



***MICHAEL
RUSSELL***

***PALESTINE, OR,
THE HOLY LAND: FROM
THE EARLIEST PERIOD
TO THE PRESENT TIME***

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BY THE REV. MICHAEL RUSSELL, LL.D.

PREFACE.

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In giving an account of the Holy Land, an author, upon examining his materials, finds himself presented with the choice either of simple history on the one hand, or of mere local description on the other; and the character of his book is of course determined by, the selection which he makes of the first or the second of these departments. The volumes on Palestine hitherto laid before the public will accordingly be found to contain either a bare abridgment of the annals of the Jewish people, or a topographical delineation of the country, the cities, and the towns which they inhabited, from the date of the conquest under Joshua, down to the period of their dispersion by Titus and Adrian. Several able works have recently appeared on each of these subjects, and have been, almost without exception, rewarded with the popularity which is seldom refused to learning, and eloquence. But it occurred to the writer of the following pages, that the expectations of the general reader would be more fully answered were the two plans to be united, and the constitution, the antiquities, the religion, the literature, and even the statistics of, the Hebrews combined with the

narrative of their rise and fall in the sacred land bestowed upon their fathers.

In following out this scheme, he has made it his study to leave no source of information unexplored which might supply the means of illustrating the political condition of the Twelve Tribes immediately after they settled on the banks of the Jordan. The principles which entered into the constitution of their commonwealth are extremely interesting, both as they afford a fine example of the progress of society in one of its earliest stages, when the migratory shepherd gradually assumes the habits of the agriculturalist; and also as they confirm the results of experience, in other cases, in regard to the change which usually follows in the form of civil government, and in the concentration of power in the hands of an individual.

The chapter on the Literature and Religion of the Ancient Hebrews cannot boast of a great variety of materials, because what of the subject is not known to the youngest reader of the Bible must be sought for, in the writings of Rabbinical authors, who have unfortunately directed the largest share of their attention to the minutest parts of their Law, and expended the labour of elucidation on those points which are least interesting to the rest of the world. It is to be deeply regretted, that so little is known respecting the Schools of the Prophets—those seminaries which sent forth, not only the ordinary ministers of the Temple and the Synagogue, but also that more distinguished order of men who were employed as instruments for revealing the future intentions of Providence. But the Author hesitates not to say, that he has availed himself of all the materials which

the research of modern times has brought to light, while he has carefully rejected all such speculations or conjectures as might gratify the curiosity of learning without tending to edify the youthful mind. The account which is given of the Feasts and Fasts of the Jews, both before and after the Babylonian Captivity, will, it is hoped, prove useful to the reader, more especially by pointing out to him appropriate subjects of reflection while perusing the Sacred Records.

The history of Palestine, prior to the Fall of Jerusalem, rests upon the authority of the inspired writers, or of those annalists, such as Josephus and Tacitus, who flourished at the period of the events which they describe. The narrative, which brings down the fortunes of that remarkable country to the present day, is much more various both in its subject and references; more especially where it embraces the exploits of the Crusaders, those renowned devotees of religion, romance, and chivalry. The reader will find in a narrow compass the substance of the extensive works of Fuller, Wilken, Michaud, and Mills. In the more modern part of this historical outline, in which the affairs of Palestine are intimately connected with those of Egypt, it was thought unnecessary to repeat facts mentioned at some length in the volume already published on the latter country.[1]

The topographical description of the holy Land is drawn from the works of the long series of travellers and pilgrims, who, since the time of the faithful Doubdan, have visited the interesting scenes where the Christian Faith had its origin and completion. On this subject Maundrell is still a principal authority; for, while we have the best reason to believe that he recorded nothing but what he saw, we can trust implicitly

to the accuracy of his details in describing every thing which fell under his observation. The same high character is due to Pococke and Sandys, writers whose simplicity of style and thought afford a voucher for the truth of their narratives. Nor are Thevenot, Paul Lucas, and Careri, though less frequently consulted, at all unworthy of confidence as depositaries of historical fact. In more modern times we meet with equal fidelity, recommended by an exalted tone of feeling, in the volumes of Chateaubriand and Dr. Richardson. Clarke, Burckhardt, Buckingham, Legh, Henniker, Jowett, Light, Macworth, Irby and Mangles, Carne, and Wilson, have not only contributed valuable materials, but also lent the aid of their names to correct or to conform the statements of some of the more apocryphal among their predecessors.

The chapter on Natural History has no pretensions to scientific arrangement or technical precision in its delineations. On the contrary, it is calculated solely for the common reader, who would soon be disgusted with the formal notation of the botanist, and could not understand the learned terms in which the student of zoology too often finds the knowledge of animal nature concealed. Its main object is to illustrate the Scriptures, by giving an account of the quadrupeds, birds, serpents, plants, and fruits which are mentioned from time to time by the inspired writers of either Testament.

Edinburgh, *September*, 1831.

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CHAPTER I.

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The country to which the name of Palestine is given by moderns is that portion of the Turkish empire in Asia which is comprehended within the 31st and 34th degrees north latitude, and extends from the Mediterranean to the Syrian Desert, eastward of the river Jordan and the Dead Sea. Whether viewed as the source of our religions faith; or as the most ancient fountain of our historical knowledge, this singular spot of earth has at all times been regarded with

feelings of the deepest interest and curiosity. Inhabited for many ages by a people entitled above all others to the distinction of peculiar, it presents a record of events such as have not come to pass in any other land, monuments of a belief denied to all other nations, hopes not elsewhere cherished, but which, nevertheless, are connected with the destiny of the whole human race, and stretch forward to the consummation of all terrestrial things.

To the eye of mere philosophy nothing can appear more striking than the events produced upon the world at large by the opinions and events which originated among the Jewish people. A pastoral family, neither so numerous, so warlike, nor so well instructed in the arts of civilized life as many others in the same quarter of the globe, gradually increased into a powerful community, became distinguished by a system of doctrines and usages different from those of all the surrounding tribes; retaining it, too, amid the numerous changes of fortune to which they were subjected, and finally impressing its leading principles upon the most enlightened nations of Asia and of Europe. At a remote era Abraham crosses the Euphrates, a solitary traveller, not knowing whither he went, but obeying a divine voice, which called him from among idolaters to become the father of a new people and of a purer faith, at a distance from his native country. His grandson Jacob, a "Syrian ready to perish," goes down into Egypt with a few individuals, where his descendants, although evil entreated and afflicted, became a "nation, great, mighty, and populous," and whence they were delivered by the special interposition of Heaven. In prosperity and adversity they are still the objects

of the same vigilant Providence which reserved them for a great purpose to be accomplished in the latter days; while the Israelites themselves, as if conscious that their election was to be crowned with momentous results, still kept their thoughts fixed on Palestine, as the theatre of their glory, not less than as the possession of their tribes.

We accordingly see them at one period in bondage, the victims of a relentless tyranny, and menaced with complete extirpation; but the hope of enjoying the land promised to their fathers never ceased to animate their hearts, for they trusted that God would surely visit them in the house of their affliction, and, in his appointed time, carry them into the inheritance of peace and rest. At a later epoch we behold them swept away as captives by the hands of idolaters, who used all the motives which spring from fear and from interest to secure their compliance with a foreign worship; but rejecting all such inducements, they still continued a separate people, steadily resisting the operation of those causes which, in almost every other instance, have been found sufficient to melt down a vanquished horde into the population and habits of their masters. At length they appear as the instruments of a dispensation which embraces the dearest interests of all the sons of Adam; and which, in happier circumstances than ever fell to their own lot, has already modified and greatly exalted the character, the institutions, and the prospects of the most improved portion of mankind in both hemispheres of the globe.

Connected with Christianity, indeed, the history of the Hebrews rises before the reflecting mind in a very singular

point of view; for, in opposition to their own wishes they laid the foundations of a religion which has not only superseded their peculiar rites, but is rapidly advancing towards that universal acceptance which they were wont to anticipate in favour of their own ancient law. In spite of themselves they have acted as the little leaven which was destined to leaven the whole lump; and in performing this office, they have proceeded with nearly the same absence of intention and consciousness as the latent principle of fermentation to which the metaphor bears allusion. They aimed at one thing, and have accomplished another; but while we compare the means with the ends; whether in their physical or moral relations, it must be admitted that we therein examine one of the most remarkable events recorded in the annals of the human race.

Abstracting his thoughts from all the considerations of supernatural agency which are suggested by the inspired narrative, a candid man will nevertheless feel himself compelled to acknowledge that the course of events which constitutes the history of ancient Palestine has no parallel in any other part of the world. Fixing his eyes on the small district of Judea, he calls to mind that eighteen hundred years ago there dwelt in that little region a singular and rather retired people, who, however, differed from the rest of mankind in the very important circumstance of not being idolaters. He looks around upon every other country of the earth, where he discovers superstitions of the most hateful and degrading kind, darkening all the prospects of the human being, and corrupting his moral nature in its very source. He observes that some of these nations are far

advanced in many intellectual accomplishments, yet, being unable to shake off the tremendous load of error by which they are pressed down, are extremely irregular and capricious, both in the management of their reason and in the application of their affections. He learns, moreover, that this little spot called Palestine is despised and scorned by those proud kingdoms, whose wise men would not for a moment allow themselves to imagine, that any speculation or tenet arising from so ignoble a quarter could have the slightest influence upon their belief, or affect, in the most minute degree, the general character of their social condition.

But, behold, while he yet muses over this interesting scene, a Teacher springs up from among the lower orders of the Hebrew people,—himself not less contemned by his countrymen than they were by the warlike Romans and the Philosophic Greeks,—whose doctrines, notwithstanding, continue to gain ground on every hand, till at last the proud monuments of pagan superstition, consecrated by the worship of a thousand years, and supported by the authority of the most powerful monarchies in the world, fall one after another at the approach of his disciples, and before the prevailing efficacy of the new faith. A little stone becomes a mountain, and fills the whole earth. Judea swells in its dimensions till it covers half the globe, carrying captivity captive, not by force of arms, but by the progress of opinion and the power of truth, all the nations of Europe in successive ages,—Greek, Roman, Barbarian,—glory in the name of the humble Galilean; armies, greater than those which Persia in the pride of her ambition led forth to

conquest, are seen swarming into Asia, with the sole view of getting possession of his sepulchre; while the East and the West combine to adorn with their treasures the stable in which he was born, and the sacred mount on which he surrendered his precious life.[2]

On these grounds, there is presented to the historian and politician a problem of the most interesting nature, and which is not to be solved by any reference to the ordinary principles whence mankind are induced to act or to suffer. The effects, too, produced on society, exceed all calculation. It is in vain that we attempt to compare them to those more common revolutions which have changed for a time the face of nations, or given a new dynasty to ancient empires. The impression made by such events soon passes away: the troubled surface quickly resumes its equilibrium, and displays its wonted tranquility; and hence we may assert, that the present condition of the world is not much different from what it would have been, though Alexander had never been born and Julius Caesar had died in his cradle. But the occurrences that enter into the history of Palestine possess an influence on human affairs which has no other limits than the existence of the species, and which will be everywhere more deeply felt in proportion as society advances in knowledge and refinement. The greatest nations upon earth trace their happiness and civilization to its benign principles and lofty sanctions. Science, freedom, and security, attend its progress among all conditions of men; raising the low, befriending the unfortunate, giving strength to the arm of law, and breaking the rod of the oppressor.

Nor is the subject of less interest to the pious Christian, who confines his thoughts to the momentous facts which illustrate the early annals of his religion. His affections are bound to Palestine by the strongest associations; and every portion of its varied territory, its mountains, its lakes, and even its deserts are consecrated in his eyes as the scene of some mighty occurrence. His fancy clothes with qualities almost celestial that holy land,

Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,
Which eighteen hundred years ago were nailed
For our advantage to the bitter cross.[3]

In a former age, when devotional feelings were wont to assume a more poetical form than suits the taste of the present times, an undue importance, perhaps, was placed on the mere localities of Judea, viewed as the theatre on which the great events of Christianity were realized, and more especially on those relics which were considered as identifying particular spots, honoured by the sufferings or triumph of its Divine author. The zealous pilgrim, who had travelled many thousand miles amid the most appalling dangers, required a solace to his faith in the contemplation of the cross, or in being permitted to kiss the threshold of the tomb in which the body of his Redeemer was laid. To such a character no description could be too minute, no details could be too particular. Forgetful of the ravages inflicted on Jerusalem by the hand of the Romans, and by the more furious anger of her own children within her,—fulfilling unintentionally that tremendous doom which was pronounced from the Mount of Olives,—the simple worshipper expected to see the hall of judgment, the house

of Pilate, and the palace of the high-priest, and to be able to trace through the streets and lanes of the holy city the path which led his Saviour to Calvary. This natural desire to awaken piety through the medium of the senses, and to banish all unbelief by touching with the hand, and seeing with the eye, the memorials of the crucifixion, has, there is reason to apprehend, been sometimes abused by fraud as well as by ignorance.

But it is nevertheless worthy of remark, that from the very situation of Jerusalem, so well defined by natural limits which it cannot have passed, there is less difficulty in determining places with a certain degree of precision than would be experienced in any other ancient town. Nor can it be justly questioned, that the primitive Christians marked with peculiar care the principal localities distinguished by the deeds or by the afflictions of their Divine Master. It is natural to suppose, as M. Chateaubriand well observes, that the apostles and relatives of our Saviour, who composed his first church upon earth, were perfectly acquainted with all the circumstances attending his life, his ministry, and his death; and as Golgotha and the Mount of Olives were not enclosed within the walls of the city, they would encounter less restraint in performing their devotions to the places which were sanctified by his more frequent presence and miracles. Besides, the knowledge of these scenes was soon extended to a very wide circle. The triumph of Pentecost increased vastly the number of believers; and hence a regular congregation appears to have been formed in Jerusalem before the expiry of the third year from that memorable epoch. If it be admitted that the early Christians

were allowed to erect monuments to their religious worship, or even to select houses for their periodical assemblies, the probability will not be questioned that they fixed upon those interesting spots which had been distinguished by the wonders of their faith.

At the commencement of the troubles in Judea, during the reign of Vespasian, the Christians of Jerusalem withdrew to Pella, and as soon as their metropolis was demolished they returned to dwell among its ruins. In the space of a few months they could not have forgotten the position of their sanctuaries, which, generally speaking, being situated outside the walls, could not have suffered so much from the siege as the more lofty edifices within. That the holy places were known to all men in the time of Adrian is demonstrated by an undeniable fact. This emperor, when he rebuilt the city, erected a statue of Venus on Mount Calvary, and another of Jupiter on the sacred sepulchre. The grotto of Bethlehem was given up to the rites of Adonis, the jealousy of the idolaters thus publishing by their abominable profanations, the sublime doctrines of the Cross, which it was their object to conceal or calumniate.

But Adrian, although actuated by an ardent zeal in behalf of his own deities, did not persecute the Christians at large. His resentment seems to have been confined to the Nazarenes in Jerusalem, whom he could not help regarding as a portion of the Jewish nation,—the irreconcilable enemies of Rome. We accordingly perceive, that he had no sooner dispersed the church of the Circumcision established in the holy city, than he permitted within its walls the formation of a Christian community, composed of Gentile

converts, whose political principles, he imagined, were less inimical to the sovereignty of the empire. At the same time he wrote to the governors of his Asiatic provinces, instructing them not to molest the believers in Christ, merely on account of their creed, but to reserve all punishment for crimes committed against the laws and the public tranquillity. It has therefore been very generally admitted; that during this period of repose, and even down to the reign of Dioclesian, the faithful at Jerusalem, now called Aelia, celebrated the mysteries of their religion in public, and consequently had altars consecrated to their worship. If, indeed, they were not allowed the possession of Calvary, the Holy Sepulchre, and of Bethlehem, where they might solemnize their sacred rites, it is not to be imagined that the memory of these holy sanctuaries could be effaced from their affectionate recollection. The very idols served to mark the places where the Christian redemption was begun and completed. Nay, the pagans themselves cherished the expectation that the temple of Venus, erected on the summit of Calvary, would not prevent the Christians from visiting that holy mount; rejoicing in the idea, as the historian Sozomen expresses it, that the Nazarenes, when they repaired to Golgotha to pray, would appear to the public eye to be offering up their adoration to the daughter of Jupiter. This is a striking proof that a perfect knowledge of the sacred places was retained by the church of Jerusalem in the middle of the second century. At a somewhat later period, when exposed to persecution, if they were not allowed to build their altars at the Sepulchre, or proceed without apprehension to the scene of the Nativity, they

enjoyed at least the consolation of keeping alive the remembrance of the great events connected with these interesting monuments of their faith; anticipating, at the same time, the approaching ruin of that proud superstition by which they had been so long oppressed.

The conversion of Constantine gave a new vigour to these local reminiscences of the evangelical history. That celebrated ruler wrote to Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem, to cover the tomb of Jesus Christ with a magnificent church; while his mother, the Empress Helena, repaired in person to Palestine, in order to glue a proper efficacy to the zeal which animated the throne, and to assist in searching for the venerable remains of the first age of the gospel. To this illustrious female is ascribed the glory of restoring to religion some of its most valued memorials. Not satisfied with the splendid temple erected at the Holy Sepulchre, she ordered two similar edifices to be reared under her own auspices; one over the manger of the Messiah at Bethlehem, and the other on the Mount of Olives, to commemorate his ascension into heaven. Chapels, altars, and houses of prayer gradually marked all the places consecrated by the acts of the Son of Man; the oral traditions were forthwith committed to writing, and thereby secured for ever from the treachery of individual recollection.[4]

These considerations gave great probability to the conjectures of those pious persons who, in the fourth century of our era, assisted the mother of Constantine in fixing the locality of holy scenes. From that period down to the present day, the devotion of the Christian and the

avarice of the Mohammedan have sufficiently secured the remembrance both of the places and of the events with which they are associated. But no length of time can wear out the impression of deep reverence and respect which are excited by an actual examination of those interesting spots that witnessed the stupendous occurrences recorded in the inspired volume. Or, if there be in existence any cause which could effectually counteract such natural and laudable feelings, it is the excessive minuteness of detail and fanciful description usually found to accompany the exhibition of sacred relics. The Christian traveller is delighted when he obtains the first glance of Carmel, of Tabor, of Libanus, and of Olivet; his heart opens to many touching recollections at the moment when the Jordan, the Lake of Tiberias, and even the waters of the Dead Sea spread themselves out before his eyes; but neither his piety nor his belief is strengthened when he has presented to him a portion of the cross whereon our Saviour was suspended, the nails that pierced his hands and feet, the linen in which his body was wrapped, the stone on which his corpse reposed in the sepulchre, as well as that occupied by the ministering angel on the morning of the resurrection. The skepticism with which such doubtful remains cannot fail to be examined is turned into positive disgust when, the guardians of the grotto at Bethlehem undertake to show the water wherein the infant Messiah was washed, the milk of the blessed Virgin his mother, the swaddling-clothes, the manger, and other particulars neither less minute nor less improbable.