

DISCOURSE

By Elder Orson Pratt, in the Tabernacle
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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I will call the attention of this congregation to a portion of the word of the Lord contained in the first five verses of the 4th Chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah.

"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; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God.

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

"And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

These are the words of the inspired prophet Isaiah, most of which remain to be fulfilled. The first two verses contain a prediction not yet fulfilled: "Comfort ye, my people, saith your God; speak comfortably to Jerusalem, cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Every person who is acquainted with the history of the inhabitants of Jerusalem very well knows that this prediction has never received a fulfillment. In consequence of the wickedness of that people, and the great transgressions that they committed in the sight of Heaven in rejecting the Lord, their true Messiah, great and severe calamities and judgments came upon them, and have continued upon them and their posterity until this age of the world. In other words, all those curses which are pronounced in the Book of Deuteronomy upon the head of Israel have literally been fulfilled during the past eighteen hundred years. I have no need to enter into particulars with regard to that devoted race; but I will state, very briefly, some of the judgments that they have endured.

After the Prophet Isaiah had delivered this prophecy, they suffered severely at the hands of the Babylonians who, about six centuries before Christ, came against the Jews and Jerusalem and destroyed many of their nation and carried the remnant of them into captivity to Babylon where they remained some seventy years. They then returned and rebuilt their city and temple, and were chastened at various times from that period until their Messiah came, in fulfillment of the prophecies and predictions of Isaiah concerning the first advent of the Redeemer. He came, as He, himself, expressed it, to his own, but His own received Him not. They looked upon Him as a base impostor, as a Sabbath-breaker, a gluttonous man and a wine bibber. Instead of being a moral character, in their estimation, he was a friend of publicans and sinners, and associated with them instead of with those who professed to be religious. They persecuted, hated and reviled him; and finally succeeded, in fulfillment of prophecy, in crucifying Him.

Jesus, before He was crucified said unto the Jews: "I say unto you that the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a people who shall bring forth the fruits thereof." As much as to say, "you once enjoyed the fruits of the Kingdom; you once had in your midst inspired men, prophets, great and holy men who spoke as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost; you once enjoyed all the blessings and gifts of the Kingdom of God; in the days of your righteousness you enjoyed these fruits in abundance. But alas! you have departed from the laws of that kingdom; you have forsaken the religion of your fathers; you have turned your hearts away, you have apostatized from the truth, and the fruits that were enjoyed by your fathers no longer exist among you. Your fathers were in possession of all the miraculous fruits and blessings and gifts of the kingdom. They could prophecy and see visions; they could hear the voice of the Lord speaking to them; they could enjoy the power and gift of the Holy Spirit; work miracles in the name of the Lord; heal the sick; cast out devils and perform all those miracles that are recorded in the Old Testament; and these were the fruits of that kingdom which you, the Jewish nation, once enjoyed; but because you have rejected your Messiah, rejected the testimony of the prophets concerning him; rejected the testimony given in the law of Moses, and those great types pointing to the Messiah you, in turn, shall be rejected, the kingdom shall be taken from you, and it shall be given to a nation who shall bring forth the fruits thereof."

Again, Jesus says, before he was crucified, when looking upon Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings but ye would not."

Again, after enumerating their wickedness, pointing out their apostacy and pronouncing a great variety of woes upon them, He finally delivers a prediction of this nature upon the heads of this devoted people: "There shall be great distress in

the land, and wrath upon this people; they shall be destroyed by the edge of the sword; they shall be carried away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled."

This was literally fulfilled upon their heads. Titus, the Roman general laid siege to that city and overcame the Jews, eleven hundred thousand of whom were killed, and ninety-seven thousand taken into captivity, many of the latter being afterwards persecuted and killed by their enemies; thus a poor, miserable remnant were scattered abroad among all the various nations and kingdoms of the earth. Jerusalem, their beloved city, where their temple was built, where the name of the Lord was placed, and from which they had been warned by the mouth of the Prophets, where the voice of inspiration had been heard; where Jesus himself, who spake as never man spake, ministered for many months. That city was delivered up to the Gentiles, and overcome by them; the stones of their beautiful temple were torn down to the very foundation, and the city passed into the hands of the gentiles, and has remained in their possession from that day until the present time, which, I think, is now precisely eighteen centuries, since that people were scattered, and became a hiss and a by-word among all nations. It was said this morning, that they invoked the curse of the Almighty on their heads when they said, at the crucifixion of the Savior, "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children." The Lord took them at their word, and His blood has been answered upon their heads, and upon the heads of their children, and their children's children, until eighteen long centuries have rolled away.

When will the time come for this great curse to be removed from the Jewish nation? When shall it be said that "her iniquity is pardoned, she has received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins?" When shall the message go forth, in the words of our text, "comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God? Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received at the Lord's hand double for her sins." I ask the question; where shall we get the reply? In what way will this comforting message be delivered to the inhabitants of the earth? When shall this glorious cry go forth concerning this persecuted, down-trodden people? When shall Jerusalem be rebuilt in all its beauty and glory by the hand of the people who have been so long scattered among the nations? When shall that beautiful and holy temple be again reared upon its former foundations, and the glory of the Lord be manifested in it? There is such a proclamation to be made manifest, such a message to go forth by Divine authority and power, and to be delivered to the children of men, comforting the inhabitants of Jerusalem and declaring that her warfare is accomplished.

Before this great message for the redemption and salvation of the Jewish nation can ever go forth there is a certain work to be performed on the earth, certain purposes to be fulfilled, and until that is fulfilled and accomplished Jerusalem can never be rebuilt, and the Jews can never return as a nation. A decree has gone forth by the mouth of the Son of God himself, that that city should be in the possession of the gentiles, and that it should be trodden down by them and that the Jews should be scattered among the nations until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled. Who, among all the inhabitants of the earth, can tell us how the Lord will bring about the fulfillment of this prediction in regard to the gentiles? Who is able to declare when the times of the gentiles will be fulfilled? Who knows anything about it, unless it be revealed from Heaven? We might pore over the pages of the Bible, understand many of the prophecies that have been fulfilled and be able to treasure up in our hearts and commit to memory all the predictions of the Prophets, and yet, without new revelation, no person would be able to decide when the times of the gentiles are fulfilled. We might, of course, by carefully searching the prophecies, judge of the particular period or age of the world in which that would take place; but to come to the exact year is out of the power of human wisdom, it can not comprehend it; nothing but new revelation can put us in possession of this important knowledge. In vain may attempts be made, by the organization of societies, for the amelioration of the condition of the Jews; in vain will societies be organized for their restoration to their own land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, until the Lord's time arrive.

It may not be amiss to declare, in a very few words, the belief of the Latter-day Saints, in regard to the fulfilling of the times of the Gentiles; that is what we understand by the fulfilling of their times. We believe, as was said this morning, that before the times of the gentiles can possibly be fulfilled, a proclamation must come from Heaven and be sounded in their ears; namely, that an angel must come from Heaven and bring the everlasting gospel, not for the Jews, the descendants of Israel alone, but for every nation, kindred, tongue and people. Gentiles and Jews, all must hear it, for the prediction is that when the angel comes forth with that message from Heaven, it is to be preached to all nations, kindreds, tongues and people. This, of course, includes gentiles as well as Jews. We cannot, therefore, suppose that the times of the gentiles will be fulfilled until after that event takes place. When the

angel comes, when the servants of God are sent forth by Divine authority, with a proclamation and have fulfilled that prediction by declaring the everlasting gospel to all the nations and kingdoms of the gentiles, then their times will be fulfilled, and not before.

What would be the use of sending the gospel to the Gentiles if their times were fulfilled and there was no hope or chance for them to receive salvation? The very declaration,—that an angel shall come forth with the gospel in the latter days before the destruction of the wicked, and that that gospel is to be preached to gentiles as well as Jews, is proof and evidence to every reflecting mind that believes the Bible that the gentiles will have an opportunity, until that message is delivered and the predictions concerning it is fulfilled. When that is done the law is bound, the testimony is sealed so far as they are concerned.

When the Almighty, in the present century, sent forth an angel from heaven, as we heard this forenoon, and restored the gospel and the authority and power to preach it and administer its ordinances, and organized this Church on the earth, and sent forth His servants to all nations so far as they would open their doors to receive them, they were fulfilling the commands of the Most High given by the angel. We have been forty years, since the angel came, fulfilling that prediction; how many more years the Lord may bear with the nations and kingdoms of the gentiles before they are cut off I do not know. How many more years will pass over our heads that we will have the privilege of declaring the fullness of the everlasting gospel among the nations of the gentiles is not revealed. All that we know on the subject is what the Lord told us some forty years ago, that the times of the gentiles would be fulfilled in the generation in which He established His Church, that is, that before the generation living forty years ago have all passed away the times of the gentiles will be fulfilled. And what then? The prediction of Isaiah, in another place, will be literally fulfilled,—the "law will be bound up and the testimony sealed" so far as sending the gospel to the gentile nations is concerned.

What will be the next work to be performed? The Jews will then come in remembrance before the Lord. That is, the set time for their deliverance and restoration will have come, the period predicted by the mouth of the ancient prophet in which the gospel shall be proclaimed to them. In testimony of this let me refer you to the eleventh chapter of Romans, in which the apostle Paul has touched upon this subject very plainly. We will read a few passages commencing at the thirteenth verse:

"For I speak to you gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the gentiles, I magnify mine office.

"If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them."

Again he says, speaking of Israel:

"And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

"Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root but the root thee."

"Thou wilt say then, the branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

Thus the kingdom was taken from Israel and given to them (the gentiles) and they brought forth the fruits of it.

Says Paul again,

"Well, because of unbelief, they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear;

"For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee,"

A great warning to the Gentiles—the house of Israel,—the branches of the tame olive tree were broken off because they ceased to bring forth the fruits of the kingdom of God. As much as to say: Because they ceased to bring forth the fruit that pertains to the tame olive tree, they were broken off through unbelief, therefore you gentiles, who are now grafted in, being branches of the wild olive tree, take heed and beware lest you fall after the same example of unbelief. If thou standest by faith boast not against the branches, &c.

Paul says:

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness—otherwise thou shalt be cut off."

Now, here is a definite prediction: if ye continue in his goodness, the goodness of God will be extended to you though you are Gentiles, though you are grafted contrary to nature, into the tame olive tree, but if you do not continue in His goodness, if you lose your faith, as the house of Israel lost it; if you cease to bring forth the fruits of the kingdom as they have done, you also shall be cut off. And they also; that is the Jews, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again; but if they were cut out of an olive tree, wild by nature, and were grafted, contrary to nature, into a good olive tree, how much more shall those which be the natural branches, (meaning the scattered Jews) be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the gentiles be come in.

"And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is writ-

ten, There shall come out of Zion a Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

You see, the Lord has a blessing in store for Jacob,—the literal seed of Israel; but we cannot go to them until the gentile fullness has come in, until their times are fulfilled, then all Israel will be saved, by a Deliverer sent out of Zion; in other words, there will be a Zion again on the earth. The earth has been destitute of a Zion for about sixteen centuries. No church of God, no prophets, no inspired apostles, no voice of God from the heavens, no ministration of angels; none of the ancient powers and gifts, all the fruits of the kingdom of God that existed in the first century of the Christian era banished from among the gentile nations, and the cry among them all is "That the power of godliness, as manifested in the first century of the Christian era is no longer necessary." They have a form of godliness without the power thereof. The power then manifested, say they, is not to be enjoyed by the people of our day and age.

Having then lost their faith and ceased to bring forth the fruits of the kingdom, the prediction has gone forth that they also shall be cut off. But when? Not until the Lord sends that angel from heaven with the everlasting gospel, and sends forth His servants by Divine authority to preach that gospel to all the nations and kingdoms of the gentiles. When that has been done it brings condemnation, wherever the sound of it goes and the people reject it. But a few will receive it; a few will gather together and they will build up Zion, and out of that Zion will come a Deliverer who will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

Who will be that Deliverer? Certainly Jesus, when He came eighteen centuries ago did not turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for they then were filling up their cup with iniquity. They have remained in unbelief from that day to this; hence, there did not come a Deliverer out of Zion eighteen centuries ago. But the Zion of the last days, that Zion that is so frequently and so fully spoken of by the ancient prophets, especially by Isaiah, is the church and kingdom of God; and out of that Church or kingdom or Zion, is to come a Deliverer who will turn away ungodliness from Jacob after the times of the gentiles are fulfilled.

Paul further says:

"As concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election they are beloved for the fathers' sakes."

Again he says, in the 30th verse:

"For as ye, in times past, believed not God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these, meaning Israel, 'also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.'"

This shows that the proclamation which goes to Israel must come through the gentile nations, that is, through those whom God may select among the gentiles, that through the mercy and kindness of the gentiles, or those who receive the message in the latter days the house of Israel may be saved.

This is what the Lord has in store for His servants. You young men who sit here on these seats will live to see the times of the Gentiles fulfilled; you will live to see the time when the Lord will give you a direct command from on high, to no more go into the cities of the gentiles to preach unto them, the law having been bound, the testimony sealed; and the mission which you will receive, young men, will be to go to the scattered remnants of the house of Israel among all the nations and kingdoms of the gentiles. To search them out and proclaim to them the message restored by the angel, that it may be preached to Israel as well as to the Gentiles. That is your destiny; that, young men, is what the Lord will require at your hands. We have labored, in the midst of persecution, for forty years past in trying to establish Zion among the gentiles.

Will the gentiles be entirely cut off? Oh no, there will be a great many, even when Israel are gathering who will come along and say "Let us be numbered with Israel, and be made partakers of the same blessings with them; let us enter into the same covenant and be gathered with them and with the people of God." Though the testimony is bound, and though the law is sealed up, yet there will be an opening for you to come in. But you will have to come of your own accord, there will be no message sent to you, no ministration of the servants of God expressly directed to you. When the times of the gentiles are filled, through the mercy of the believing gentiles the house of Israel must obtain mercy; that is, through the messengers that will then go forth and fulfill the first verses of my text,—"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God."

Individuals are now sitting in this Tabernacle who will carry this message. The young among us will go forth to the ends of the earth and declare to the scattered remnants of Israel wherever found, the comforting words that "The times of the gentiles are fulfilled, that the day is come for the covenant which God made with the ancient fathers of Israel to be fulfilled;" and you will have the pleasure of gathering them up, by thousands, tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands, from the islands of the sea and from all quarters of the earth; for that will be a day of power far more than it is while the gospel continues among the gentiles.

"But, enquires one, 'have you any testimony from the scriptures, to prove that that will be a day of power?' Hear what the Lord says by the mouth of the Psalm-