

# *Jerusalem*

*And did those feet in ancient time*

*Walk upon England's mountains green?*

*And was the holy Lamb of God*

*On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

*And did the Countenance Divine*

*Shine forth upon our clouded hills?*

*And was Jerusalem builded here*

*Among these dark Satanic mills?*

*Bring me my bow of burning gold:*

*Bring me my arrows of desire:*

*Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!*

*Bring me my chariot of fire.*

*I will not cease from mental fight,*

*Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand*

*Till we have built Jerusalem*

*In England's green and pleasant land.*

***Jerusalem*** is a short poem by William Blake from the preface of *Milton a Poem*. It was originally called “And Did Those Feet in Ancient Times”. The poem was first printed in 1804. Today it is best known as the anthem “Jerusalem”, with music written by Sir Hubert Parry in 1916. It is one of the three hymns that are being sung at the Royal Wedding and was considered to be the British Anthem.

The poem was inspired by the story that a young Jesus, accompanied by his uncle Joseph of Arimathea, travelled to the area that is now England and visited Glastonbury. The legend is linked to an idea in the Book of Revelation describing a Second Coming, wherein Jesus establishes a new “Jerusalem”.

In the most common interpretation of the poem, Blake implies that a visit of Jesus would briefly create heaven in England, in contrast to the “dark Satanic Mills” of the Industrial Revolution. Note that Blake asks four questions rather than stating a visit to be true.

The term “dark Satanic Mills”, which entered the English language from this poem, is interpreted as referring to the early Industrial Revolution and its destruction of nature and human relationships. This view has been linked to the fate of the Albion Flour Mills, which was the first major factory in London, designed by John Rennie and Samuel Wyatt and built on land purchased by Wyatt in Southwark. This was a rotary steam-powered flour mill by Matthew Boulton and James Watt, with grinding gears by Rennie, producing 6,000 bushels of flour a week. The factory could have driven independent traditional millers out of business, but it was destroyed, perhaps deliberately, by fire in 1791. London’s independent millers celebrated with placards reading, “Success to the mills of ALBION but no Albion Mills. Opponents referred to the factory as satanic, and accused its owners of adulterating flour and using cheap imports at the expense of British producers. An illustration of the fire published at the time shows a devil squatting on the building. The mills were a short distance from Blake’s home.

The phrase was especially poignant for the millions of workers employed in mills, who adopted the poem as a Socialist hymn.

The line from the poem, “Bring me my Chariot of fire!” draws on the story of 2 Kings 2:11, where the Old Testament prophet Elijah is taken directly to heaven: “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” Blake used it to show that he would part the industrial factories aside and ride up above them and start a mental revolution.

The term “green and pleasant land,” universally quoted, has become a collocation for identifiably English landscape or society. It appears as a headline, title or sub-title in dozens of articles and books.

Several of Blake’s poems and paintings express a notion of universal humanity: “As all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various)”. He retained an active interest in social and political events for all his life, but was often forced to resort to cloaking social idealism and political statements in Protestant mystical allegory. Even though the poem was written during the Napoleonic Wars, Blake was an outspoken supporter of the French Revolution, whose successor Napoleon claimed to be. The poem expressed his desire for radical change without overt sedition. (In 1803 Blake was charged at Chichester with high treason for having “uttered seditious and treasonable expressions” but was acquitted).

The words of the poem stress the importance of people taking responsibility for change and building a better society “England’s green and pleasant land”.

The poem, which was little known during the century which followed its writing, was included in a patriotic anthology of verse published in 1916, a time when morale had begun to decline due to the high number of casualties in WWI and the perception that there was no end in sight.