our people had been guilty of breaking the laws it was

in the power of our enemies to bring us before their courts of justice, for in all these places they held all the civil offices in their own hands. But they very well knew that, so far as the laws of the country were concerned, they could not reach this people. Why? Because we were not guilty of the transgression of any of their laws.

When we were driven from Nauvoo there were some unable to leave—poor, feeble and sick; Nauvoo was a kind of a sickly place and a great many people were sick there, and many of the sick, infirm and poor had to be left behind, being unable to leave with the main body of the Saints. We walked over the Mississippi river on the ice and wandered and wallowed about in the snowdrifts of Iowa with our teams and wagons, but these poor people could not get away in time. The mob were very anxious to come in possession of our property, and hence after the main body got out one or two hundred miles from Nauvoo, where there were no inhabitants cut off from all resources, and unable to obtain any information from our poor brethren, the mob was so anxious to get the property of which they had forcibly deprived us, that they attacked the city with cannon and musketry, and finally drove these poor people out and compelled them to cross the river, where a great many of them perished. Were not these tribulations? Yes, and they were all foretold years before they came to pass. "After much tribulation comes the blessing, and this is the blessing which I, the Lord God, have promised unto you; that after your tribulation you shall be redeemed, and be restored again to the lands of your inheritance."

Since our arrival in these mountains we have had a hard time here. We have had a land such as no other people would ever have pretended to occupy. It was once considered the most dreary, desolate, barren place on the face of all North America, a land where it was supposed that no human being could subsist, or in which if he undertook to subsist by the labor of his hands by cultivating the earth, he would perish. But by hard labor and perseverance we have made ourselves comfortable homes in what was formerly a desert, and the Lord has been very favorable to us and really has blessed us far beyond anything we could have anticipated when coming here, and he has caused that the seasons should be very fruitful as a general thing; and this land, which appeared so desolate, barren, parched up and so full of drouth, has become a fruitful land, and the Lord has fulfilled many and many a prophecy recorded in Isaiah and the Psalms of David in relation to making the desert blossom as the rose and making it like the garden of the Lord. It is thus prophesied, and that it has been fulfilled no one can dispute, who will reflect and realize for a moment what the Lord has done since we came here to this land. When the pioneers reached here, in July, 1847, we went out to what is now termed Black Rock, over beyond the first point of the western mountain; we went into the lake to bathe, and we could walk up to that rock, the water being several feet below the dry ground on which we walked to get to it. What do you now behold? Ten feet of water over that ground on which we walked. The Lake, since then, has been continually rising, until ten or twelve feet of water have been added to it. We might naturally have supposed that it would have fallen that much instead of rising. Why? Because the waters, which before then had been continually emptying into the Lake were withheld from it and used to irrigate the soil and evaporated again into the heavens. This, according to natural appearances, would have a tendency to lower the streams; but with all the use of the waters and of the streams for the irrigation of crops, &c., there has been a continual rise in the Lake. We read numerous prophecies referring to the last days, in which it is said that the wilderness should be like the Garden of Eden, and that the desert should be made to blossom as the rose, that it should blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing, and that they should have songs of melody, thanksgiving in the desert, &c. I might quote you numerous chapters in Isaiah and in the Psalms of David relating to this subject, but I have not time, I want to pass along to some other points.