

THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM IN PROPHECY AND FULFILLMENT

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*A Study of the Scope of
"Spiritualization" in Scripture*

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WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

The Future of the Kingdom in Prophecy and Fulfillment
A Study of the Scope of "Spiritualization" in Scripture
By Wyngaarden, Martin J.
ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-029-0
Publication date 1/13/2011
Previously published by Baker Book House, 1955

In appreciation of my early teachers

Geerhardus Vos and R. D. Wilson

J. A. Montgomery and A. T. Glay

PREFACE

Much interest is displayed in prophecies and their fulfillment. But their study gives rise to a leading question. Which prophecies must be understood literally and which spiritually?

In other words, what is the scope, the realm, the sphere of spiritualization in the Scriptures, as evidenced by the Word of God? This is the main problem here under consideration, especially in chapters I, VIII and X.

Chapter I is reprinted from *The Banner* by permission. Various requests followed its publication, for a continuation of the discussion. Here then is the continuation, with materials that had been gradually developed in certain courses, as the background for the interpretation of the preaching of the prophets.

To the literature on the subject, the writer is deeply indebted, though his greatest obligation is to the concordances and lexicons, in order that the Biblical evidence, itself, might be explored and adduced.

For relatively few works were found that treat the *scope* of the kind of prophecy that is spiritually interpreted, by the Scriptures,—in contrast with the *scope* of the many literally fulfilled prophecies.

The present attempt to search out the Biblical evidence that may be adduced, in connection with this problem, may, therefore, hopefully, be of use. This evidence is presented especially in chapter VIII, and discussed in chapter X.

Some consideration is also given to the predicted Jewish return to the ancient Holy Land,—after the exile, not only. But attention is also given to the growing Jewish colonies in Palestine, today, some of which were visited, by the author, in 1931; and some inquiry is made into the related theme of a possible literal fulfillment of prophecy, in connection with the Jewish return to Palestine, in our times.

Some of the esteemed readers may possibly recall that it was the writer's privilege to read the substance of chapters VII, VIII and X, before The Chicago Society of Biblical Research, on different occasions; and part of chapter V before The American Oriental Society.

This little book is humbly inscribed in appreciation of some of his early teachers and guides, two still living. Guides to Biblical research they were, all.

But the writer's greatest debt he owes to that most modest of scholars, Dr. Geerhardus Vos, formerly professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton, whose courses were an incentive for the present work. During a number of years, that incentive has accumulated, as its fruit, the present contribution, on the eschatology of the theocracy,—the future of the typical Kingdom of God.

Evidence is adduced for the spiritualization of the entire typical kingdom, including the vital elements Israel, Zion, and the Promised Land,—fundamental either to the millennium or to our final glory.

May this Biblical evidence contribute, therefore, to illumine Israel's significance, in connection with Christ's Church.

But may these studies be used, chiefly, to magnify the glorified Christ, the Righteous Servant to Jehovah—Isaiah 53:11.

Finally, this little work is sent forth with the prayer that it may prove valuable in interpreting the Biblical approach to Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost; and useful in understanding the predictive approach to Christ's Second Coming,—according to the glorious prophecies of our covenant God.

Calvin Seminary,
Grand Rapids, Mich.
February 20, 1934.

M. J. W.

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CHAPTER I

WONDERS OF JEHOVAH'S PROPHECY

Were Any Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled Literally?

Few things can so stimulate one's faith in the revelation of God, as the fulfillments of prophecy. Here we have, first of all, those fulfilled in Christ's ministry, in his sacrifice and resurrection.

But there are also many others fulfilled in the history of great cities and mighty nations, in a most remarkable manner. The fulfillments are so precise, unmistakable, important, and far-reaching as to recall the words of Isaiah, addressed to those inclined to reject Jehovah's predictions: "Produce your cause, saith Jehovah; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring forth, and declare unto us what shall happen: declare ye the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or show us things to come" (Isa. 41: 21, 22).

To "know the latter end" of Israel and its neighbors means to know their future, their eschatology. For eschatology deals with that group of predictions that tells of things seen by the prophets on the distant future, prophetic horizon. Anything, therefore, that has to do with the latter days, or the day of Jehovah, or the latter end of things is eschatological, from the Old Testament point of view, irrespective of the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy.

And then we find many¹⁾ literal fulfillments of prophecy, in connection with Israel, as the theocratic nation, and in connection with the surrounding nations referred to by the prophets serving under the theocracy, — the Old Testament kingdom of Jehovah.

Now the very remarkable thing is that those fulfillments are so exceedingly literal. The problem of interpretation thus raised is one of great interest, with a view toward attempting to discover the sphere in which the spiritualization of prophecies takes place.

THE MIGHTY TYRE: PREDICTED TO BE DESTROYED

1. *The Prophecy:*

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold I am against thee, O Tyre, and they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her a bare rock. She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea And they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the waters Thou shalt be built no more: for I Jehovah have spoken it, saith the Lord Jehovah” (Ezek. 26:3, 4, 5, 12, 14)²⁾.

2. *The Fulfillment:*

Tyre was one of the foremost neighboring cities, at the time of the theocratic government of God's covenant people. It was one of the great cities of the

1) cf. A summary of them on page 26.

2) All Biblical quotations in this book are from the American Revised Version, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, and copyrighted 1929, by the International Council of Religious Education.

ancient world that stood opposed to the theocratic, holy nation. A very strategic position marked its location on the Mediterranean, so that its inhabitants became the foremost mariners, merchants, and explorers of antiquity. Though the Phoenicians aided Solomon in the building of the temple, they became a snare to Israel, on account of their Baal worship.

The particular form of the judgment on this city is given by Ezekiel. It is so specific that no one today would be safe in hazarding a prophecy as detailed concerning any city. The end of this city is foretold in a most circumstantial fashion. How was it fulfilled?

Tyre was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and her walls and towers broken down. But the riches of the city did not fall into his hands, in any great measure. These the rulers of Tyre had transported to an island approximately a mile out into the sea. Nebuchadnezzar left the city in ruins, according to the prophecy. For it read, "They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers."

But the rest of the prophecy was not yet fulfilled. Nor did it seem at all likely that anyone would undertake to cast her stones into the sea, her timber and dust into the water. Yet there was the prophecy.

For two hundred and forty years, the faith of God's people had to wait, after the siege by Nebuchadnezzar, for the further fulfillment of the prophecy. It seemed utterly incredible that this would take place.

But Alexander the Great, with his swift phalanxes, became the instrument of Jehovah, on the

sandy shores of Old Tyre. A New Tyre on the nearby island refused his summons to open its gates to him. Its hardy mariners felt secure on their island citadel.

Meanwhile, Alexander the Great undertook the well nigh impossible and built a causeway to the island, using the stones of the Old Tyre, its timbers and its dust, in the mounds of the ruins left by Nebuchadnezzar. Accomplishing the prophecy, he cast these materials into the waters. Thus he built the roadway that enabled him to capture the city. God's Word was fulfilled.¹⁾

Today, after a period of over twenty-five hundred years, one may study the prophecy and visit Old Tyre to find it truly a place for the spreading of nets, for it is marked by nothing but sea-sand and an occasional piece of rock that looks like the ancient building stones so much in evidence at the excavated cities of Palestine.

Here then is a prophecy pointing forward to the far distant prophetic horizon of Ezekiel. But we see its fulfillment as before our eyes. It persuades us of the inspired, supernatural character of the Word of God, with a renewed joy of certainty.

And this instance brings home to us the problem whether not all prophecies must be fulfilled with the same literalness. It causes one to appreciate the evidence that can be adduced for spiritualization. We come to ask: *What must be spiritualized and what not?* But that question will have to wait, while we consider other instances.

1) For the historical matters of this chapter, see G. T. B. Davis, *Fulfilled Prophecies That Prove the Bible*, 1931; J. Urquhart, *The Wonders of Prophecy*, 1925; A. Keith, *De Stipte en Letterlijke Vervulling der Bijbelsche Profetiën*, 1865.

Concerning Sources: That there are literal fulfillments is considered as granted by the Premillenarians. What remains to be proved is that there

SIDON ABIDING: THE PREDICTED BLOODSHED

1. *The Prophecy:*

"Behold, I am against thee, O Sidon For I will send pestilence into her, and blood into her streets; and the wounded shall fall in the midst of her, with the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ezek. 28:22, 23).

2. *The Fulfillment:*

The prophecy of Tyre could not be exchanged with that of Sidon, because of its very precise character. Nor could the fulfillments of these two prophecies be interchanged. For they form a most remarkable contrast.

The cities themselves sustained well-nigh the same relationship to the theocratic kingdom. In fact, Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. The city of Sidon became one of the greatest dangers for the northern Israelitish tribes, because of its idolatry.

On the prophetic horizon, Ezekiel sees much bloodshed in this city. Her wounded shall fall in the midst of her, by the sword on every side. But no doom of extinction is pronounced upon Sidon as upon her daughter and leader, Tyre.

The prophesied judgments, however, are abundantly confirmed by the checkered history of the

are spiritualizations and spiritual fulfillments and their scope in Scripture. Accordingly, this first chapter, dealing with literal fulfillments depends upon the recognized, historical, secondary sources, investigated and quoted at length by Urquhart. At the same time, the writer has made grateful use of Davis' presentation, to whom indebtedness is also acknowledged here. However, the writer's Biblical discussions, where not historical, have been developed directly from the primary source, — Scripture itself. (For Bibliographical Note see end of book.)

city. About 35 B. C., Sidon revolted against the Persians and was besieged by this people. "When all hope of saving their city was gone, 40,000 citizens chose to die rather than submit to Persian vengeance. They shut themselves up with their wives and children, set fire to their dwellings and perished amid the flames."

But this tragic event did not end the doom of suffering. More judgments were to follow. Thrice it fell into the hands of the crusaders and each time it was recaptured by the Moslems. One reads the prophecy of the sword upon her on every side, with a new interest.

Even in modern times, old Sidon marks the site of many conflicts between the Druses and the Turks and between the Turks and the French. In 1840, the city was bombarded by the combined fleets of England, France, and Turkey.

As the prophecy had not forecast the destruction of the city, so too history has not seen its destruction; but the foretold bloodshed corresponds with events in a truly remarkable fashion.

Should anyone be inclined to think that prophecy is of such a general type as to fit any fulfillment, let him but interchange the prophecies of Tyre and Sidon and then compare their histories. No human eye could have looked down the march of the centuries to foretell that old Tyre would be cast into the sea, in distinction from Sidon. Here again we may conclude with the words of our Lord, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Thus Jehovah is glorified in the fulfillment of His Word.

And the problem of the literal fulfillment of prophecy again is shown to have its complexities.

Where must we expect literal fulfillment and where does the element of spiritualization enter in? The proper sphere of spiritualization is no doubt an interesting problem, to be considered in later chapters. However, let us first look at a few more instances of literal fulfillment.

JUDGMENTS FORECAST FOR SAMARIA

1. *The Prophecy:*

"Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as places for planting vineyards; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will uncover the foundations thereof" (Micah 1:6).

2. *The Fulfillment:*

Samaria, instead of Tirzah, was chosen by Omri, to be the capital of Israel, the northern kingdom. He began the building of the royal palace on the oval hill, that descends to the surrounding plain on all sides, before the land again slopes up to the nearby hills. These hills are so distant that no ancient means of war could shoot from them into the city.

Here Ahab "did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all that were before him," I Kings 16:30. Here Elijah announced the judgments of the Lord. Here both the wicked king and his infamous wife, Jezebel, came to their end, according to the word of the prophet.

Here the prophets of the Lord were persecuted and the evil worship of the golden calves aggravated by that of the Baals.

Today the foundations of the palaces of Omri, Ahab and Jeroboam II, as they stood adjoining one another, are uncovered, according to the prophecy. Vegetation grows on the hill-sides of old Samaria. The stones of the palaces have been thrown down and many of them have found their way to the valley below.

Many similar, remarkable prophecies with respect to other cities and Bible lands, have received *literal* fulfillments.

But that of Zion creates a *problem* all its own. Let us consider it next.

ZION TO BE PLOWED AS A FIELD

1. *The Prophecy:*

"Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field" (Micah 3:12).

2. *The Fulfillment:*

Jerusalem, the most revered city of the world, was built on hills. Zion, the southeast hill, marked the old Jebusite fortress that afterward became the city of David and that was most densely populated, even in the days of our Lord. Moriah constituted the northeast height of the city and on it stood the temple and many royal buildings including the palace of Solomon and the traditional judgment hall of Pilate. The western hill also gradually became a part of the city as early as Solomon; and in our Lord's days it included the palaces of the Herods on the western wall. This wall was left, with the Herodian palaces, by the Romans, to show posterity what kind of a city it had been. We were privileged to see it in 1931. It is

still there today, and evidently includes in part the wall that was rebuilt by Nehemiah.

For, before the exile, the Babylonians "broke down the walls of Jerusalem round about" (II Kings 25:10).

The rebuilt city, destroyed by the Romans, after having passed through many subsequent vicissitudes, saw much of its old wall restored in 1542 by Suleiman the Magnificent. But his architect did not restore the ancient wall around the old city of David, on the southeast hill of Zion. A large part of this hill, therefore, lies outside of the present city wall, though a portion of the ancient wall of David has been identified upon it.

The prophecy foretold that Zion would be plowed as a field. Even in the days of our Lord, it did not seem probable that this prophecy would ever be fulfilled, for Zion then marked one of the most populous parts of the city.

But there was shown to us the hill, outside of the walls — a collection of gardens, and plowed from year to year, as a field. Thomson, in *The Land and the Book*,¹⁾ tells of the hill being decked with fields of ripe grain. No other part of Jerusalem is under cultivation, in that manner today. No other part of Jerusalem has a similar recorded history. But the prophecy of Micah has been literally fulfilled, improbable as it once seemed to be, with reference the once holy hill of Zion.

How about other prophecies, with respect to the Holy City? Must they all be taken literally, or is there a sphere for spiritualization, and if so, of what

1) Vol. I, page 540.

perspective does Zion then form a part? We find that there is a future of the kingdom, an eschatology of the theocracy, whose perspective leads on into the Church, by way of the spiritualization of all its elements as they fit into that perspective. Thus we see that Zion is spiritualized by the Scriptures, to fit into that perspective.

Meanwhile, the old hill of Zion has its own specific history. This history too becomes the theme of prophecy. Thus Zion should be plowed as a field, according to the Word of God unto Micah.

Of course, such literal fulfillments are not only a wonderful testimony to the truth of Holy Writ.

But the temptation lies at hand to conclude that all fulfillments must be equally literal, without testing such a conclusion by the Scriptures themselves.

In fact the position is sometimes taken that no other type of fulfillment can be considered than the literal. *But when we institute an investigation into the prophecies concerning the theocratic kingdom, in order to see inductively what kind of a perspective the Scriptures provide, we find every phase of this kingdom spiritualized in the Scriptures themselves.*

Space does not permit the inclusion of that evidence now, later chapters being concerned with that.

But the spiritualized kingdom of prophecy comes to be the glorious Church of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Are you, as a member of that church, even now, in some measure, glorifying your Saviour, according to the predictions? *Soli Deo Gloria.*¹⁾

1) Chapter I was published, as an article, in "The Banner" of Feb. 24, 1933, and is here used by special permission of "The Banner."