

THE TWO APOSTATE CHURCHES

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning September 6th, 1863

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 5 Number 246

“And they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven.”
Zechariah 5:9

AS we have already had one sermon upon this vision of the ephah, our readers of our Sunday morning sermon in different parts of the country will be looking out for a little further explanation of this mysterious vision. The ephah here is intended to represent that Jerusalem that was governed by human tradition, and was gone into a state of ignorance of the truth as it was in Jesus; so that when Jesus appeared in our world, or in their world rather, we see how ignorant the people were of him, and we see how they were led by Satan to persecute and to crucify the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, then, this Jerusalem which the Jews dreamt should remain forever, they could not be brought to believe that God would finally forsake that Jerusalem, they could not be brought to believe that the walls of that Jerusalem would ever be finally destroyed; they could not be brought to believe that that temple would ever be entirely and finally destroyed. But it was destroyed. The Lord rolled in, as you know, the Roman armies upon this ephah, upon this Jerusalem, upon this city, and crushed the whole, and the whole was destroyed; and, according to the creed I hold concerning it, gone, and gone forever. No reason can be assigned why it should ever be restored. Now, then, as there was a Jerusalem that thus came by apostasy into bondage, with her children, that Jerusalem became spiritually Sodom and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified; that Jerusalem became mystically Babylon, and was no longer recognized by the Lord as the throne of his holiness; and that Jerusalem had become a mystic Babylon. And hence we have the many scriptures exhorting us to come out of Babylon; and that word Babylon there must be understood, of course, mystically. I will again quote those wonderfully instructive words, I think, exceedingly instructive, as descriptive of Babylon, of the mystic Babylon, the words I have just quoted, namely, where our Lord is crucified, that is to say, where he is spoken against, and where he is opposed, that is, Babylon. But when I thus speak, I must explain what I mean; for, in the first place, we must have Jesus Christ and the truth go together. Never forget, if you can help it, these two things, that the business of the truth of God is to set before us the kind of Jesus Christ that God has sent into the world; that the business of the truth of God is to describe the work of God in regeneration, and to describe the same work in carrying it on to eternal glory; that the business of the truth of God is to describe the covenant of God, the counsels of God in our eternal salvation. Now I mention this because some people say, You preach the doctrines that accompany salvation, but you do not

preach salvation. I have been told that I preach the doctrines that accompany Christ, but I do not preach Christ, say they, You should preach Christ. My answer is, I cannot preach Christ except by that testimony which God himself has given of him. So, if I would preach Christ, I would say to this assembly, Judge you whether it be right to preach Christ by human doctrines, and human opinions, and human inventions, or whether it be right to preach Christ by the Lord's own word. You will find that the word of God and the testimony of Christ are ever put together. "These are they that keep the commandments of God," not the commandments of men, "and have the testimony of Jesus Christ," the meaning, of course, of which is, that they hold the testimony of Christ, not by human tradition, but by the word of God. Hence that beautiful prayer of David, only just a clause will I here mention, "O send out your light and your truth." Now Christ is the light; but then we want the truth to tell us what kind of a Jesus Christ it is; and the truth tells us of what kind of Jesus Christ it is. The truth tells us of that perfection of his atonement; the truth tells us of the warfare he has accomplished; the truth tells us that he loved his own unto the end; the truth tells us of God's everlasting love by him; the truth tells us that his person is such, and that his work is such; and that by him, by none other, not by the first Adam, not by Moses, not by Aaron, not by Joshua, not by any one of the prophets, for none of these had that about them by which the favor of God could with certainty continue toward the creature, but Jesus Christ. He is such a person, being God and man in one person; and his work is so divine, so substantial, being, like himself, eternal; therefore, the mercy of the Lord is by Jesus Christ. And can you imagine any way in which the mercy of God is so suited to us as by Christ Jesus? There it comes in all its freeness; there it comes in all its greatness; there it comes in all its timeliness; there it comes in all its variety of adaptation, and in its certainty. By him the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. Thus, then, I have not yet learned, and I do not wish to learn, how to preach Christ without his truth, how to preach Christ without his testimony. So, then, to preach Jesus Christ scripturally is to preach him by those testimonies of him which are recorded in the word of the Lord. Thus, then, this apostate Jerusalem had not gone away from a Messiah. No; they still held a doctrine that there was a Messiah to come; but they had lost God's testimony as to what kind of a Messiah it was; and having lost this, and apostatized from this, when he came they knew him not. Thus, by their severing the truth from him concerning whom the truth speaks, when he came, they knew him not. They still held the doctrine that a Messiah was to come. Why, that was a doctrine held by them all. "We know that Christ when he comes," said a woman of Samaria, "he will teach us all things." Thus, then, you will see here, I think, the importance of abiding by God's own truth. Had it been the lot of those men to have abode by the truth of God, they would have known the Savior as well as Simeon did. Simeon held the truth, and therefore when Christ appeared, he knew him. The wise men acknowledged the truth, and when they saw him, they knew him; and so, of others that knew him, it was by the truth. "Send out your light" that is, Christ, "and your truth" to tell me what kind of light it is. Let me have the truth to show me that it is a sun, when once risen from the dead, that will no more go down. Let me have the truth to show me that it is a moon, when once risen into brightness, that will never again withdraw that brightness. Now upon this apostate Jerusalem came this talent of lead, this judgment of the great God, and that Jerusalem was crushed. While we see this and are assured that that Jerusalem was in bondage with her children, we are with equal certainty assured that there is another Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ is the way to the New Jerusalem. And shall any judgment ever come upon the citizens of the New Jerusalem? If I am brought to Jesus, and he is the way into the New Jerusalem, he is the new and living way, here I have new life, and here I have new light, and here I have new holiness, and here I have a new righteousness, and here I have a new standing, and here I have a new covenant; I am brought thus into the New

Jerusalem by Christ Jesus; so that we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. And what are the walls of the New Jerusalem? The walls of the New Jerusalem are salvation; "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." "You shall call," says the same prophet in another place, "your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise." Shall any judgment ever come upon this people, these citizens of the New Jerusalem, or upon the New Jerusalem? Hear the word of the Lord, that "violence shall no more be heard in you." In the first Adam and in the lower Jerusalem there was violence; but now, in this New Jerusalem, there is no violence; in Christ all is harmony, and peaceful, and quiet, and tranquil. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and quietness, and assurance forever." And I say, shall then any judgment ever come there? "No violence shall be heard in you; wasting nor destruction within your borders." I had almost said, and I shall not be presumptuous in saying so; I say it with pleasure, as much as I say it with delightful truth, that in order for the judgment of God to come upon a child of God penally or finally, the judgment must first come upon Christ; for in this new covenant Christ is the representative to God of the believer. Therefore, if I am brought thus to know my need of Christ, can hang my hope upon him, then whatever Christ is to God, that I am to God by him. Look at it; think to yourself, Take Jesus Christ away, then I have that in me that must make me infinitely abhorrent to the divine nature, and total antagonism would exist between me and the divine nature. But the blood of Jesus Christ interposing takes away all that is antagonistic, takes away all that is opposed, constitutes me all that that atonement can make me; his righteousness comes in, and constitutes me as righteous as he is righteous; his truth comes into my heart, and his Holy Spirit dwells in me, and makes my soul truthful even as he is truthful; that whatever he is to God, that we are to God. The Lord help you to understand this, and then you will see what it was they apostatized from; and then you will see how blessed it is to be preserved from thus falling from the faith. "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling;" from falling from the faith, apostatizing from this delightful truth of God's approbation of you in Christ, your acceptance in Christ. So then, I say, shall any judgment come upon these? Yea, what say the Holy Scriptures concerning these citizens? Is it not written concerning them, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." And I am sure, if I am a citizen there, it is by the choice, the mercy, and good pleasure of the blessed God; if I am brought to inquire into these things, I am sure, not unto me, not unto me, but unto the Lord be indeed all the glory. Thus, then, this judgment that came upon the literal Jerusalem enables us to contrast the New Jerusalem with the old; enables us to contrast the jasper walls of the New Jerusalem with the common stone walls of the old Jerusalem; enables us to contrast the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem, which are indeed fireproof, time-proof, and eternity-proof, to contrast these with the gates of that Jerusalem which was burned. It enables us to contrast the house that is not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, with that house of which, not one stone upon another was left; it enables us to contrast the new covenant people with the old; we see them there in Zion, beholding Jehovah's face, enjoying his presence, and reigning for ever and ever.

Thus, then, see the contrast between the two. And this judgment that came upon this mystic Babylon, the literal Jerusalem, is only a very small thing, a very little thing, a few solitary drops of the wrath of Almighty God in comparison of that judgment that is by-and-bye at the end of time, to be ministered, when Babylon, universally it will be said "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and fallen for ever;" when the angel cast a mighty millstone into the sea, indicative of the final perdition, that will be a judgment that no language can attempt to describe. Happy, then, is the man that knows

something of Jesus Christ, something of the New Jerusalem, something of that new state of things by which he shall be counted worthy to escape all these things.

Now, having made these remarks, I come to the two women that came out of this ephah after the judgment upon Jerusalem. There came two women. Some have supposed that these two women, all, I think, or most divines, agree that they both relate to false churches; and I think one opinion very general is that these two women are Mahometanism and Catholicism. Well, it may be so, and that is a very good thought. I at once conclude that the two women are, first, the Old Testament apostate church, namely, the Jews, and there they are to this day and secondly, the Christian apostate church. Now we have in the world at this time two apostate churches, the Gentile Christian apostate church, and the Jewish apostate church. And it is very clear that the judgments that came upon Jerusalem, instead of the Jewish church, if I may so call it, coming out of that judgment a converted church, instead of coming out of that judgment an altered church; instead of coming out of that judgment a church reconciled to Christ; instead of coming out of that judgment any better for that judgment, they came out as they went in, for there was not anything that converted them. It is true, and it is a pleasant idea to dwell upon, that in the apostolic age, and for centuries after, many were gathered in out of the Jews, and saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; but it was not the judgment that came upon them that did it; it was the Spirit of God that did it, the grace, the mercy, and the gospel of God that did it. I therefore take these two women to be these two apostate churches, the Jewish apostatized church and the Christian apostatized church, whether you call the Christian apostate church Mahometan, Catholic, or whatever name. For we are apt to be too narrow in our views. We have cartloads of books written to prove that the Roman Catholic church is the harlot, and the mystery, Babylon, spoken of in the Book of the Revelation. Well, men have written very largely upon this, but they are too narrow. The Roman Catholic church is but one member of the mystic woman; she is but one limb of the beast; she is but one section of the whole apostate church. This is the way in which I understand, then, these two women. And they may well be called two women, because between them, it is a remarkable thing, worthy of your attention; it seems to carry out our idea that these two women, while they are both apostates from God, and from the truth of God, yet they do not associate, much less amalgamate. You cannot turn a Jew into a Gentile, and you cannot turn a Gentile into a Jew; there is a living antipathy between Judaism and Christianity in any form unto the present day. So that these two women, they are in that respect mutually repulsive. But not to dwell upon that, I would, before I go to the next part, or rather to the wings of these two women, just notice that the Old and the New Testament church are but one; they are not two, but only one. Hence the apostle Paul, in the 11th of the Hebrews, begins with Abel, goes all through the Old Testament church, in order to show that the New Testament church is one with the Old Testament church. And hence, when you come to the final winding up of all things, there is the Lamb's bride, she is but one; there is no schism. Well, now, these are called women, these two apostate churches, because each claim to be married to God. The Jewish church considers herself God's bride to this day; and I am sure the apostate church in all the members of it, Catholic or Mahometan, both the Jewish and the Christian, claims to be the bride of God. This, I think, is the reason why they are thus called women. But the chief point I will dwell upon now is this, "the wind was in their wings." Now that means the atmosphere in which they moved. And the wind that was in their wings, what shall we understand by that? Let the word of God explain; and if I do not give an explanation of this profitable to you, then I shall wish I had not spoken upon the subject. Now what, then, shall we understand by the wind being in their wings? Their wings we will take to mean their faith and love; what, then, shall we understand by

the wind being in their wings? Now the apostle Paul will explain this to us. The apostle Paul says, in the 4th of Ephesians, "That we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." There it is that explains the whole. Their doctrines are in their faith, and in their love, and in their sympathies; they are carried along by the wind; so that the way the wind blows they are carried. Now it is very clear that Judaism, as now held by the Jews, does carry them from God; it is very clear that the doctrines held by apostate Christians do carry them from God. Now I shall want your attention very solemnly and very particularly in what I am going to say. I have said that these winds of false doctrines must necessarily carry them from God. I will now point out to you very carefully that relation to God from which false doctrine will carry people, but to which the truth will bring the soul; and, as I go on describing it, leaving you to judge whether you are under the influence of doctrines that carry you away from what I am about to name, or whether you are under the influence of that wind of doctrine that brings you to and enlists your sympathies in the things I am about to name. I take, therefore, some things from the 54th of Isaiah. Passing by the first part of that beautiful chapter, the first thing I come to is the substitution and work of Jesus Christ for all our sin and shame, and that substitution brought about by an indissolubly constituted relationship to Christ, wherein he appears as the husband, and the church as the bride. And it stands like this: "Fear not, for you shall not be ashamed; neither be you confounded, for you shall not be put to shame: for you shall forget the shame of your youth, and shall not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore." The meaning is, that blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, forgiven by the substitutional work of Christ; the man whose sin is covered, covered by the sacrificial perfection of Christy the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity, but imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Here, then, such a man, such an one knows that he has sin enough in him and about him to expose him to shame and everlasting contempt; but being brought to receive this substitutional perfection of Jesus, that very promise belongs to faith; "Fear not, you shall not be ashamed." What! not all my sins make me ashamed? No; that is, not in the sense there intended. And you shall not be put to shame; you shall forget the shame of your youth, the shame of your natural origin; for you were conceived in sin, shaped in iniquity, born as the wild ass's colt, and gone astray, speaking lies; but all this your shame you shall forget. The dear Redeemer has taken your sin and shame, and put that sin and shame everlastingly away, and constituted you perfect in his substitutional work and in his righteousness. Do we hold doctrines that lead us to this substitutional perfection, or do we hold doctrines that lead us away from it? Catholicism leads from it; free-willism leads from it; duty-faith with one finger points to it, with the other finger points from it; with one breath advocates it as a matter of divine sovereignty and pleasure, and with the other breath thrusts the sovereignty of God aside, and brings in the supposed sovereignty and efforts of the creature. Those doctrines blow first one way, and then the other. But if you are under the right doctrines, they will always lead you to Christ; it will be a wind that will always blow in the right direction; and you may spread your sails, and the more these blessed truths lay hold of your soul, the more they will make Jesus Christ your hiding-place, the more you wilt appreciate this wondrous substitution. Do you now see, then, what is meant by the wind being in their wings? False doctrines carrying them away from Jesus Christ. Now where is the secret of all our shame being forgotten, and passed away, and we appearing in all the perfection of substitutional glory at the last? Here it comes. "Your Maker" there is the explanation, "is your husband; the Lord, Jehovah, of Hosts is his name; and your Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." And to show that you cannot be carried from this perfection, from this freedom; that there is no power east, west, north, or south, that can rise to deprive you of it, "The God of the whole earth shall he be called." See how that accords with, "You have given

him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." Now, then, the wind was in their wings, to carry them away from this God, from this substitution, from this indissoluble relation to the blessed God. Now that is one thing that false doctrine will carry you from, and that is one thing that true doctrine is sure to carry you to. If you are taught of the Spirit of God, he will so teach you as to bring you to Christ; if you are taught of God the Father, he will so teach you as to bring you to Christ; for "every one that has heard and learned of the Father comes unto me;" and the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ, reveals them to the soul. Now, then, that is the first thing, for that is what I feel so anxious about, to which the wind of true doctrine will waft the soul; where we may pray for it to do so more and more, and to say, "Awake, O north wind." Ah! the north wind? Yes, Lord; let the north wind be as piercing, and as cold, and as trying as it may; let it awake. And I think in accordance with those words in Solomon's Song are the words of Mr. Hart,

"Convince us of our sin;"

that is the north wind;

"Then lead to Jesus' blood;"

that is the south wind.

"Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits;" because the sympathies and affections of the soul are all alive to God, and, shall I say, can entertain the Savior with all those adorations, and confessions, and delights in his dear name spoken, of there as the pleasant fruits which he loves to see, and loves, as it were, to eat. The second thing from which the wind of false doctrine takes the people is the Lord's gospel dealings with his people. All those that are interested in what we have before described in the 54th of Isaiah, the Lord puts to grief; that is one of his dealings; and gives them to see that by the law they are rejected, despised, and condemned; that the law says, Go, get you to your own abode; I have nothing but a curse for you. And when the soul is thus grieved, in steps the Savior. He says, "The Lord has called you as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit;" to think you could not make yourself holy and righteous, "and a wife of youth, when you were refused, says your God;" wishing to be married to the law, but the law would not have you. It had you once in the first Adam, but you apostatized from it; you took the devil into the place of the law, and you having apostatized, the law would not have you. "A wife of youth, when you were refused." Did Moses refuse you? Yes, Lord, he did. Well, I will have you. "Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out;" let him be as guilty as he may, as leprous as he may, as filthy as he may. Ah! says the soul, I do not care about the law refusing me, so that the gospel receives me; I do not mind Moses putting me away, so that Jesus Christ takes me up. These are they that will prize the gospel. Now this is one of the Lord's gospel dealings with his people. Second, the Lord by-and-bye in a little apparent wrath seems to forsake you. Ah! you say, the Lord seems gone now:

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?"

Now the Lord says, "For a small moment have I forsaken you;" won't be long. I don't know, Lord, how I shall see your face again. It shall be in this way: "With great mercies will I gather you." Ah! says the Pharisee, lifting up his Pharisaic hands and hypocritical eyes, "with great mercies will I gather you;" what, without my piety? Your piety! Why, it is the spawn of hell, sir, because it tries to take the place of Jesus Christ; it tries to take the place of sovereign mercy and grace, and you will thrust these eternal realities aside to make room for your contemptible little bits of doings. "With great mercies will I gather you." Are there great sins to pardon? I will come with great mercies; are there great wounds to heal? I will come with great mercies; there are great breaches to make up, and I will come with great mercies to make them up; there are great crooks to make straight, and I will come with great mercies to make them straight; there are great mountains to lower, and I will come with great mercies to lower them; there are great valleys to fill up, and I will come with great mercies to fill them up; there are dark clouds hanging over you, these shall pass away, and mercies shall concentrate themselves upon your believing head. So, the church appears with a crown of twelve stars upon her head, prophetic and apostolic light uniting and culminating upon her head; everlasting joy shall be upon her head. And then, "in a little wrath," apparent wrath, not real, for,

"Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face"

"I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you." I will not only have mercy on you, but I will do it after a kindly manner, everlasting kindness. The manner of an action, you know, has a great deal to do with determining its character. "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer." These are the gospel dealings of the Lord with his people. And how is the whole wound up? for between these gracious dealings and the end there will be enemies arise; the Lord assures us, in that same chapter, that enemies will arise. But what is the sum and the substance at the close? "No weapon that is formed against you." the soul brought to receive this substitution, brought under these gospel drawings and gospel dealings. "shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn." And the secret of that is, that "this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord." Thus, then, I think you can understand what is meant by the two women, and by the wind being in their wings.

Now it is said they had wings like a stork. Now the stork is a bird of passage, and kindly visits us here in England, like the cuckoo, in the spring; but off it goes when the winter comes. Just so with professors, they are birds of passage. They avail themselves of every favorable wind; but whenever any cold weather is coming for the truth's sake, or for the word's sake, or for their religion's sake, they will tack about, and take care they will not enter into the cold. As Cardinal Wiseman says, in his book upon Protestantism and Catholicism, one fault he finds with Protestantism is, he says, You have only one avenue, as it were, and that is with the letter of the word, to draw people; whereas, he says, we have music for the ear, of course; pictures for the eye; wafers for the taste, of course you have; holy water for the touch, and the beauties of architecture; we have all that variety that we lay hold of the tastes of men, and draw them in. Ah! it is a draw in, it is a draw in, it is a draw into hell, sir, if almighty grace prevents not. So that they are birds of passage; must not rely upon their friendship. Not like the apostle Paul; he says, "I will winter with you." Give me that friend; that is the friend. Jesus Christ wintered with us, bless his holy name, that we might

summer with him; and if we suffer with him now, winter with him now, we shall summer with him when the winter of tribulation shall be no more. You can understand the stork then, friends, a bird of passage. Not so with the Christian, he goes straight on, winter or summer, in season, out of season; the Christian must be always the same in his position in relation to the truth.

But do you not see a contrast intended here also? I see another pair of wings that contrast with these wings of the stork, and it strikes me that that other pair of wings will bear out what I have just now said about the wind. The wind of false doctrine carries you from what I have stated; the wind of true doctrine will carry you to it; and so the wind of true faith and love will carry you to God. Now the eagle is very superior to the stork. So the Lord says, "You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you" not on storks' wings, but superior to that, "on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself;" there it is, "brought you unto myself." The wings of true faith and love will carry us to God. "Brought you unto myself." I say it with reverence, but God himself could not take the people to a better place; he could not take them to a better home. He swore by himself; there was none greater; he swore by himself. I say he took them to the best place, the greatest place, the holiest place, the strongest place, the richest place, the pleasantest place, the most plentiful place, could not have taken them to a better place. So, then, you may have your stork-like wings, to accommodate yourself to circumstances, to anything and everything; but let me have the eagle's wings, let me be brought to God, then I shall dwell on high, my place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks, bread shall be given me, water shall be sure. "They shall rise with wings as eagles not as storks, but as eagles. The eagle flies a very great deal higher than the stork does. Ah, say some, you are always saying a word in favor of high doctrine. Of course I am, because my refuge is on high, and my hope is on high, and happily my treasure is on high, where thieves cannot break in, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where the eagle's wings of faith and love shall take me when death shall call me home. I need not remind you of other scriptures wherein the church is spoken of as on eagles' wings. "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness." And that is where the Lord was. Ah, say you, you say that is where the Lord was, but it does not say so there. But it does somewhere else. Where? Leave you to find out. I know. "Who is this that comes up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" He is not in the theatre, not in the multitude, not in the gaudy shows of men, but in the wilderness, among the poor and needy. To her were given two wings of a great eagle, and she fled to where the Lord was, willing to suffer affliction with the people of God, and to stand against all the floods the devil may pour out with the desire to carry her away.

Thus, then, we have got so far through the subject, but we have not got to our text; we must have a sermon upon it another time. Now I think you can understand, then, the difference between the two cities, the one upon which the judgment fell, the other upon which mercy and peace will ever reign; and between the two opposite characters, the two women, the false churches, carried away by false doctrine, and the true church, that is brought to God, between the wings of the stork and the wings of the eagle. The Lord increase us in an understanding and realization of these things, for his name's sake.