Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries

Genesis through Deuteronomy

GENESIS

#1

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CREATION OF MAN

**[Genesis 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.26)**

"And God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Though men constantly trace their origin to their immediate parents, and frequently to their remoter ancestors—yet they rarely consider When, or How they first came into existence, or Whether any change has taken place in their nature since they came out of their Creator's hands. That there was a period when no such creature as man existed, even reason itself would teach us; for every effect must proceed from some cause; and therefore the formation of man, however remotely we trace his origin, must, in the first instance, have been the product of some intelligent Being, who was eternally self-existent.

But we are not left to the uncertain deductions of reason; God has been pleased to reveal unto us (what could not otherwise have been known, [Hebrews 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.3). ) the time and manner of our creation, together with the state in which we were created. And these are the subjects which we would now propose for your consideration:

I. The circumstances of our creation—

The **time** of our creation—

Five days had been occupied in reducing to order the confused chaos, and in furnishing the world with whatever could enrich or adorn it. On the sixth, God formed man, whom he reserved to the last, as being the most excellent of his works; and whose formation he delayed, until everything in this habitable globe was fitted for his accommodation.

It is not for us to inquire why God chose this space of time for the completion of his work, when he could as easily have formed it all in an instant; but one instructive lesson at least we may learn from the survey which he took of every day's work; it teaches his creatures to review their works from day to day, in order that, if they find them to have been good, they may be excited to gratitude; or, if they perceive them to have been evil, they may be led to repentance.

At the close of every day, God pronounced his work to be "good;" but when man was formed, and the harmony of all the parts, together with the conduciveness of each to its proper end, and the subserviency of every part to the good of the whole, were fully manifest, then he pronounced the whole to be "very good."

From this also we learn, that it is not one work or two, however good in themselves, that should fully satisfy our minds; but a comprehensive view of all our works, as harmonizing with each other, and corresponding with all the ends of our creation.

In the **manner** of our creation there is something worthy of very peculiar attention—

In the formation of all other things God merely exercised his own sovereign will, saying, "Let there be light," "Let such and such things take place." But in the creation of man we behold the language of consultation, "Let us make man." There is not the least reason to suppose that this was a mere form of speech like that which obtains among monarchs at this day; for this is quite a modern refinement; nor can it be an address to angels; for they had nothing to do in the formation of man; it is an address to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both of whom co-operated in the formation of Him who was to be the master-piece of divine wisdom and power.

The work of Creation is ascribed to Jesus Christ, [John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1-3) and to the Holy Spirit, [Genesis 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.2); [Job 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 26.13); [Job 33:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.4). This appears from a still more striking expression, which occurs afterwards; where God says, "Now man is become like one of us, to know good and evil, [Genesis 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.22)." And it is confirmed in a variety of other passages, where God, under the character of our "Creator," or "Maker," is spoken of in the plural number, See [Job 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 35.10); [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5); [Ecclesiastes 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.1). These are all plural in the original.

We must not however suppose that there are three Gods; there certainly is but One God; and His unity is as clear as his existence; and this is intentionally marked in the very verse following our text; where the expressions, "us" and "our" are turned into "he" and "his"—"God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him."

Here, then, we may see an early intimation of the Trinity in Unity; a doctrine which pervades the whole Bible, and is the very corner-stone of our holy religion. And it is deserving of particular notice, that, in our dedication to our Creator at our baptism, we are expressly required to acknowledge this mysterious doctrine, being "baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19)."

The text informs us further respecting,

II. The state in which we were created—

There was some "likeness" to God even in the nature of man. "God is a spirit," who thinks, and wills, and acts. Man also has a spirit, distinct from his body, or from the mere animal life. He has a thinking, willing substance, which acts upon matter by the mere exercise of its own volitions, except when the material substance on which it operates is bereft of its proper faculties, or impeded in the use of them. But the image of God in which man was formed, is properly two-fold:

1. Intellectual—

"God is a God of knowledge." He has a perfect discernment of everything in the whole creation. Such too, was Adam in his first formation. Before he had any opportunity to make observations on the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, he gave names to every one of them, suited to their several natures, and distinctive of their proper characters. But it was not merely in things natural that Adam was so well instructed; he doubtless had just views of God, his nature and perfections; he had also a thorough knowledge of himself, of his duties, his interests, his happiness. There was no one thing which could conduce either to his felicity or usefulness, which was not made known to him, as far as he needed to be instructed in it. As God is light without any mixture or shade of darkness, [1 John 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.5)—so was Adam, in reference to all those things at least which he was at all concerned to know.

2. Moral—

Holiness is no less characteristic of the Deity than wisdom. He loves everything that is good, and infinitely abhors everything that is evil. Every one of His perfections is holy. In this respect, also, did man bear a resemblance to his Maker. "God made man upright, [Ecclesiastes 7:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.29)." As he had a view of the commandment in all its breadth, so had he a conformity to it in all his dispositions and actions. He felt no reluctance in obeying it; his will was in perfect unison with the will of his Maker. All the inferior appetites were in habitual subjection to his reason, which also was in subjection to the commands of God.

We are told respecting the Lord Jesus Christ, that he was "the image of God, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4)," "the image of the invisible God, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15)," "the express image of his person, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)."

What the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, was upon earth—that was man in Paradise, "holy, harmless, undefiled, [Hebrews 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.26)."

That man's resemblance to his Maker did indeed consist in these two things, is manifest; because our renewal after the divine image is expressly said to be in knowledge, [Colossians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.10), and in true holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24). Well, therefore, does the Apostle say of man, that "he is the image and glory of God, [1 Corinthians 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.7)."

Inferences

1. What an awful change has sin brought into the world!

Survey the character before drawn; and compare it with men in the present state, "How has the gold become dim, and the fine gold changed!" Men are now enveloped in darkness, and immersed in sin. They "know nothing as they ought to know," and do nothing as they ought to do it. No words can adequately express the blindness of men's *minds*, or the depravity of their *hearts*! Yet all this has resulted from that one sin which Adam committed in Paradise. He lost the divine image from his own soul; and "begat a son in his own fallen likeness;" and the streams that have been flowing for nearly six thousand years from that polluted fountain, are still as corrupt as ever! O that we habitually considered sin in this light, and regarded it as the one source of all our miseries!

2. What a glorious change will the Holy Spirit effect in the hearts of all who seek Him!

In numberless passages, as well as in those before cited, the Holy Spirit is spoken of, as "renewing" our souls, and making us "new creatures, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)." What Adam was in Paradise, that shall we be, "according to the measure of the gift of Christ." "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree, [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.13)." He will "open the eyes of our understanding," and cause us to "know all things" that are needful for our salvation, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27). And at the same time that he "turns us from darkness unto light, he will turn us also from the power of Satan unto God;" "He will put his laws in our minds, and write them in our hearts, [Hebrews 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10)."

Let not any imagine that their case is desperate; for he who created all things out of nothing, can easily create us anew in Christ Jesus; and he will do it, if we only direct our eyes to Christ, "We all beholding as in a looking-glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18."

3. What obligations do we owe to the ever-blessed Trinity!

If we looked no further than to our first creation, we are infinitely indebted to the sacred Three, for making us the subject of their consultation, and for co-operating to form us in the most perfect manner.

But what shall we say to that other consultation, respecting the restoration of our souls? Hear, and be astonished at that gracious proposal:

"Let us restore man to our image." "I," says the Father, "will pardon and accept them, if an adequate atonement can be found to satisfy the demands of justice."

"Then on me be their guilt," says his only dear Son, "I will offer myself as a sacrifice for them, if anyone can be found to apply the virtue of it effectually to their souls, and to secure to me the purchase of my blood."

"That shall be my charge," says the blessed Spirit, "I gladly undertake the office of enlightening, renewing, sanctifying their souls; and I will "preserve every one of them blameless unto your heavenly kingdom."

Thus, by their united efforts, is the work accomplished; and a way of access is opened for every one of us through Christ, by that one Spirit, unto the Father, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18). O let every soul rejoice in this Triune God! May the Father's love, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore! Amen.

#2

APPOINTMENT OF THE SABBATH

**[Genesis 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.2-3)**

"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."

Though we know no reason on God's part why he should proceed in the work of creation by slow and gradual advancement, instead of perfecting the whole at once; yet we may conceive a reason on the part of man, who is enabled thereby to take a more minute and deliberate survey of all its parts, and from every fresh discovery of the creation to derive fresh themes of praise to the Creator. This idea seems to be countenanced by the institution of a Sabbath immediately after the completion of the sixth day's work. At all events, this is the improvement which it befits us to make of the Sabbath; in speaking of which we shall show,

I. The reason of its appointment—

God, after finishing his work, "rested, and was refreshed, [Exodus 31:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 31.17)." Whether this expression be merely a figure of speech taken from what is experienced by us after any laborious and successful exertion, or whether it intimate the delight which God felt, as it were, on a review of his works, we cannot absolutely determine. But his sanctifying of the seventh day in consequence of that rest, shows that he consulted,

1. His own glory—

As "God made all things for himself," so he instituted the Sabbath in order that his rational creatures might have stated opportunities of paying him their tribute of prayer and praise. If no period had been fixed by him for the solemnities of public worship, it would have been impossible to bring mankind to an agreement respecting the time when they should render unto him their united homage. They would all acknowledge the propriety of serving him in concert; but each would be ready to consult his own convenience; a difference of sentiment also would obtain respecting the portion of time that should be allotted to his service; and thus there would never be one hour when all should join together in celebrating their Creator's praise.

But by an authoritative separation of the seventh day, God has secured, that the whole creation shall acknowledge him, and that His goodness shall be had in everlasting remembrance. In this view, God himself, speaking of the Sabbath which he had instituted at the creation, and the observance of which he was, with some additional reasons, enforcing on the Jews, calls it "a sign" between him and them, that they might know that he is the Lord, [Exodus 31:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 31.13); [Exodus 31:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 31.17); [Isaiah 58:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.13).

2. His people's good—

Though men might have worshiped God in secret—yet the appointment of a certain day to be entirely devoted to His service, had a tendency to spiritualize their minds, and to make every one in some respect useful in furthering the welfare of the whole community. Sympathy is a powerful principle in the human bosom; and the sight of others devoutly occupied in holy exercises, is calculated to quicken the drowsy soul. The very circumstance of multitudes meeting together with raised expectations and heavenly affections, must operate like an assemblage of burning coals, all of which are instrumental to the kindling of others, while they receive in themselves fresh ardor from the contact.

A further benefit from the appointment of the Sabbath is, that the attention of all must necessarily be directed to the eternal Sabbath, which awaits them at the expiration of their appointed week of labor. Each revolving Sabbath, freed from the distractions of worldly care, and attended, not merely with bodily rest, but with a rest of the soul in God, must be to them a pledge and foretaste of Heaven itself. Well therefore does Nehemiah number the Sabbath among the richest benefits which God had conferred upon his chosen people, [Nehemiah 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.14).

But as some have thought the Sabbath to be a mere Jewish institution, which, like the rest of the ceremonial law, is abrogated and annulled, we shall proceed to show,

II. The continuance of its obligation—

That there was something ceremonial in the Jewish Sabbath, we readily acknowledge; but there was something moral also; and therefore, as to the moral part of it, it must, of necessity, be of perpetual obligation. To remove all doubt on this important subject, consider,

1. The **time** of the Sabbath's institution—

Some have thought that the mention which is made of the Sabbath in the words before us, was merely by anticipation; and that the appointment never took place until the days of Moses. But if this were the case, how did Moses come to specify the circumstance of God's resting on the seventh day as the reason of that appointment, [Exodus 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.11). It would have been a good reason for our first parents and their immediate descendants to hallow the seventh day; but it could be no reason at all to those who lived almost twenty-five hundred years after the event; more especially when so obvious and cogent a reason as their deliverance out of Egypt was assigned at the very same time, [Deuteronomy 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.15). But if the command given to the Jews was a repetition of the injunction given to Adam, then there is an obvious propriety in assigning the reason that was obligatory upon all, as well as that which formed an additional obligation on the Jewish nation in particular.

Besides, there are traces of a Sabbath from the beginning of the world. For, if no Sabbath had ever been given, whence came the practice of measuring time by weeks? Yet that custom obtained both in the patriarchal ages, [Genesis 29:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 29.27-28), and antediluvian ages, [Genesis 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.10); [Genesis 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.12); and therefore, since it accords so exactly with what was afterwards instituted by divine authority, we may well infer its original appointment by God himself. And if its obligation existed so many ages before the ceremonial law was given, then must it continue to exist after that law is abolished.

2. The **manner** of the Sabbath's re-establishment—

Notwithstanding the long continuance of the Jews in Egypt, the remembrance of the Sabbath was not effaced; for Moses, before the giving of the law, speaks of the Sabbath as an institution known and received among them, [Exodus 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.23). And, without any express direction, they gathered on the sixth day a double portion of manna to serve them on the Sabbath; which they would not have done, if they had not thought the observance of the Sabbath to be of the first importance, [Exodus 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.22). That they did this without any direction from Moses, is evident from the complaint which the Rulers made on the occasion; for which complaint there could have been no ground, if any direction had been given.

Nevertheless, for the more effectual maintenance of its authority, God judged it necessary to publish it to them again, both upon the original grounds, and on other special grounds peculiar to that people. And how did he publish it? Did he deliver it to Moses in the same manner as he did the ceremonial law? No! he wrote it with his own finger on tables of stone, and embodied it with the moral law, [Deuteronomy 10:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.3-4). Surely this affords a very strong presumption that God himself considered its duties, not as ceremonial, limited, and transient—but as moral, universal, and permanent.

3. The confirmation of the Sabbath by the **Prophets**—

That its obligations should be sanctioned by the prophets, we might well expect; because they lived under the authority of the Jewish law. The mere circumstance, therefore, of their insisting on the observation of the Sabbath would prove nothing. But their speaking of the Sabbath, as to be observed under the Christian dispensation, very strongly corroborates the perpetuity of its obligations. Now the prophet Isaiah does speak of the Sabbath in such a connection, that we cannot doubt of its referring to the times of the Gospel; and he represents the "keeping of the Sabbath" as no less necessary to our happiness, than the laying hold of Christ's righteousness and salvation, [Isaiah 56:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.1-2). We can scarcely think that the prophet would have so strongly marked the continuance of the Sabbath, if its obligations were to cease with the ceremonial law.

4. The observation of the Sabbath by the **Apostles**—

The precise day on which the Jews kept their Sabbath, was indeed changed; and the first day of the week was substituted for the seventh. This was done in order to commemorate the resurrection of our blessed Lord; an event, the most interesting that ever occurred from the foundation of the world; an event which proved, beyond all doubt, the Messiahship of Jesus, and has served from that time as the corner-stone of all our hopes, [Acts 4:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.10-12).

When Israel was brought out of Egypt, God, in order to commemorate that deliverance, changed the commencement of the year from the Autumn to the Spring, [Exodus 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.2); can we wonder then, that, in remembrance of an infinitely greater deliverance, he should alter the day on which the Sabbath had been observed? It was in the appropriation of a seventh part of our time to God, that the morality of the Sabbath consisted; and that is preserved under the Christian economy, as much as under the Jewish economy.

This change was sanctioned by our blessed Lord, who repeatedly selected that day for the more public exhibition of himself to his disciples, [Luke 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.13); [Luke 24:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.33); [Luke 24:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.36); [Luke 24:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.40); [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45); [John 20:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.19); [John 20:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.26). And on that day he sent down the Holy Spirit upon them This is ascertained by calculation, as well as from its being the seventh Sabbath after his resurrection; in order that the application, as well as the completion of his redemption, might give a further sanctity to the new-appointed day.

From that time the first day of the week was invariably observed for the public services of the church, [Acts 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.7); [1 Corinthians 16:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.1-2); and, to stamp peculiar honor upon it, it was distinguished by that endearing name, "The Lord's day, [Revelation 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.10)."

Who that weighs all these arguments, can doubt the continued obligation of the Sabbath?

For the regulation of our conduct on the Sabbath, we should inquire into,

III. The nature of its requirements—

The same kind of strictness is not required of us as was enjoined under the law—

We have before said, that there was something of a ceremonial nature in the Jewish Sabbath. The Jews in the wilderness were not permitted to leave their habitations on the Sabbath-day, [Exodus 16:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.29), except to assemble for divine worship; and the portion of manna which they gathered on the preceding day for the consumption of that day, was, for the space of forty years, kept fit for their use upon the Sabbath by a constant miracle, on purpose that they might have no excuse for transgressing the divine command, [Exodus 16:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.24). They were forbidden even to kindle a fire on the Sabbath-day, [Exodus 35:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 35.3), or to do any species of servile work.

But all this rigor is not necessary now; it was suited to the burdensome dispensation of the law; but not to the more liberal dispensation under which we live. Indeed, our blessed Lord has shown us clearly that works of necessity, [Matthew 12:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.1-8), or of mercy, [Matthew 12:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.10-13), may be performed on that as well as any other day. Being himself "the Lord of the Sabbath day," he dispensed with those rites which were merely temporary, and requires of us such services only as a spiritual mind will most delight in.

Our sanctification of the Sabbath should consist rather in mental, than in bodily exercises—

What are the proper employments for our minds, the prophet Isaiah has plainly told us, "We should account the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and should honor him, not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words, [Isaiah 58:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.13)." We should endeavor to have our thoughts abstracted from the world, and to fix them with intenseness and delight on heavenly objects. On every day we should present to God our sacrifices of prayer and praise; but as, under the law, the accustomed sacrifices, both of the morning and evening, were doubled upon the Sabbath, [Numbers 28:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 28.9-10), so, under the Gospel, we should have our minds doubly occupied in the service of our God.

The subject before us suggests ample matter,

1. For reproof—

Many, very many there are who hate the duties of the Sabbath; and, breaking through all the restraints of conscience, follow without remorse their usual occupations.

Others, complying with the established forms, cry, "What a weariness it is! [Malachi 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.13)." When shall the Sabbath be over, that I may prosecute more pleasing or more profitable employments? [Amos 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 8.5). When they come up to the house of God, they find no pleasure in his service, but are rather, like Doeg, "detained before the Lord, [1 Samuel 21:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 21.7)."

Some, indeed, conceiving that they are doing something meritorious, spend without reluctance the time allotted for public service; but, though they draw near to God with their lips, their hearts are far from him, [Matthew 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8). It is not such worshipers that God seeks or approves; nor is such the sanctification of the Sabbath that he requires.

On the contrary, he is indignant against all such profaneness or hypocrisy; and declares that such people "worship him in vain, [Matthew 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.9). " Whatever such people may imagine, they indeed profane the Sabbath. And what the consequence will be, they may form some judgment, from the punishment inflicted on the man who gathered sticks upon the Sabbath-day. By God's express command, he was stoned to death! [Numbers 15:32-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.32-36). If, then, so heavy a sentence was executed upon him by the direction of the Most High, can we suppose that God is more indifferent about the conduct of his creatures now? or that he has loaded them with mercies for no other end than to give them a greater license to sin? Let us well consider this; for "if they, who despised Moses' law, died without mercy"—then surely a far sorer punishment awaits us, if, with our additional obligations, we disregard the wonders of redeeming love, [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29).

2. For encouragement—

Not only personal, but even national judgments may be expected for the violation of the Sabbath, [Jeremiah 17:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.27). But, on the other hand, every blessing may be expected, both by individuals [Isaiah 56:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.4-7), and the community, [Jeremiah 17:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.24-26), if the Sabbath is habitually and conscientiously improved. Indeed, it seems almost impossible that anyone who sets himself in earnest to improve the Sabbath-day, should ever perish. God would bless to such a one the ordinances of his grace; and rather send him instruction in some extraordinary way, than allow him to use the means in vain, [Acts 8:27-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.27-35); [Acts 10:1-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.1-21). We can appeal to all who have ever labored to sanctify the Sabbath, whether they have not found their labor well repaid? Surely "God has never said to any, 'Seek my face in vain', "and the more diligently we keep his Sabbaths below, the more shall we be fitted for our eternal rest!

#3

COVENANT MADE WITH ADAM

**[Genesis 2:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.16-17)**

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying; Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

When the creation was formed, it was proper that every part of it should show forth the Creator's glory, and, as far as its peculiar nature and capacity would admit of, fulfill his will.

The sun and moon and stars being inanimate bodies, it was sufficient for them to move with regularity in their respective orbits.

The creatures that were endued with life, were to follow their respective instincts, and, according to their abilities, to yield obedience to man, who was God's vice-regent over them.

To man more had been given; of him, therefore, was more required. He was endued with understanding and will; he was capable of knowing what he owed to his Maker, and of exercising discretion in performing it. To him therefore, in addition to the moral law which was written on his heart, and from which he could not deviate without opposing all his innate propensities, a positive precept was given; the will of his Creator was enacted into a law; and that which was indifferent in itself, was made a test of its obedience. All the trees in Paradise were given to him for the nourishment and support of his body. But that he might have an opportunity of acknowledging his dependence on God, and his ready submission to the divine will, one tree was excepted; and the use of it was prohibited under the severest penalties. This prohibition is to be the subject of our present consideration; and, in order that it may be understood in all its bearings and relations, we shall endeavor to explain,

I. The **import** of the prohibition—

The name given to the forbidden tree strongly marked the importance of abstaining from it—

Adam was created in the perfect image of his God. He knew everything that was good, but nothing that was evil. This was his honor and his felicity. The knowledge of evil would have marred, rather than augmented, his happiness. Such knowledge, if speculative, would be only vain; if practical, be ruinous.

We have no reason to think that the fruit of the tree was at all noxious in itself; but, as being forbidden, it could not be eaten without guilt; and therefore the designation given to the tree itself was a standing memorial to Adam on no account to touch it; since by eating of it he would attain the knowledge of evil, which. through the perfection of his nature, he was hitherto unacquainted with.

The necessity of abstaining from it was yet more awfully inculcated in the penalty annexed to disobedience—

The death which in the event of his transgressing the command, was denounced against him, was three-fold; it was temporal death, spiritual death, eternal death. His body, which had not in it naturally the seeds of dissolution, was to be given up a prey to various diseases, and at last to return to the dust from which it sprang. His soul was to lose both the image and enjoyment of God, and to be consigned over to the influence of everything that was earthly, sensual, and devilish. And, after a certain period, both his body and soul were to be "cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."

That such was the penalty, appears from the outcome; for, upon transgressing the divine command, he became mortal; a change also instantly took place in his intellectual and moral faculties; as he showed, by attempting to hide himself from God, with whom he had hitherto maintained the most familiar converse. The eternal duration of his punishment may be inferred from the penalty annexed to sin at this time; for if the wages of sin is eternal death now, there can be no doubt but that it was so then In [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23), death, which is the wages of sin, and the life which is the gift of God, are contrasted; both being of the same duration. Compare also [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.46).

There was, however, an implied promise, that, if he persevered in his obedience, he should live forever. In the law which God has since published, and to which the same penalty is annexed for disobedience, we are assured that whoever does the things which are commanded, shall live in them. Compare [Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26) and [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10), with [Leviticus 18:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 18.5) and [Romans 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.5) and [Galatians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.12); from whence we may conclude, that there was a similar reward prepared for Adam, if he should continue to obey his God. It is true that the law can not give us life now [Galatians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.21); but that is not owing to any change in God's regard for obedience, but to our incapacity to render that obedience which his law requires, [Romans 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3-4). If we could keep all the commandments, we should, by keeping them, enter into life, [Matthew 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.17). And it is manifest that the same reward would have been given to Adam; since we are told, that "the law was ordained to life, [Romans 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.10)."

The import of the prohibition being made clear, let us consider,

II. The **nature** of the prohibition—

It could not be expected that in so brief a history as that before us, every minute particular should be explained; indeed, it was intended that the subsequent revelations of God's will should clear up things which were left in a state of obscurity. Now from other parts of scripture we find that this prohibition was, in reality, a covenant; in which not Adam only, but all his posterity were savingly interested. In this covenant, Adam was the head and representative of all his seed; and they, to the remotest generations, were to stand or fall in him. In proof of this we may observe that,

1. In this prohibition are contained all the constituent parts of a covenant—

Here are the parties; God on the one side; and Adam, for himself and all his posterity, on the other.

Here are the terms expressly declared; there was a condition prescribed, namely, that Adam should obey the divine mandate; on his performance of which condition, he had a promise of life; but on his neglecting to perform it, a threatening of death.

Lastly, there was also a seal annexed to the covenant; as the rainbow was a seal of the covenant made with Noah; and circumcision and baptism were the seals of the Abrahamic and Christian covenants; so "the tree of life" was a seal of the covenant made with Adam, [Genesis 9:8-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 9.8-17); [Romans 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.11); it was a pledge to Adam, that, on his fulfilling the conditions imposed upon him, he should participate the promised reward.

2. The consequences flowing from the transgression of it, prove it to have been a covenant—

Death and condemnation were the immediate consequences of Adam's sin. Nor were these confined to the immediate transgressor; they were entailed on his remotest posterity; by that one act of his, all his children are constituted sinners, and are consigned over to death and condemnation.

Both scripture and experience attest this melancholy truth. How often is it repeated, that all these evils proceeded from the offence of one man! See [Romans 5:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12-19). How can we account for so many millions of persons being involved in his punishment, if they were not in some way or other involved also in his guilt? Surely "the Judge of all the earth will do right;" and therefore, when we behold punishment inflicted on so many beings, who were once formed after the divine image, we may be sure that in the sight of God they are considered as guilty; and, as infants cannot have contracted guilt in their own persons, they must have derived it from Adam, by whom they were represented, and in whom they died.

3. It is represented as exactly corresponding with the covenant which God made with Christ on our behalf—

Nothing can be more labored than the parallel which Paul draws between Adam and Christ in the passage we have just referred to. Not content with tracing all evil to the offence of one, he declares that that one person, even Adam, was "a type or figure of Him who was to come;" and that as death and condemnation came by the offence of ONE, that is, Adam; so righteousness and life come by the obedience of ONE, even Christ, [Romans 5:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12-19). In another place he draws precisely the same parallel, representing Christ as "the second man," "the last Adam, [1 Corinthians 15:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.45); 1 Corinthians 15:47;" and affirming, that "as in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive, [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.22)."

These things collectively, clearly prove that the prohibition was not a mere personal concern with Adam, but that it was a covenant made with him on behalf of himself and all his posterity.

If it be thought strange that God should make other people responsible for Adam's conduct; we answer, that, among ourselves, the happiness of children is greatly involved in the conduct of their parents; and that God expressly avows, on another occasion, that he did make a covenant with some on behalf of others who were yet unborn, [Deuteronomy 29:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.14-15); and if he did it on one occasion, he might with equal propriety do it on another.

But lest there should lurk in the mind any dissatisfaction with this mysterious appointment, we proceed to show,

III. The **reasonableness** of the prohibition—

1. Consider its reasonableness as a **prohibition**—

If the will of the Maker were to be enacted into a law, for the purpose of trying the obedience of man, we cannot conceive a more easy and simple method than the prohibiting the use of one single tree amidst the thousands which were laden with the choicest fruits. If God had prohibited all except one, it would have been highly reasonable that He should be obeyed, seeing that they were all the works of His hands, and He was at liberty to give or withhold, as it seemed good to Him. But when He gave the free enjoyment of all, and denied him only one, certainly nothing could be more reasonable than that His will should be honored by a cheerful compliance.

Nor was it less reasonable that the prohibition should be enforced with so severe a penalty; for the object of the penalty was to keep Adam from transgression, and to shut him up under a necessity of continuing holy and happy; and therefore the more awful the sanctions were, the more likely they were to answer the desired end; and the more gracious was God in annexing them to the prohibition.

2. Consider its reasonableness as a **covenant**—

It is but a small thing to say concerning the covenant, that it was just; we go much further; and affirm, that it was in the highest degree favorable and advantageous to all who were savingly interested in it. Consider the state in which Adam was, when subjected to the temptation; and compare with it the state in which we should meet temptation, supposing every one of us to be called forth to the trial as soon as ever we entered into the world;

He was perfect; we are imperfect.

He was in full possession of all his faculties; we would begin our conflict while all the powers of our souls were in a state of infantile weakness.

He was exposed to only one temptation, and that apparently easy to be withstood, on account of his having no evil disposition to close with it; we would be assaulted with ten thousand temptations, with every one of which we have a proneness to comply.

He conflicted with his enemy who was yet unskilled in the work of beguiling souls; we would engage him after his skill has been augmented by the experience of six thousand years.

He was fortified by the consideration that not his own happiness only, but that also of all his posterity, depended on him; whereas we would have no other motive to steadfastness than a regard to our own personal welfare.

Let anyone compare these states, and then say whether Adam or We were more likely to fall; and if it appears that his situation was far more conducive to stability than ours, then must it be considered as a great advantage to us to have had such a person for our covenant-head.

If it be said that eventually we are sufferers by it; we may well be satisfied with it; since if he, with all his advantages, was overcome, then there is no hope at all that we, under all our disadvantages, should have maintained our integrity. Nor can we doubt, but that if all the human race had been summoned before God at once to hear the proposal of having Adam for their covenant-head, every one of them would have accepted it, as a signal token of the divine goodness.

Inferences;

1. What folly it is to seek for happiness in sin!

Depraved as everything is by means of sin—yet is there all that we can wish for in this transient state, together with a liberty "richly to enjoy it." We have not a sense for which God has not provided a suitable and legitimate indulgence.

Survey the number, brightness, magnitude, and order of the heavenly bodies; or the innumerable multitude of animate and inanimate beings, with all their variegated hues, the exquisite formation of their parts, their individual symmetry, their harmonious configuration, their wonderful adaptation to their respective ends. Can we conceive a richer feast for our eyes?

Behold how the earth is strewed with flowers, that cast their perfumes to the wind, and regale us with their fragrances!

Where, among all the contrivances of art, will anything be found to equal the fruits of the earth, in the variety and richness of their flavor?

Or where will the sons of harmony produce such exquisite music as the feathered tribes gratuitously afford to the poorest cottager?

Take the feelings for which so many myriads of mankind sacrifice their eternal interests; and we will venture to affirm, that even those are called forth with keener sensibility and richer zest in the way of God's appointment, than they ever can be in a way of licentious and prohibited indulgence.

What need have we then of forbidden fruit? If nothing were left us in this world but the favor of God and the testimony of a good conscience, we would have a feast which nothing but Heaven can excel; but when, together with these, we have all that can conduce to the comfort of the body; when we have "the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come," is it not madness to seek for happiness in sin; to relinquish "the fountain of living waters, and to hue out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water?"

Let us but learn to enjoy God in everything, and everything in God, and we shall find that this world, polluted as it is, is yet a Paradise! With God's favor, bread is better than royal delicacies, and the lowest dungeon is a palace.

2. With what abhorrence should sin be viewed by us!

Look through the creation which God pronounced to be very good, and see how all things are out of course; the earth that should nourish us, is struck with barrenness; the elements that should administer to our comfort, are armed against us for our destruction. See the smallest insects in the creation invading us with irresistible force, and by their united efforts desolating our fairest prospects.

Look at man himself, once the image of his Maker; see with what malignant dispositions he is filled. See him passing his time here in labor and sorrow, and generation after generation swept away from the face of the earth! Follow him into the eternal world, and behold him banished from the presence of his God, and cast into a lake of fire and brimstone, there to endure the full penalty of all his sins!

Behold all this, I say, and consider that this is the work of sin! One sin introduced it all; and successive generations have lived only to complete what our first parents began. O that we could view sin in this light! O that we could bear in mind the judgment denounced against it, "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die!" We have warnings sufficient to intimidate the stoutest heart, "The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18);" "The soul that sins, it shall surely die, [Ezekiel 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.20);" "Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death, [James 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.15)." Only let sin be stripped of its deceitful attire, and be viewed in all its naked deformity—and we shall shudder even at the thought of it, and flee from it as from the face of a serpent!

3. How thankful should we be for the tree of life!

Blessed be God, the tree of life yet grows in the midst of us, [Revelation 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.7). No cherubim with flaming swords obstruct our way to it; on the contrary, all the angels in Heaven are ready to exert all their influence to conduct us to it; and God, even our Father, invites and entreats us to gather its life-giving fruits. This tree of life is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ, "it bears twelve manner of fruits," suited to all our various necessities; and its very "leaves are for the healing of the nations, [Revelation 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.2)."

Let us then flock around this tree; let us with humble boldness stretch forth our hands to gather its fruits. We may see around us many who have already experienced its efficacy to heal the spiritual sick, and to revive the spiritual dead. Let us view the Savior as God's instituted ordinance for this very end; and now that he is accessible unto us, let us approach him; lest haply the accepted time be terminated, and we eat forever the bitter fruits of our transgression!

#4

THE SERPENT BEGUILING EVE

**[Genesis 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.4)**

"And the serpent said unto the woman; You shall not surely die!"

In reference to the fact before us, Paul says, "The serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety." And great is the subtlety which appears throughout the whole of his conduct on this occasion.

He took an opportunity of addressing himself to Eve when she was alone, so that she might become an easier victim to his wiles. He insinuated his temptation first in a way of inquiry only, "Has God said, You shall not eat of every tree in the garden?" By this he intimated, that she had made some mistake respecting the supposed prohibition, since it was scarcely probable that her Maker, who had granted her everything else in the garden, should impose such an unnecessary restriction upon her. When, in answer to this, Eve informed him that not only was the restriction really given, but that it was enforced with the most tremendous sanction that could possibly be imagined, he again insinuated that she must be under a mistake, since it could not be that so good a God should inflict so heavy a judgment for so slight an offence, "You shall not surely die!"

Now this is the very temptation with which he has ever since, even to this present hour, assaulted unwary men, and by which he is yet daily ruining millions of the human race. We will therefore endeavor to put you on your guard against it, by showing,

I. The falsehood of Satan's temptation—

Two things were here insinuated, namely; That the threatening was not of such a terrific import as she imagined; and that, whatever it might import, it would not be eventually executed. But in both these things "he lied unto her;" for,

1. God will fulfill his threatenings to whatever they may relate—

See his threatenings to individuals; Ahab, in dependence on his false prophets, and on Satan who inspired them, thought to come off victorious; but, notwithstanding his device to escape the notice of the Syrians, he was slain, according to the prediction of the prophet Micaiah.

Hiel the Bethelite would rebuild the city of Jericho; but did he escape the judgment denounced many hundred years before, against any person who should presume to make the attempt? Did he not lay the foundation in the death of his first-born, and raise up the gates in the death of his youngest son, [Joshua 6:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.26) with [1 Kings 16:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 16.34).

See his threatenings against the whole nation of Israel. Were they not carried captive to Babylon, according to His word? And is not the dispersion of the Jews at this day a proof, that no Word of God shall ever fall to the ground?

See his threatenings against the whole world. Did not the deluge come according to the prediction, and sweep away every living creature (those only excepted that were in the ark) from the face of the earth? Let us be sure that God is true; and that whatever He has spoken shall surely come to pass.

2. He will fulfill them in the extent that is here declared—

Death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal were included in the sentence denounced against transgression; and on our first parents it came, the very day that they ate of the forbidden tree. They did not, it is true, cease on that day to live, because God had purposes to serve by their continuance in life; but the seeds of death were that day implanted in their constitution; and in due time they returned to their native dust. That they died at that very moment a spiritual death, is evident from their conduct; for they foolishly hoped to hide themselves among the trees of the garden from the eyes of the omniscient God; and offered vain excuses for their transgression, instead of humbling themselves for it before God.

To eternal death also they were subjected; and to it they would have been consigned, had not God, in his infinite mercy, provided a way of deliverance from it, through that seed of the woman, who was in due time to bruise the serpent's head.

If it is doubted whether God will execute so heavy a judgment on the sinners of mankind, I hesitate not to declare, that he most assuredly will; since he has himself declared it in terms that admit of no reasonable doubt. See [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.46), and [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48), and [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11). "He is not a man that he will lie, nor the son of man that he will repent."

But since so many are deceived by this suggestion, I will endeavor to show, more distinctly,

II. The danger of listening to Satan's temptation—

The effect of this sad delusion is visible in all around us. It is entirely owing to this, that Satan retains so many in bondage, and leads them captive at his will.

1. Hence it is that men make so light of **sin**—

Why is it, I would ask, that men are so easily drawn aside by every temptation, and that for a momentary gratification they will offend their God? Is it not from a secret persuasion that God will not fulfill his threatenings, and that they may sin against him with impunity?

If men saw before their eyes the instruments of torture whereby the violators of a law were to be put to a lingering and cruel death, and knew at the same time that there was no possibility of escape to anyone who should transgress the law—would they incur the penalty with the same indifference that they now transgress the laws of God? How much less then would they rush into wretchedness, if they saw Hell open before them, and heard the groans of those who are now suffering under the wrath of God! Truly, they would not then "make a mock at sin, but would tremble at it, and flee from it as from a deadly viper!

If then you would be preserved from sin, listen not a moment to this accursed suggestion; and if the whole world should unite in saying, "You shall not surely die!" reply to them, "Get behind me, Satan!" for "you are a liar from the beginning."

2. Hence it is also that men make so light of **salvation**—

Salvation by Christ is offered to a ruined world. But who believes our report? Who receives it with that gratitude which it might well be expected that a perishing sinner should feel towards his reconciled God and Savior? With the exception of a few, the whole world regard the Gospel as little better than a cunningly devised fable; so faint are the emotions it excites, and so transient are the effects which it produces. And what is the reason of this? Is it not that men do not feel their need of such a Savior, and that they do not believe that God's threatenings will ever be executed upon them? Yes! To this source must it be traced; for if they truly believed, that the wrath of God, which is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, would fall upon them, and that all their hope of escaping it was by embracing the Gospel, they would flee to Christ with their whole hearts, and cleave unto him with their whole souls, and not rest a moment until they saw themselves within the gates of the city of refuge.

Were they duly sensible of their danger, even a hope, a mere perhaps that God might have mercy upon them, would be sufficient to make them weep before him day and night. Not a word of mercy was mixed in Jonah's message to Nineveh; yet the most distant hope of mercy was sufficient to encourage that whole city to repent in dust and ashes. What then would not all the promises of the Gospel effect, if men really felt the greatness of their guilt and danger?

It is evident, that all the indifference of men about the Gospel must be traced to this one source; their believing of Satan's lie in preference to the truth of God! If ever the Gospel is to have a saving influence on our hearts, we must begin by rejecting this suggestion of the devil, and by believing that all the threatenings of God against sin and sinners shall assuredly be accomplished.

Observe then, on the whole,

1. What need there is of fidelity in ministers—

Satan at this time, no less than formerly, suggests to men, "You shall not surely die!" and his emissaries all the world over are re-echoing the delusive sound. Every friend we have, father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, the very instant we begin to dread the wrath of God, unite their endeavors to compose our minds, by saying, 'There is no such penalty against sin as you suppose, nor have you any reason to fear that it shall be inflicted on you.'

Our own wicked hearts also are but too ready to adopt a sentiment so gratifying to the mind, and to speak peace to us on insufficient grounds.

What would be the consequence if ministers also favored such delusions, and, through fear of alarming you, neglected to warn you of your danger? Would not Satan triumph to a far greater extent than he already does? Would he not be secure of his prey? Is not this the very effect produced, wherever the Gospel, instead of being preached with apostolic fidelity, is kept upon the background, and modified to the taste of a deluded world?

Be thankful then if you hear your guilt and danger faithfully set before you. Be thankful, as you would be if a man, seeing your house on fire, roused you from your slumbers, and saved you from death. And, if God has given to you this mercy, improve it with all diligence, by fleeing from the wrath to come, and laying hold on eternal life!

2. What a mercy it is, that, notwithstanding the truth of God in his threatenings, there is a way of salvation opened for us in the Gospel—

Yes, God can be true, and yet absolve the sinner from his guilt; for, in Christ Jesus, "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other!" The penalty of death has been inflicted upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the surety and substitute of sinners; and, if we believe in him, all that he has done and suffered for us shall be so imputed to us as to be accepted of God in our behalf, so that God shall be "a just God, and yet a Savior," yes "just, and yet the justifier" of sinful man! O blessed tidings! amply sufficient to pacify the most afflicted mind, and to warrant in our hearts the most joyful hope!

Brethren, only believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I will adopt with confidence the very words of Satan, and say, "You shall not surely die!" I will go further still, and from a doubtful suggestion turn them to a direct affirmation, and say, 'Surely you shall not die.' So says our blessed Lord himself, "My sheep shall never perish!" Paul also says, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!"

On this, therefore, you may rely, with the fullest possible assurance; for, if the threatenings of God shall be fulfilled, so shall also His promises be; not one of them shall ever fail, as long as the world shall stand. Fear not then to see the worst of your state; fear not to acknowledge the extent of your guilt and danger, since the provision for you in Christ Jesus is fully commensurate with your necessities, and suited to your needs. Only believe in Him, and you shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end!

#5

THE FALL OF MAN

**[Genesis 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.6-7)**

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings."

The happiness of our first parents in Paradise must have far exceeded anything which we can conceive. Formed in the image of God, they had not a desire or thought contrary to His holy will. There was no cloud upon their understanding.

There was no sinful bias on their will.

There was nothing inordinate in their affections.

With respect to outward comforts, they possessed all that they could wish. God himself had planted a garden for them, and given them the whole produce, except one tree, for their support. Above all, they enjoyed the freest fellowship with their Maker, and conversed with Him as a man converses with his friend. But this happiness, alas! was of short continuance; for Satan, who had left his first estate, and, from being a bright angel before the throne of God, had become an apostate spirit and a wicked fiend; he, I say, envied their felicity, and sought to reduce them to the same misery with himself.

An opportunity for making his attempt soon occurred. He saw the woman near the forbidden tree, and at a distance from her husband. So favorable an occasion was not to be lost. He instantly took possession of a serpent; which being confessedly the most subtle of all animals, was least likely to create suspicion in her mind, and fittest to be employed in so arduous a service.

Through the instrumentality of this creature, Satan entered into conversation with her; and, as we learn from the history before us, succeeded in withdrawing both her and her husband from their allegiance to God.

In the text we have a summary of the fatal tragedy. In it, as connected with the context, the whole plot is developed, and the awful catastrophe declared.

That we may have a just view of the conduct of our first parents, we shall consider,

I. Their temptation—

The scope of Satan's conversation with Eve was to persuade her to partake of the forbidden tree,

1. With safety—

With this view, his first attempt was to raise doubts in her mind respecting the prohibition. And here his subtlety is very conspicuous; he does not shock her feelings by any strong assertion; but asks, as it were for information, whether such a prohibition as he had heard of had been really given. Nevertheless, his mode of putting the question insinuates that he could scarcely credit the report; because the imposing of such a restraint would be contrary to the generosity which God had shown in other respects, and to the distinguished love which he had professed to bear towards them.

Now, though he did not thus far prevail as to induce her to deny that God had withheld from her the fruit of that tree—yet he gained much even in this first address; for, he led her to maintain a conversation with him; he disposed her also to soften the terms in which the prohibition had been given. God had said, "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die;" and she, in reporting it, said, "You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die;" thus converting a most positive threatening of instant and certain death, into a gentle caution against a possible, or probable, misfortune. And though she might intend nothing more than to prevent his entertaining any hard thoughts of God, she hereby emboldened him to prosecute his purpose in a more direct and open manner.

Improving the advantage he had already gained, he proceeded to question in direct terms the grounds of her fears, in relation to the penalty, "You shall not surely die!" He here intimates that she must be mistaken with respect both to the extent and certainty of the penalty. God could never threaten "death" for such an offence as that; he could threaten nothing worse even for the most heinous transgression that could be committed; how then could he annex that to so small a matter as the eating of a piece of fruit? At least, if God did put forth his threat, he certainly would never execute it, "You shall not surely die;" it could not be, that a just and good God should ever proceed to such rigorous measures on so slight an occasion. By this daring assertion, he quite disarmed her; and persuaded her, that she must have misunderstood the divine declaration; or, at least, that it never could be carried into effect.

2. With advantage—

Finding that Eve did not revolt at his impious assertions, he went on to direct and open blasphemy. He knew that to an intelligent and holy being, nothing was so desirable as knowledge. He therefore affirmed, that there was in the fruit of that tree a virtue capable of wonderfully enlarging her views, so that she and her husband would "become as gods," and possess a self-sufficiency and independence suited to that high character.

In confirmation of this, he appeals to God himself; and blasphemously insinuates, that God, in withholding the fruit from them, had been actuated by nothing but envy, and a jealousy, lest they should become as wise and happy as himself.

Such was the temptation with which that "old serpent" assaulted Eve; hoping that, if he could prevail with her, he might, through her influence, overcome her husband also.

Happy would it have been, if we could have reported of them, as we can of the second Adam, that they repelled the Tempter. But, in following the course of their history, we are constrained to notice,

II. Their sin—

Eve, overpowered by the alluring aspect of the fruit, and the hope of attaining a knowledge as superior to what she already possessed, as this serpent's was to that of all the rest of the creation—ate of the fruit, and prevailed upon her husband to partake with her. A variety of questions might be asked respecting different parts of this history; but where God has not been pleased to inform us, we should be contented to be ignorant. And where no certainty can be attained, we judge it better to pass over matters in silence, than to launch out into the boundless and unprofitable regions of conjecture.

Without inquiring how she prevailed with him, or what would have been the effect if she alone had fallen, let it suffice to know, that Adam transgressed in eating the forbidden fruit, and that this was the sin whereby he and all his posterity were ruined. That the offence may not be thought trivial, let us consider of what malignant qualities it was composed:

1. What pride!

Our first parents were endowed with facilities unknown to any other creatures. While, in common, with all the rest, they possessed a beautifully constructed frame of body, they had a rational soul also, which assimilated them to God; so that they were a connecting link between God and the brute-creation, a kind of compound of both. Moreover, they were constituted lords of this lower world; and all other creatures were subjected to their dominion. None was above them but God himself. But they chose to have no superior; they desired to be as gods. What daring presumption! What criminal ambition! It was time indeed that "their loftiness should be bowed down, and their haughtiness be made low."

2. What unbelief!

God had spoken with a perspicuity which could not admit of misconstruction, and an energy that precluded doubt. Yet they listen to the suggestions of a wicked fiend, and believe the lies of Satan in preference to Jehovah's word. Can anything be conceived more insulting to the Majesty of God than this? Can an offence be deemed light which offers such an indignity to the God of truth?

3. What ingratitude!

What could God have done more for them, than he had done? What could they have, to augment their felicity? And, if any restraint at all was to be laid upon them for the purpose of trying their fidelity and obedience, what smaller restraint could be conceived than the prohibition of one single tree amidst ten thousand? Was one tree too much for Him to reserve, who had created all the rest for their use? Were they to think much of so small an act of self-denial, where so much was provided for their indulgence? Were they to be so unmindful of all which He had done for them, and of all the good things which He had in store for them, as to refuse Him so small a testimony of their regard? Amazing! Incredible! that such favors should be so requited!

4. What rebellion!

God had an undoubted right to command; and, whatever His injunctions were, they were bound to obey them. But how do they regard this single, this easy precept? They count it at nothing; they transgress it; they violate it voluntarily, immediately, and without so much as a shadow of reason. They lose sight of all the considerations of duty, or self-interest; they are absorbed in the one thought of personal gratification; and upon that they rush, without one moment's concern, how much they may displease their Friend and Benefactor, their Creator and Governor, their Lord and Judge. Shall not God bring judgment for such rebellion as this?

After their transgression, we are naturally led to inquire into,

III. Their recompense—

Satan had told them, that "their eyes would be opened," but little did they think in what sense his words should be verified! "Their eyes were now opened;" but only like the eyes of the Syrian army when they saw themselves in the heart of an enemy's country, [2 Kings 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.20); or those of the rich man when he lifted them up in Hell torments. [Luke 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.23). They beheld now, what it was their happiness not to know—the consequences of sin.

1. They beheld the **guilt** they had contracted—

Sin, while yet they were only solicited to commit it, appeared of small malignity; its present pleasures seemed to overbalance its future pains. But when the bait was swallowed, how glad would they have been if they had never viewed it with desire, or ventured to trespass on what they knew to have been forbidden! Now all the aggravations of their sin would rush into their minds at once, and overwhelm them with shame.

It is true, they could not yet view their conduct with penitence and contrition, because God had not yet given to them the grace of repentance; they could at present feel little else than self-indignant rage, and self-tormenting despondency; but their anguish, though not participating in the sincere feelings of self-loathing and self-abhorrence, must have been pungent beyond all expression; and they must have seemed to themselves to be monsters of iniquity!

2. They beheld the **misery** they had incurred—

Wherever they cast their eyes, they must now see how awfully they were despoiled. If they lifted their eyes up to Heaven, there they must behold the favor of their God forever forfeited. If they cast their eyes around, everything must remind them of their base ingratitude; and they would envy the basest of the brute creation. If they looked within, O what a sink of iniquity were they now become! The nakedness of their bodies, which in innocence administered no occasion for shame, now caused them to feel what need they had of covering, not for their bodies merely, but much more for their souls. If they thought of their progeny, what pangs must they feel on their account; to have innumerable generations rise in succession to inherit their depravity, and partake their doom! If they contemplated the hour of dissolution, how terrible must that appear to be consigned, through diseases and death, to their native dust; and to protract a miserable existence in that world, where the fallen angels were banished, and from whence there can be no return!

Methinks, under the weight of all these considerations, they wept until they could weep no more, [1 Samuel 30:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.4); and until their exhausted nature sinking under the load, they fell asleep through excess of sorrow, [Luke 22:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.45).

Inferences:

1. How deplorable is the state of every unregenerate man!

Anyone who considers the state of our first parents after their fall, may easily conceive that it was most pitiable. But their case is a just representation of our own. We are despoiled of the divine image, and filled with all hateful and abominable dispositions. We are under the displeasure of the Almighty. We have nothing to which we can look forward in this world, but troubles, disorders, and death; and in the eternal world, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish for evermore! Why do we not endeavor to get our minds suitably affected with this our melancholy condition? Why do we not see ourselves, as in a looking-glass; and apply to ourselves that commiseration which we are ready to bestow on our first parents? Alas! "the god of this world has blinded our minds!" else we should smite upon our bosoms with sorrow and anguish, and implore without delay the divine mercy which we so much need.

2. How astonishing was the grace of God in providing a Savior for us!

It is needless to say that our first parents could do nothing to repair the evil which they had committed. And how far they were from attempting to make reparation for it, we see, when they fled from God, and cast the blame on others, yes even on God himself, rather than acknowledge their transgressions before him! But God, for His own great name sake, interposed, and promised them a Savior, through whom they, and their believing posterity, would be restored to his favor. To this gracious promise we owe it, that we are not all involved in endless and irremediable misery. Let Heaven and earth stand astonished at the goodness of our God! And let all the sinners of mankind testify their acceptance of his offered mercy, by fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them!

3. How vigilant should we all be against the evil devices of Satan!

He who "beguiled Eve under the form of a serpent," can assume any shape, for the purpose of deceiving us! He is sometimes "transformed into an angel of light," so that we may be ready to follow his advice, as if he were a messenger from Heaven. But we may easily distinguish his footsteps, if only we attend to the following inquiries:

Does he lessen in our eyes, the sinfulness of sin?

Does he weaken our apprehensions of sin's danger?

Does he persuade us to imbibe that which is forbidden?

Would he make us think lightly of that which is threatened?

Does he stimulate our desires after evil by any considerations of the pleasure or the profit that shall attend it?

Does he calumniate God to us, as though He were unfriendly, oppressive, or severe?

If our temptations are accompanied with any of these things, we may know assuredly that "the enemy has done this," and that he is seeking our destruction. Let us then be on our guard against him. Let us watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. However remote we may imagine ourselves to be from the love of evil, let us not think ourselves secure; for if Satan vanquished our first parents under all the advantages they enjoyed, he will certainly overcome us, unless "we resist him," "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

#6

EXCUSES MADE BY OUR FIRST PARENTS, AFTER THEIR FALL

**[Genesis 3:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.11-13)**

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The immediate effects of sin are not easily discovered by us at this time; for if we look for them in ourselves, our partiality and self-love conceal them from us; and if we look for them in others, the universal prevalence of those effects prevents us from ascribing them to their proper cause. To see them in their true colors, we should be able to contrast the habits of some person during a state of innocence with those which he manifests after the commission of sin.

Doubtless there are glaring instances of iniquity, from the investigation of which we may gather instruction; but we shall make our observations to the greatest advantage, if we examine the records respecting the conduct of our first parents after their unhappy fall. The accounts given of them are not indeed very full and circumstantial; yet the narration, brief as it is, is sufficient to elucidate the immediate influence of sin upon the mind, as well as its remoter consequences in the destruction of the soul.

There are two things in particular which we shall be led to notice from the words before us:

I. The way in which men manifest their consciousness of guilt—

Mark the conduct of our first parents. While they were innocent, they were strangers either to shame or fear; but instantly after their transgression, they made coverings for themselves of fig-leaves, and fled from the presence of their God. Here we may behold ourselves as in a looking-glass; they have set a pattern to us which all their posterity have followed; however men may affect to be innocent, they all be-tray their consciousness of guilt in these two things:

1. They conceal themselves from themselves, and from each other—

Knowing that their hearts are depraved, and that, if closely inspected, they would exhibit a most disgusting appearance, men will not turn their eyes inwards. They will not examine the motives and principles of their actions. They cast a veil over the workings of pride and ambition, of envy and malice, of falsehood and covetousness, of carnality and selfishness. Then, because they see no evil in their actions, they hastily conclude there is none. So successful are they in hiding from themselves their own deformity, that when all around them are even amazed at the impropriety of their conduct, they take credit to themselves for virtuous principles and laudable deportment.

If we should attempt to open their eyes, and to set before them their own picture, they would not even look at it, but would be offended with our fidelity, and condemn us as destitute of either charity or candor.

Now, would men act in this manner if they had not a secret consciousness that all was not right within? Would they not rather be glad of any assistance whereby they might discover any latent evil; or, at least, be glad to "come to the light, that their deeds might be made manifest that they were wrought in God?"

There is the still greater concern in men to hide their shame from each other. The whole community of mankind with each other is one continued system of concealment. All endeavor to impose on others, by assuming the appearances of virtue; but no one will give credit to his neighbor for being as guiltless in his heart, as he seems to be in his conduct. A thorough knowledge of a person whose principles have been tried, will indeed gain our confidence; but who has so good an opinion of human nature in general as to commit his wife or daughter to the hands of a perfect stranger; or to give him unlimited access to all his treasures; or even to take his word, where he can as easily obtain a legal security?

But, if men were not conscious of depravity within themselves, why should they be so suspicious of others? The fact is, they know themselves to have many corrupt propensities; and justly concluding that human nature is the same in all, they feel the necessity of withholding confidence where they have not been warranted by experience to place it.

2. They shun, rather than desire, the presence of God—

God comes to all of us in his word, and speaks to us in the language of love and mercy. He bids us to draw near to Him, and to enjoy "fellowship with him, and with his Son, Jesus Christ." But are these employments suited to the taste of all? or do the habits of the generality evince any regard for these inestimable privileges? Nay, if we endeavor to set God before them, and to make known to them his will—do they consider us as their friends and benefactors? They may bear with us, indeed, in the exercise of our public ministry; but will they be pleased, if we come home to their houses, and labor to bring them, as it were, into the presence of God? Will they not be ready to say to us, as the demoniac did to Christ, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" or, like the Jews of old, "Prophesy unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits; make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us!"

Now would this be the conduct of men, if they were not conscious of much guilt within? Would a man who had just received gold from the mint, be afraid of having it tried by a touchstone? Or one who was perfectly innocent of a crime, be afraid of being interrogated in relation to it? Would not rather the knowledge of God be desirable to one who had no wish but to perform his will? Would he not account it his highest happiness to gain an increasing acquaintance with his Savior, and a more entire conformity to his image?

When the guilt of men can no longer be concealed, they have many refuges of lies to which they flee; to expose which, we shall show,

II. The way in which they endeavor to palliate and excuse their guilt—

Our first parents indeed confessed their transgression, but in a way which clearly showed, that they were not humbled for it. Thus:

1. When we cannot deny our guilt, we cast it upon others—

Doubtless we all are accessory to the production of much guilt in others; and it is well to take shame to ourselves in that view. But to take occasion from this to excuse our own wickedness, is only to add sin to sin! Yet who does not betake himself to this refuge?

Mark little children—they will deny their faults as long as there remains for them any hope of concealment. And when they are clearly detected, they will do their utmost to shift the blame off from themselves. According to the nature of the crime alleged, they will impute it to accident, or inadvertence, or mistake, or, like our first parents, to the instigation and example of their accomplices.

What is the disposition which shows itself in people of riper years, when they are called to account for any evil that they have committed, or when their angry passions have involved them in dispute and quarrel? Is it not the endeavor of each to incriminate the other, in hopes thereby to exculpate himself? Or when no particular ill-will is exercised towards others, is not the same system prevalent; and do not men justify their own conduct from the habits and examples of those around them?

But what folly is this! Did the Serpent compel Eve to eat the fruit? Or was Adam necessitated to follow her example? They were free agents in what they did; and they should have rejected with abhorrence the first proposals of sin, however harmless they might appear, and by whoever they might be made. And in the same manner, it is no excuse to us that the ways of iniquity are crowded; for we are to withstand the solicitations that would allure us from God, and stem the torrent of sin that would drive us from him.

2. When we cannot deny our guilt, we even cast it even upon God himself—

There is peculiar force in those words of Adam, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate!" It is no less than a reflection upon God himself for giving him the woman; and a casting of the blame upon him as accessory at least to his fall, if not also as the original cause of it.

It is thus also that we account for our transgressions from the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed, and thus ascribe them rather to the dispensations of Providence, than to our own willful depravity. One is poor, and therefore has not leisure time to consult the welfare of his soul; or is under the authority of others, and cannot serve God without subjecting himself to their displeasure. Another is rich, and cannot deviate so far from the habits of the world, as to conform to the precise rules which God has prescribed. In this manner, people endeavor to persuade themselves that a life of entire devotedness to God is incompatible with their worldly duties; and that their deviations or defects are rather their misfortune than their fault.

Some indeed will be yet more bold in accusing God; and, when condemned for giving the rein to their sinful appetites, will say, 'Why did God give me these passions? I cannot act otherwise than I do!'

How far these excuses will avail in the day of judgment, it befits every one to consider with fear and trembling. They may stifle the accusations of a guilty conscience now; but there is not a man in the universe so stupid as seriously to believe that his conscience will acquit him at the tribunal of his God.

We shall conclude with an address:

1. To those who are unhumbled for their sins—

Some are so impious, that "they declare their sin as Sodom; the very show of their countenance witnesses against them." To such people we say with the prophet, "Woe unto them! [Isaiah 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.9)." Nor can we deliver any milder message to those who "cover their transgressions, as Adam, and hide their iniquity in their bosom! [Job 31:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.33)," for God's Word to them is plain, "He who covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy! [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)."

It is absolutely indispensable that we humble ourselves before God, and that we repent in dust and ashes. God has noted our transgressions, whether we have observed them or not; for "there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves, [Job 34:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.22)." God is extremely earnest in endeavoring to impress this thought upon our minds, [Isaiah 29:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.15) with [Amos 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.2-3). It is equally certain that we cannot impose upon him by any vain excuses. The day is coming, when he will not only ask in general, "Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?" but will interrogate us, as he did Eve, with holy indignation, saying, "What is this that you have done!" Are you aware of its malignity? are you prepared to meet the consequences?

O let us, every one of us, humble ourselves before him, while yet the effects of his displeasure may be averted from us; but if we yet remain impenitent and stout-hearted, a sudden and irremediable destruction shall come upon us! [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1).

2. To those whose hearts are beginning to relent—

Do not think that a small and transient humiliation is sufficient. If you could weep "rivers of tears," it would be no more than the occasion calls for. You may perhaps comfort yourselves with the thought of not having committed many or great offences; but consider what it was that brought guilt and ruin upon the whole race of mankind; it was not many offences, but one. Nor was it what would appear to us a very heinous sin, but only the violation of a positive precept, the eating of a forbidden fruit. Reflect on this, and you will derive little consolation from the thought that you are not so bad as others.

But whether your sins have been more or less heinous, there is one Refuge, and only one, to which you must flee for safety. The refuge provided for our first parents was, "The seed of the woman, who was in due time to bruise the serpent's head." The same is provided for you. Jesus was born into the world for this very end. He has made a full atonement for sin; and if "only you acknowledge your transgressions," and believe in him, they shall be "remembered against you no more forever."

#7

THE SEED OF THE WOMAN

**[Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)**

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

This was the first promise that was ever given to fallen man. The occasion on which it was given was this; Satan had beguiled our mother Eve, and, through her, had prevailed on Adam to transgress; and he had thereby destroyed both them and all their posterity; for, since they were corrupt, nothing but what was corrupt could proceed from them. But God, in his abundant mercy, interposed for our fallen race, who must without such interposition have been involved in all the misery of the fallen angels.

Against Satan he denounced a curse suited to his crime; and at the same time informed him, that, though for the present he had prevailed over the woman, a seed would spring from her who should execute on him the vengeance he deserved, and rescue mankind from the misery he had entailed upon them!

Now, as the oak with all its luxuriant branches is contained in the acorn, so was the whole of salvation, however copiously unfolded in subsequent revelations, comprehended in this one prophecy; which is, in fact, the sum and summary of the whole Bible. And on this promise all the saints lived, during the space of 2000 years; yes, all from Adam to the time of Abraham were encouraged, comforted, and saved by this promise alone, illustrated as it was by sacrifices appointed by the Lord.

In explaining this prophecy, I shall call your attention to,

I. The person here predicted—

It was the Lord Jesus Christ; who was in a peculiar way "the seed of the woman;" for he was formed in the womb simply by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of a pure virgin altogether without the intervention of man. And this was necessary, for, had he been born like other men, he would have been in the loins of Adam, like other men; and therefore would, like them, have been partaker of his guilt and corruption. But, being the sole and immediate workmanship of God, he was absolutely perfect, and therefore capable of sustaining the office of a Savior for fallen man; whereas, if he had been otherwise formed, he would have needed a Savior for himself, and been incapable of effecting salvation for others. Thus you see, that when it was impossible for man to restore himself to God, God "laid help for him upon One that was Mighty;" on one who, being God and man in one person, was able to effect for men all that their necessities required. As man, he could atone for sin; and as God, he could render that atonement available for all who would trust in him.

At the same time that this prophecy announced the Messiah's advent, it declared,

II. The conflicts the Messiah would sustain—

Between Satan and him, God put an irreconcilable enmity; which, without a moment's intermission, has raged, from that very time even to the present hour. Satan, having, thus introduced sin into the world, instigated every child of Adam to the commission of it. And how far he prevailed, may be seen in this, that he induced the very first-born of man to murder his own righteous brother, for no other reason than because he was more righteous than himself. At times he had so entirely reduced the whole race of man to his dominion, that scarcely a righteous man existed upon earth!

And, when God sent prophets to reclaim the world, Satan stirred up the people of every age and place to destroy them.

At last, when the promised Seed himself came, Satan only exerted himself the more violently against him, if by any means he might prevail to destroy the Savior himself. No sooner was Jesus born into the world, than Satan stimulated Herod to destroy all the males around Bethlehem from two years old and under, so that it might be impossible for Jesus to escape.

And, when Jesus was entering upon his ministry, he urged him to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, if perhaps he might thus induce him, under an idea of trusting in God, to destroy himself. Afterwards he stirred up Peter to dissuade him from executing the work he had undertaken; saying, "Master, spare yourself." When he could not prevail in any of these ways, he put it into the heart of Judas to betray him, and stirred up all the Priests and Elders to put him to death.

In like manner has this wicked adversary still prosecuted his malignant work even to the present hour, blinding the eyes of men, and hardening their hearts, and "leading them captive at his will!" And if any have dared to resist his will, he has stirred up all his own agents, to persecute them, and to put them to death!

On the other hand, Christ has also fought against him from the beginning, rescuing men from his dominion, and "turning millions from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." In the days of his flesh especially, he showed his superiority to Satan, by casting him out from many whom he had possessed, and constraining him to relinquish the hold which he had gained, both of their bodies and their souls. And though he seemed himself to sink under Satan's attacks—yet did he, in fact, defeat Satan by the very means which that adversary had used for his destruction! For by death he overcame death, and "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14)." Yes, "on the very cross itself he spoiled all the principalities and powers of Hell, triumphing over them openly in it, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)." And in his ascension, "he led captivity itself captive;" and has bound all the hosts of Hell, "reserving them in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

In his people, too, he gets the victory from day to day, enabling them to resist him manfully, and to trample both Satan and all his hosts under their feet.

This conflict is still going on from day to day. The God of this world, and the God of Heaven, are contending for us, and in us, 2 Corinthians 4:4; [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6); and as long as the world shall stand, will this contest continue.

But in our text we are informed, that Jesus will prevail, and enjoy at last,

III. The victory assured to the Messiah —

In the conflict, the Savior's "heel is bruised," but "he bruises the head" of his great adversary, and breaks his power for evermore. Behold the Savior on his throne of glory, far above all the principalities and powers, whether of Heaven or Hell! Behold the progress of his Gospel in every age! See in Heaven the multitudes which no man can number, continually increased by fresh accessions from every quarter of the globe, from the most blinded votaries of Satan among the Heathen, as well as from his more specious servants among ourselves! See the weakest of men enabled to triumph over him, and, though persecuted like their divine Master, "made more than conquerors through him that loved them!" This is going forward among ourselves; so that you see the most devoted vassals of Satan casting off his yoke, and "brought into the liberty of the sons of God;" and soon shall you behold those whom once he held in the most miserable bondage, seated upon thrones of glory, and actually sitting in judgment upon the angels, as judges with their divine Master, [1 Corinthians 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.2-3).

Yes, it is but a little time, and the seed of Christ, as well as Christ himself, will be seated upon thrones of glory! While Satan, and his seed, shall be cast into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels!

Such is the prophecy before us; and in this way is it accomplishing yet daily; and shall be accomplished, until the final destinies of each shall terminate the contest for evermore.

Behold then, brethren,

1. How marvelous is the grace of God!

Think under what circumstances he made this promise to man. He had placed our first parents in Paradise, where there was everything that could conduce to their happiness; and he himself visited and communed with them, as a friend. Yet did they, on the very first temptation, violate his express command; and then, instead of humbling themselves before him, they fled from him; and, when summoned into his presence, excused themselves, and even cast the blame of their iniquity on him, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate. The woman, whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

What might we expect now that he should do unto them? Surely, that he should consign them over to the misery they deserved. But no; unsought and unsolicited, he promised them a Savior, even his only dear Son, who should rescue both them and all their believing posterity out of the hands of their great adversary.

Now then, I ask, if God, unsolicited, bestowed the Savior himself on these impenitent offenders, will he refuse salvation to any penitent who calls upon him? Let no sinner in the universe despond; but let every one see in this prophecy how abundant and inconceivable is the grace of God.

2. How complete shall be the victory of all who believe in Christ!

You appear to be in a hopeless condition, because your corruptions are so great and your enemies are so mighty. Go, then, to the cross of Christ, and there see the Savior himself hanging, a helpless and inanimate corpse! What hope has he of victory? Wait a moment, and you will see. Behold him rising from the grave, ascending to Heaven, sending down the Holy Spirit, establishing his kingdom upon earth, surrounded in Heaven by myriads of his redeemed, and sealing up his great adversary, with all his hosts, in the bottomless abyss of Hell! See all this; and then know what shall be the outcome of your conflicts.

You are fighting with a vanquished enemy; and it is but a little time, and he, your Almighty Savior, "will bruise Satan under your feet," and will elevate you to thrones of glory, like unto his own. Only follow him in his conflicts, and you shall be partakers with him in all his victories and triumphs for evermore.

#8

THE WAY OF SALVATION ILLUSTRATED TO OUR FIRST PARENTS

**[Genesis 3:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.21-24)**

"Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made garments of skin, and clothed them. Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."

The works of God are extremely different from those which are carried on by man. Creatures of limited capacity are compelled to act as unforeseen occasions require; and hence their works are, for the most part, independent and detached, without being regulated by any fixed system; but the works of God are all united and harmonious, as parts of one grand whole.

In the structure of the tabernacle and all its diversified rites, there was not anything, however minute or obscure, which did not shadow forth some mystery. This appears from the strict injunction given to Moses to "make everything according to the pattern shown to him in the mount."

It is thus also with respect to all the most remarkable events recorded in the Bible, whether they relate to the Jewish, patriarchal, or antediluvian ages; they were all, in some respect, figurative and emblematic.

Among these we must certainly number the fall of man, with all its attendant circumstances; the covenant made with him, the means by which he was induced to violate it, the way provided for his recovery, were all of lasting and universal importance.

In like manner, the facts specified in our text must be regarded, not as mere uninteresting happenings, but as occurrences of most mysterious import.

In God's conduct towards our first parents, as it is here related, we may see,

I. The manner in which he illustrated to them his promised salvation—

Our first parents, feeling in themselves the sad effects of their fall, "sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons." But God was pleased to clothe them in another manner, even with the skins of beasts; and thus to direct their attention to:

1. The blood of atonement—

We are not expressly told that the animals which were slain on this occasion were offered in sacrifice; but if we duly weigh the reasons for believing that God ordered them to be slain for this purpose, we can scarcely entertain any doubt upon the subject.

In the first place, we may be sure that the offering of sacrifices was not an institution of man's device; and that, if it were, it could not be pleasing and acceptable to God. How could it enter into the mind of man to imagine, that the blood of a beast could make any satisfaction to God for sin? What connection is there between the blood of a beast and the sin of man? There was much more reason to think that God would be displeased with the unauthorized destruction of his creatures, than that he would be so pleased with it as to forgive the iniquities of mankind on account of it. Moreover, had not God himself enjoined this method of propitiating his anger, we cannot doubt but that he would have answered the presumptuous offerer, as he did the Jews, "Who has required this at your hands? [Isaiah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.12)." But we know that when a bleeding sacrifice was offered to him by Abel, he testified his acceptance of it in a visible manner, probably by sending fire from Heaven to consume it. We cannot doubt, therefore, but that the institution of sacrifices was of divine appointment.

In the next place, if sacrifices were not now instituted, we can scarcely account for the slaughtering of the animals, and much less for God's direction respecting it. It is thought indeed by some, that the flesh was given to our first parents for food; but this seems very improbable, because God told Adam at this very time, that he should henceforth exist, not upon the fruits of the garden as before, but on "the herb of the field," which should be produced only by constant and laborious cultivation, [Genesis 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.18-19). Nor was it until after the flood that God gave to man the liberty of eating the flesh of animals [Genesis 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 9.3). Hence, if the animals were not offered to God in sacrifice, they were killed merely for their skins, which seems to be by no means an adequate reason for God's interposition. On the contrary, if they were by God's commandment offered in sacrifice, we see, what we are in no other place informed of, the origin of the institution; and at the same time we behold abundant reason for God's special interference.

We see what instruction and consolation our first parents must derive from such an ordinance; for while they beheld their own desert in the agonies and death of an unoffending creature, they must be encouraged to look forward to that Seed of the Woman, who was in due time to offer himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

We cannot doubt therefore but that this was the time when sacrifices were instituted; and that, as they were appointed by God to prefigure the great sacrifice, they were enjoined at this time for the express purpose of directing the views of fallen man to that atonement which Christ should afterwards offer to God upon the cross. In this sense, as well as in the divine purpose, may Christ be called, "The Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world! [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8)."

2. The righteousness of Him who made that atonement—

When we are told that "the Lord God made coats of skins, and clothed them," can we suppose that nothing was intended by him but to provide more conveniently for their decency and comfort? Impossible! There was in this a deep stupendous mystery. Adam and Eve thought only of a covering for their bodies; God pointed out to them a covering for their souls. They were despoiled of their original righteousness; and they needed a robe to cover their naked souls, that they might again stand before God "without spot or blemish." All means which they could devise for this purpose would be ineffectual.

God therefore was pleased to shadow forth to them the righteousness of Christ; of Him who was "to be the atoning sacrifice for their sins," and emphatically to be "called, The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)."

How far they beheld the substance in the shadow, we cannot say; but there is abundant proof that the same means were used in subsequent ages to represent the Savior to the world. All the vestments of the priests, sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices, clearly showed in what manner all were to be clothed who would be "a holy priesthood to the Lord." And the language of Prophets, and Apostles, and of Christ himself, has so strict an analogy with the event before us, that we cannot but discern their harmony and agreement. Isaiah speaks of being "clothed with the garments of salvation, and covered with a robe of righteousness, [Isaiah 61:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.10);" Paul, enjoying the fuller light of the Gospel, says more plainly, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, [Romans 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.14);" And our blessed Lord more plainly still, "I counsel you to buy from me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothing, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not appear, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18)."

We need only further observe, that in this marvelous appointment God taught our fallen parents to look to Him through one Mediator, and to make that one object the only ground of all their hopes; or, in other words, to expect pardon only through His atoning blood, and acceptance only through His meritorious and perfect righteousness.

Having seen how strongly God illustrated to them his promised salvation, let us notice,

II. The means he used to secure their acceptance of it—

He banished his guilty creatures from Paradise, and, by the ministration of angels, prohibited effectually their return to it. This he did,

1. Partly in judgment—

The ironical and sarcastic expressions which purpose to be the reason of this dispensation, are certainly strong indications of his heavy displeasure. The flattering hope of "becoming as gods," had led Adam and his wife to transgress the divine command. Now therefore God casts it, as it were, in their teeth, with holy indignation, in order that they might see what they had gained by their folly and presumption. And whereas they had hitherto enjoyed the liberty of eating all the fruits of Paradise, and especially that which was a pledge to them of God's eternal favor, he drives them out from the garden, to live in a far different manner by the sweat of their brow, and to feel that they were cut off from that life, which, had they maintained their innocence, would have been consummated in glory.

Thus we behold them driven as outcasts from God and happiness, and doomed to a life of labor and sorrow which would outcome in a painful death, and (if repentance intervened not) would end in everlasting misery.

2. Partly in mercy—

God's judgments in this world have always been tempered with mercy; yes so tempered, as to be capable of being turned into the richest blessings. Thus it was in the case before us.

Our first parents had been accustomed to consider the tree of life as a pledge of the divine favor; and would be likely to regard it in the same view after their fall, as they had done before. Under this delusion they would be ready to embrace these means of reconciliation with their offended God, and would be led thereby to neglect the means which God had prescribed. Persisting in this mistake, they would pacify their own consciences; and having lulled themselves asleep under the guilt of their transgressions, they would perish in the midst of all the mercy which God had offered them through the mediation of his Son.

To prevent these fatal consequences, God cuts them off from all access to the tree of life, and thus necessitates them to seek for mercy in his appointed way. Precisely as in destroying the Jewish nation and polity, God punished his people indeed, but at the same time consulted their truest interests, by rendering it impossible for them to fulfill the righteousness of the Mosaic law, and thereby "shutting them up unto faith in Christ! [Galatians 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.23);" so did he expel our first parents from Paradise, that they might have nothing to divert their attention from that "Seed of the Woman who was in due time to bruise the Serpent's head."

Thus did God "in judgment remember mercy;" and, in the very hottest exercise of his anger, provide means for the richest display of his unmerited, unsought kindness.

From this subject we may learn,

1. The antiquity of the Gospel—

Whenever Salvation by the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus is insisted on, it is exclaimed against as a new doctrine; but it is none other than "the good old way, [Jeremiah 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.16)," which has been pointed out by our Reformers, by the Apostles, by the Prophets, and by God himself from the beginning of the world. God showed it to our first parents immediately after their fall; he showed it them not only by a prophetic declaration, but also by an emblematic exhibition. And our very clothing in which we are so apt to pride ourselves, would, if we considered the origin and occasion of it, lead us to that way, even to Jesus, in whom alone we can find righteousness and life. Let us then hold fast the Gospel, without regarding the senseless cavils of the world; and while "the proud make it only a stumbling-block, and the conceited reject it as foolishness," let us receive and glory in it as "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

2. The necessity of embracing it—

Like our first parents, we are ready to rest in the signs and seals of the covenant (as baptism and the Lord's supper), instead of fleeing to the Savior himself. But whatever devices we use for the reconciling of ourselves to God, they will all prove vain and useless; we shall find them "a bed too short to stretch ourselves upon, and a covering too narrow to wrap ourselves in, [Isaiah 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.20)." There was one way appointed from the beginning; that way has been progressively displayed, and illustrated in different ages; but it has never been altered, no not in the slightest degree. "There never has been any other name whereby we could be saved, but that of Jesus Christ, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12);" and the only difference between us and the Jews, or us and Adam, is, that we behold in meridian splendor the truths, of which they saw only the early dawn.

Let us be persuaded then that all access to life by the first covenant is stopped; and that all plans for covering our own shame will be in vain. We must all be accepted through one sacrifice, and all be clothed in one righteousness; and all comply with that direction of the prophet, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

#9

THE DEATH OF ABEL

**[Genesis 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.8-10)**

"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."

It is scarcely to be conceived how much iniquity there is in the heart of fallen man! That we have passions which incline us occasionally to deviate from the path of duty, is nothing more than what all feel and confess; but that we are ready to perpetrate all manner of evil, not excepting even murder itself, few are sufficiently candid or intelligent to acknowledge. This seems an excess of wickedness, of which human nature, unless in very extraordinary circumstances, is not capable. To such a charge most men would be ready to reply, "Is your servant a dog, that I should do this thing?"

But we may behold in Cain a just picture of ourselves. What he was by nature, that are we also. The first-born of Adam, begotten after his own fallen image, shows what all are, until renewed by grace, "they live in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another;" and their contempt of God is equal to all the other odious qualities that defile their souls! We cannot but be struck with this in the history of Cain, who having murdered his brother Abel, presumed even to insult his God. His conduct will come properly under our review, if we consider,

I. The Murder of Abel—

In this awful transaction, there are two things to be inquired into:

1. The manner in which Abel's murder was perpetrated—

Satan, in his assaults on man, can exert himself only by wiles and stratagems, not being permitted to exercise his power against us in any other way. But when he employs human agents in his service, he stirs them up to combine in their attacks "deceit and violence." Such were the weapons with which the blood-thirsty Cain sought the destruction of his brother Abel.

"He talked with Abel his brother." What the subject of the conversation was, it would be foolish to speculate; but that it was of a friendly nature, there can be no doubt. It was evidently with a design to allure him into a place of solitude, where he might effect his murderous purpose without difficulty or detection. Had he disclosed the sentiments of his heart, he would have put his brother on his guard; whereas by feigning affection towards him, he would remove all fear or suspicion from his brother's mind, and facilitate the accomplishment of the fatal deed, [Psalm 55:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.21).

To similar means assassins have had recourse in all ages. It was thus that Joab slew both Abner and Amasa, "he sent messengers after Abner, and took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, 2 Samuel 3:26-27." "To Amasa he said, Are you in health, my brother? and took him by the beard to kiss him, [2 Samuel 20:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 20.9-10)." But his pretenses to friendship were only to secure access to them, that he might strike with effect the dagger to their heart.

It was thus that Absalom also contrived to murder his brother Amnon; he made a feast for all his family, and expressed particular solicitude to have the company of Amnon; but the whole was a cover-up, to effect the destruction of his brother in the midst of his convivial mirth, [2 Samuel 13:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 13.26-28).

The murder of a brother is such an atrocious act, that it scarcely admits of being aggravated by any circumstances; but if anything can aggravate it, surely the treachery of Cain must awfully enhance its guilt. Had it been the effect of sudden wrath, it had even then been criminal beyond the power of language to express; but being the result of premeditation and contrivance, of deceit and treachery, its enormity is increased a hundred-fold!

2. Cain's motive to murder Abel—

Gladly would we, if possible, find somewhat to extenuate the guilt of this transaction; but the more minutely we examine it, the more heinous it appears. The Scripture informs us, that Cain, in the commission of this act, was impelled only by envy and hatred. God had been pleased to testify his acceptance of Abel and of his sacrifice, while no such token of approbation was given to Cain. The effect of this should have been, to lead Cain into a close examination of his spirit and conduct, and to make him earnest in prayer, that he might know why this preference had been given to Abel, and how he also might obtain the favor of his God. But, alas! his heart was filled with envy and wrath, insomuch that his whole countenance was changed. In vain did God expostulate with him on the unreasonableness of his behavior. "The spirit that dwelt in him lusted to envy, [James 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.5);" this malignant passion "was as rottenness in his bones, [Proverbs 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.30)," so thoroughly had it corroded his very inmost soul.

The excellence of Abel's character served only to add fuel to the flame. His virtues were the motive for his murder; so "impossible is it to stand before envy, [Proverbs 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.4)." Cain hated in him the divine image, as much as he envied him the divine favor. The light of his brother's example was offensive to Cain's eyes; and on this account he sought to extinguish it. John, having told us that Cain slew his brother, asks, "And why did Cain murder Able?" he then answers, "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous, [1 John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.12)."

Such were the motives by which Cain was instigated to this infernal deed. The murder was first committed in his heart; and then completed with his hand; according to that saying of the Apostle, "He who hates his brother is a murderer, [1 John 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.15)." Indeed there is such a connection between "envy, deceit, and murder, [Romans 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.29)." that wherever the first is harbored, the rest would follow of course, if God in his infinite mercy did not interpose to limit the operation of our sinful propensities.

God, who "makes inquisition for blood," would not allow the murder to be concealed; he therefore sought out the offender, and commenced,

II. The judicial inquiry—

It is said, that "Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation, [Proverbs 26:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 26.26);" and where that hatred has proceeded to murder, God in his providence has generally fulfilled this saying. On this occasion, the Governor of the Universe proceeded exactly as he had done upon the first transgression. He summoned the criminal, and made inquiry at his hands. In the trial we notice,

1. Cain's denial of the fact—

Being interrogated, "Where his brother Abel was," he answered with consummate effrontery, "I know not! Am I my brother's keeper?" Alas! how inseparable the connection between guilt and lying! But what blindness had sin induced upon his mind, and what obduracy upon his heart! What could he imagine, when he thus flatly denied any knowledge of his brother? Did he suppose that he could deceive his God? Had he forgotten that omniscience was an attribute essential to the Deity? Yes, such is the atheism which sin produces he said in his heart, "Tush, God has not seen; Can he see through the thick clouds? [Job 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.14)."

Not contented with uttering this impious falsehood, he added an insult, which we should scarcely have thought he would have dared to offer to his earthly parent, much less to his Maker and his God. Behold this murderous wretch presuming to incriminate his Judge, and to reprove him as unreasonable and unjust! "Am I my brother's keeper?" that is, 'What right have you to interrogate me respecting him?' We stand amazed at this effort of impiety. But, in truth, it is no other than what is daily exemplified before our eyes.

If we question men respecting the performance of any of their duties, they will not hesitate to condemn our expectations as unreasonable, and the laws on which they are founded, as absurd; and when the authority of God is urged in support of his law, they will not scruple to arraign the wisdom and equity of the Lawgiver himself.

The very manner in which Cain attempted to conceal his crime was of itself a strong presumption against his innocence. What need had he to be offended with an inquiry after his brother, if he really knew not where he was? What occasion was there for all this petulance and profaneness? But it was in vain to deny a fact which the all-seeing God was ready to attest, [Psalm 94:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7-10).

2. Cain's conviction before God—

He had effectually silenced his brother's voice; so that no testimony could be borne by him. But the blood which he had shed, had a voice which cried aloud; a voice which reached the throne of Almighty God, and brought him down to plead the cause of injured innocence.

Indeed, every sin has a voice, which speaks powerfully in the ears of God, and calls for vengeance on the head of him who has committed it. It was in vain to dispute the testimony of Jehovah. The criminal stands confounded, and awaits the sentence awarded by his Judge. Surely now then at least we shall behold him softened; his obdurate heart must now relent; and he will accept with resignation the punishment of his iniquity. Not so indeed! He expresses no contrition; he asks not once for mercy; he complains indeed, but not of himself, not of the guilt he has contracted, not of the deed he has perpetrated—but of the punishment he has incurred, "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

But let not this be wondered at! It is the effect of sin to sear the conscience, and to harden the heart! And the more heinous our transgressions are, the more shall we be disposed to incriminate the authority that calls us into judgment for them. Even in Hell itself this disposition is exercised, yes, it rages with uncontrolled and incessant fury; the damned spirits "gnaw their tongues for pain, and blaspheme the God of Heaven because of their pains, and repent not of their deeds! [Revelation 16:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.10-11)."

Hence then we may observe,

1. How soon did "the enmity which God has put between the Serpent's and the Woman's seed begin to show itself!

It is an undeniable fact, that "all who live godly in Christ Jesus do suffer persecution, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12);" and the world, yes sometimes Christians themselves also, are ready to think that the opposition made to them is discreditable to their cause. But our Lord and his Apostles taught us to expect precisely the same treatment which they themselves received, [John 15:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-20). They inform us also how all the Prophets were used by those among whom they sojourned [Acts 7:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.52); they declare that, in all ages, even from the beginning of the world, "they who have been born after the flesh have persecuted those who were born after the Spirit, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29);" and that all "the blood shed from the time of righteous Abel" to the time that Christ himself was nailed upon the cross, [Matthew 23:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.35), served to illustrate "the enmity of the carnal mind against God," and the path in which all must walk who would finally attain to glory. Hence persecutors are emphatically said to "go in the way of Cain, Judges 11."

Let none then think it strange that they are called to endure a fiery trial, as though some strange thing happened unto them, 1 Peter 4:12;" but "let them rejoice and glorify God on this behalf [1 Peter 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13-14); [1 Peter 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.16);" knowing that myriads who are now in Heaven "came there out of great tribulation, [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14);" and that, "if they also suffer with Christ, they shall in due time be glorified together with him! [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

2. How vain is it to cultivate the friendship of the world!

If, in any situation, fellowship could have been maintained between a carnal and a spiritual man, we may well suppose that it should exist between the two first men who were born into the world, educated as they must have been with the strictest care, and necessitated as they were to cultivate a friendly fellowship on account of the contracted state of society in the world; yet not even these could enjoy spiritual communion with each other.

It is true, that all natural men do not give themselves up, like Cain, to the dominion of their lusts; but it is equally true, that all men have in their hearts the same envious and malignant passions, [James 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.5), and that, until they are renewed by divine grace, they are enemies to true religion, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7).

Hence we are told to come out from the world and be separate, because there can be no more true communion between believers and unbelievers, than between light and darkness, or Christ and Belial, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15; [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17). And those who, in opposition to this direction, choose the unregenerate for their associates, or form still more intimate connections with them, are sure to "suffer loss" in their souls; and, if saved at all, they are "saved only so as by fire, 1 Corinthians 3:15."

3. How certainly "sin will find us out" at last!

We may conceal our iniquities from man; but we can never hide them from God, "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." God does not often interfere to make known our guilt, as in the case before us; (though the interpositions of His providence in the discovery of murder are sometimes extremely marked and visible;) but in the day of judgment "he will make manifest the very counsels of our hearts."

It will be in vain then to deny our guilt, or to raise those captious, not to say impious, objections, which now appear to us of so much weight! Everything will be substantiated by the fullest evidence, and be recompensed according to its desert. O that "in that day we may be found without spot, and blameless!" This may be the state of all, not excepting even murderers themselves, provided they wash in the fountain of Christ's blood, and be renewed by his Holy Spirit. Let us then seek his pardoning and renewing grace. Then shall we be enabled to "stand before our God with boldness," and "give up our account to him with joy, and not with grief."

#10

INSTITUTION OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

**[Genesis 4:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.26)**

"Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord."

Of the various institutions of religion, some were clearly founded on an express appointment from God himself; others appear to have arisen, in the first instance, from the suggestions of holy men, and to have been afterwards authorized and established by divine authority.

It is manifest that baptism was practiced by the Jews long before it was appointed by Christ as the rite whereby his followers were to be consecrated to his service; but when it was first introduced, or whether by any express command of God, we know not.

The change of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first was sanctioned by the practice of the Apostles; but whether they received any particular direction respecting it, we are not informed.

The presumption indeed is, that all the observances which God has sanctioned, originated from him; and that men began to practice them in consequence of some intimations from him; but as this is not declared in Scripture, we must be contented to leave the matter undecided.

We are not anywhere told that God commanded men to meet together for the purposes of public worship. If we take the text in the precise sense that it bears in our translation, it would seem that public assemblies of worship were rather the offspring of necessity; and that they arose out of an increase of population, and a growing neglect of personal and family religion.

The text indeed is, in the margin of our Bibles, rendered differently, "Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord." Nor are commentators agreed to which of the versions we should give the preference. We shall therefore include both; and take occasion from the words to show,

I. In what manner we should confess God—

The descendants of Cain, who had become "a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth," soon cast off all regard for God, and addicted themselves to open and shameless impiety. Lamech broke through the restraints which the Creator had imposed in relation to marriage, and "took unto him two wives;" leaving thereby an example, which in process of time effaced the very remembrance of God's original institution. From these and other abominations arose an imperious necessity for the godly to separate themselves from the ungodly, and to maintain by an open and more visible profession the honor of God in the world. This they did, and in so doing they have taught us,

1. To separate ourselves from the ungodly—

There is a certain degree of fellowship which must exist between us and the world. But it is by no means desirable to extend it beyond that which the duties of our calling absolutely require. Our Lord repeatedly declares that his faithful followers "are not of the world, even as He was not of the world [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16)." The Apostles also with one voice guard us against cultivating the friendship of the world, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4), and teach us to come out from among them, [2 Corinthians 6:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-18), and to live as a distinct "peculiar people, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)," "shining among them as lights in a dark place, [Philippians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15)."

We should go to them, indeed, when duty calls, as the physician enters the infected chambers of the sick; but we should never forget, that "evil company corrupts good character, [1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.33);" and that an undue familiarity with them is far more likely to weaken the spirituality of our own minds, than to generate a holy disposition in theirs. In us should be verified the prophecy of Balaam, "Israel shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations, [Numbers 23:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.9)."

2. To make an open profession of our attachment to Christ—

The godly, in the antediluvian world, called themselves "Sons of God," as distinct from those who were only children of men; and it was foretold that a similar distinction should prevail among the followers of Christ, [Isaiah 44:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.5). If in one instance Peter failed in acknowledging his Lord, on other occasions he witnessed a good confession, and manfully withstood the threatenings of his enemies, [Acts 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.8); [Acts 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.10); [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19-20). It may be thought perhaps, that, because Christianity is the established religion of the land, there is no occasion for such boldness now; but the sons of Cain and of Ishmael are yet among us, Judges 11; [Galatians 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.23); [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29). There are in every place those who deride all vital godliness; and it requires almost as much fortitude to withstand their sneers and contempt, as it does to brave more cruel persecutions.

There is the same necessity for us to "take up our cross and follow Christ," as there was for the primitive Christians. And the command given to them to "be faithful unto death," is equally to be regarded by us; for the same conduct will be observed by the Judge towards men of every age and nation, "he will confess those before his Father who have confessed him in the world," and "deny before his Father those who have denied," or been ashamed of him, [Matthew 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32-33); [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38).

But the text instructs us also,

II. In what manner we should worship him—

We cannot doubt but that Adam and his pious offspring maintained the worship of God both in their families and their closets; but until the human race were considerably multiplied, there was no occasion for what may be called public worship. But when the families became so numerous that they were obliged to separate, then it was necessary to call them together at stated times and seasons, that, by forming different congregations, they might all receive instruction at once, and keep up in their minds a habitual reverence for God.

The necessity for public ordinances is obvious; and the benefit arising from them is incalculable:

1. They preserve the knowledge of God in the world—

There is reason to fear, that if there were no public ordinances of religion, the very name of God would be soon forgotten. Notwithstanding the establishment of such institutions, the generality are "perishing for lack of knowledge;" darkness has overspread the land, even a darkness that may be seen and felt! [Exodus 10:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.21) with [Isaiah 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.2). But there is some light shining in the world; and that is diffused almost exclusively by the public ministry of the word. Occasionally, God is pleased to instruct men by his word and Spirit, without the intervention of human agents; but, as he has set apart an order of men for the express purpose of propagating his truth, so he delights to honor them as his instruments to convey his blessings to the world. Compare [Zechariah 4:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.11-14) and [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7) with [Acts 8:26-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.26-39); [Acts 10:9-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.9-44). Doubtless he grants his blessing to those who read and pray in secret, provided they reverence, as far as their circumstances admit, his public institutions; but never did he, from the foundation of the world, impart his blessing to those who continued to live in an avowed contempt of his ordinances. No, "he loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob, [Psalm 87:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.2)."

2. They are the means of perfecting his work in his people's hearts—

God has told us that this was a very principal end for his ordaining men to preach the Gospel, [Ephesians 4:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.11-15); but it is by means of the public ordinances chiefly that Ministers can address the people; and consequently the ordinances themselves are the means by which God accomplishes his end. We have said before, that God will also reveal himself to his people in secret; and it sometimes happens that their communion with him in private is more sweet and intimate than in the public assembly.

But may we not ask, on the other hand, whether, when the heart has been cold and formal in the closet, it has not often been warmed and animated in the church? And is not much of the enjoyment experienced in secret, the result of instructions administered in the public ordinances? In the one they gather the food; in the other they ruminate and chew the cud; but the pleasure and nourishment derived to their souls must be acknowledged, in part at least, as originating in their public duties. To these has God promised his peculiar blessing, [Exodus 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.24); [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20); and therefore we should "reverence his sanctuary," and join with one consent in a public surrender of ourselves to God. See [Zephaniah 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.9); [Zechariah 8:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.20-22).

Address,

1. Those who have others under their authority—

Parents, and Masters, you are responsible to God for the exercise of your power and influence. Will you then, either by precept or example, encourage a conformity to the world, or a disregard of the worship of your God? O "destroy not their souls, for whom Christ died!" Employ your authority for God; and, whatever opposition you may meet with in the world, learn to say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord! [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15)."

2. Those who are acting for themselves—

If you have "chosen the good part," be careful that it "be not taken away from you," either through the love of this world, or through the fear of man. Be steadfast, and "endure unto the end, that you may be saved at last." If you lose your life for Christ's sake, you shall find it unto life eternal! But if you are "walking in the broad road," think where it leads; and begin to serve your God in this world, that you may be honored by him in the world to come, [John 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.26).

#11

ENOCH'S WALKING WITH GOD

**[Genesis 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 5.24)**

"And Enoch walked with God; then he was no more; for God took him."

The cares of a family are by no means incompatible with a life of devotedness to God. The man distinguished for his piety above all others in the antediluvian world, had a very numerous offspring. His eldest son, Methuselah, was born to him at the age of sixty-five; after which he continued for the space of three hundred years to beget sons and daughters, (verses 1-23) to whom doubtless he paid every attention in his power. Yet he was not impeded in his spiritual course; but found time to serve his God, as much as if he had been free from all concern about this present world.

We shall consider,

I. His conduct—

We are told that Enoch "walked with God."

1. Walking with God implies **agreement**—

Enoch, as a fallen creature, was once alienated from God, like others, [Ephesians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.18), and, during his unconverted state, was full of enmity against him both in heart and life, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7); [Colossians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.21), "walking after the flesh," according to the course of this world, and altogether contrary to God, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1); [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2); [Leviticus 26:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.27-28). But now he was reconciled to God through faith in Christ. It is said in [Hebrews 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.5) that Enoch was "translated by faith;" and though that faith might have more immediate respect to some promise given him relative to his translation—yet we can scarcely conceive but that it had a further respect to the promised Messiah. And this idea is greatly strengthened by the account Jude gives of his foretelling the very manner of the future judgment (verses 4, 15,) for if he prophesied of Christ's second coming, doubtless he was not ignorant of his first advent; and was brought by this means to an agreement with him both in mind and will.

Thus must all of us obtain reconciliation with God through the blood of Christ, before we can resemble this eminent saint; for it is not possible for "two to walk together except they be agreed, [Amos 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.3)."

2. Walking with God implies **familiarity**—

Friends who associate much together, contract a familiarity with each other; they open to each other their sorrows and their joys; they consult each other in their difficulties; and maintain with the greatest freedom a mutual fellowship. Thus did Enoch with his God. He considered God as his friend; he had familiar access to him at all times; he opened to him all his needs, all his fears, all his trials; he did nothing without first asking counsel of his friend, and engaging his assistance.

Nor was this an honor peculiar to him—it is the duty and the privilege of all the saints.

We may go and knock at the door of our Friend, and he will always open unto us, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8) saints.

We may have access to him with boldness and with confidence, even in our most private closet, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8); [Ephesians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.12); [Hebrews 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19).

We may ask what we will of him, and he will do it for us, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7).

He, on the other hand, will come and knock at our door; and will come in and sup with us, [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23).

He will communicate to us his secrets, [Psalm 25:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.14); and will in ten thousand ways manifest himself unto us as he does not unto the world, [John 14:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-22).

3. Walking with God implies **affection**—

Affection is the very essence of friendship—mere agreement or familiarity are of little value without it. Where affection does not exist, the fellowship cannot be such as is implied in walking with God. Enoch loved his God, if I may so speak, with all his heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. God would never have given him a special testimony of his approbation, if his heart had been destitute of the sacred flame of love. He went forth to meet his God, as Adam was accustomed to do in his state of innocence; he looked forward with joy to the seasons when he would again renew his fellowship with him. He studied to avoid everything that might in any respect grieve him; and made it the great object of his life to do what was pleasing in his sight.

It is in this way that we also are to walk with God, [Hebrews 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19). We must commune with him not by constraint, but willingly and of a ready mind, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3). We must delight ourselves in him, [Psalm 37:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.4). His loving-kindness must be better to us than life itself, [Psalm 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3); and it must be as marrow and fatness to us to serve and honor him, [Psalm 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.5).

How acceptable to God this conduct was, we may learn from,

II. The reward with which God honored him—

The manifestations of God's presence and favor which he continually enjoyed, were a rich recompense for any self-denial which he exercised, or any exertions which he used, to please his God. But, besides all these,

1. God exempted him from death, the common lot of all men—

All, the righteous as well as the wicked, must pay the penalty of death, which has been entailed on them by the sin of Adam, and been richly merited by their own personal transgressions. But God has been pleased to exempt from it one in the old world, and one in the new, Compare [2 Kings 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.11) with the text. This testimony of his approbation God given to Enoch. He was a bold and faithful witness for God, and doubtless incensed many against him, Judges 14, 15. And God took him from a persecuting and ungodly world, who probably were seeking to destroy him on account of his pungent admonitions.

In [Hebrews 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.5) before cited, it is said "he was not found." This may refer to some search made by his friends (see [2 Kings 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.16),) or rather by his enemies, (see [1 Kings 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.10)). God took him in the prime of life, without any previous pain or sickness. To some indeed it might appear a calamity to be taken away, in the midst of his useful labors, and while his family were still looking up to him for instruction and support; but he thought it "far better to depart and to be with Christ," than to prolong his days in the midst of a tempting and ungodly world; and God gave him the desire of his heart.

We, however diligent in walking with God, cannot hope to participate in such a reward as this. But death shall be disarmed of its sting, so that it shall be to us rather an object of desire, than of fear and terror! [2 Corinthians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.4); and while the most stout-hearted sinner in the universe trembles at its approach, we shall be enabled not only to meet it with serenity and composure, but to triumph over it as a vanquished enemy! [1 Corinthians 15:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.55).

2. God exalted him both in body and in soul to a more immediate enjoyment of his presence—

While Enoch was in the body, he could not endure the full splendor of the divine glory, [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16); he could only behold his God through the dark medium of faith, [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.12), or, at most, be permitted to "see his back parts, [Exodus 33:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.23)." But God translated him, both in body and soul, to the highest heavens; making him thereby not only an eminent type of Christ's ascension, but a pledge to us that our bodies shall hereafter be raised to a participation of the happiness, which our glorified souls shall enjoy at the instant of their departure from the body.

To what extent the blessedness of every individual will be advanced by the re-union of the soul and body, it is not possible to say; but it is reasonable to suppose, that that which consummates our reward, will greatly enhance our felicity.

This, however, Enoch had not to wait for; he received his full reward at once; and was thereby distinguished from all those disembodied spirits, which, though perfected in glory, waited for their complete happiness until the day of judgment. The happiness of Enoch in communing with God on earth was doubtless exceedingly great; but when he arrived at the full fruition of the divine glory, his blessedness as far exceeded all that he had before experienced, as the early dawn is surpassed by the meridian light.

It need not, however, be any matter of regret to us, that we are not to expect this reward; since, on our dismissal from the body, we shall instantly be in Paradise; and at the day of resurrection, we shall have our bodies raised to a participation of our bliss.

3. God made him a most distinguished monument to the whole world, of the love he bears to those who seek communion with him—

We know but little of the state of those who are gone into the invisible world, though we believe, from the Word of God, that they are completely happy. But here is an evidence to our very senses, that none shall be allowed to "seek God's face in vain." Who, after beholding such an interposition of the Deity, such an honor conferred on a "man of like passions with ourselves," can doubt one moment of the acceptance which all shall find, who serve their God in sincerity and truth? [Isaiah 64:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.5).

In this view then we may consider his reward as a pledge of ours. We shall not be left without many expressions of God's love even in this world, if we endeavor to walk closely with him. But, whether our present state be more or less joyous, we are sure that in the eternal world we shall not lose our reward. We need only to consider the exalted condition of this distinguished saint and we may see in him the blessedness reserved for us.

Inferences:

1. What an honorable character is the Christian!

We consider those as honorable who associate with great men on earth. But the Christian has higher company than earthly monarchs; he walks with God himself; and God is not ashamed to call him his friend! [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16); [James 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.23); [John 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.15). In some sense, the Christian is already translated into God's kingdom, [Colossians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.13), and admitted into the heavenly Zion, and joined to the society of glorified saints and angels, [Hebrews 12:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22-23).

Let every one then walk worthy of this high calling; and, in a dignified contempt of all inferior objects, endeavor to attain this sublime privilege in its highest perfection.

2. What a happy character is the Christian!

His singularity may bring upon him much odium and persecution. But why should he regard the frowns of men, who enjoys fellowship with God? One smile from his almighty Friend is sufficient to counterbalance all the indignities that can possibly be cast upon him. Yet, after all, his happiness in this world is but as the drop before the shower. When he has filled up the measure of his obedience, God takes him to himself; a band of angels are sent to bear his spirit to the regions of the blessed. It must not be said of the Christian, "He dies;" but merely, that "God translates him" from a world of sin and misery, to a world of blessedness and glory. "Such honor have all his saints, "God grant it may be ours forever and ever! Amen.

#12

STRIVINGS OF THE SPIRIT

**[Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3)**

"And the Lord said; My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

Man, at first, was created in the image of his God; but when he fell, he begat children in his own fallen image. His very first-born became a murderer. Some of his posterity, however, were pious; but they, not being careful to connect themselves with those who feared God, were drawn aside from religion by their ungodly wives, insomuch that, in eight or nine generations, "all flesh had corrupted their way," and "God grieved that he had made man! [Genesis 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.6-7); [Genesis 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.12)."

In consequence of this, God determined to destroy the whole earth. But yet, being full of mercy, he would not proceed to this extremity without giving to man space for repentance. Accordingly, he commanded Noah to preach to them; and to declare, that in the space of 120 years the threatened judgments should be inflicted, if the people did not avert those judgments by their penitence. During that period his Holy Spirit would continue to strive with them—but no longer; for "he should not always strive with man, who was now become altogether flesh," and carnal; and who, if he did not repent in the time allotted him, should be left to reap the bitter fruit of his own ways.

That this warning may have a beneficial effect on us, I will endeavor to show,

I. That the Spirit of God, if long resisted, will cease to strive with us.

Certain it is, that the Spirit of God does strive with unregenerate men—

He strove with the whole antediluvian world, by the ministry of Noah; for "by the Spirit did that holy man preach, during the whole period while the ark was preparing, even to the spirits which for their disobedience were condemned, and shut up in the prison" reserved for all impenitent transgressors, [1 Peter 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.19-20).

"To the whole nation of Israel, also, did the Holy Spirit for ages testify, in and by his Prophets, notwithstanding they dealt proudly, and withdrew their shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear, [Nehemiah 9:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.29-30)."

With us also does he strive, both by the ministry of his word, and by his own immediate agency on the hearts of men. For, what is conscience, but God's vice-regent in the soul? By that, God speaks to us; warning, and inviting us from time to time, if by any means we may be induced to repent and turn unto him. Let anyone only look back upon his past life; and he shall find that there have been some periods when he has felt a conviction upon his mind that it was his duty, and would be his happiness, to seek after God, and obtain, while yet he might, the remission of his sins.

But we resist his sacred motions—

To whom among us may not those words of Stephen be applied, (if not in reference to the present moment—yet certainly in reference to some period of our lives,) "You stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so also do you, [Acts 7:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.51)."

We may not, indeed, have set ourselves in such hostility to the truth as they did; but have we been more practically obedient than they? Have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, calling us to repentance, and to a dedication of our whole selves to him? Alas! there has been the same stoutness of heart in us, as in people of a more profane character; many of whom, perhaps, have "said, I will not, but afterwards have repented, and went" into their Lord's vineyard; while we, perhaps, have said, "I will go, Sir," but have been as far from executing our acknowledged duty as ever, [Matthew 21:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.28-30).

And will the Spirit always continue to strive with us?

No! we are assured he will not. We know that his motions may be resisted, until they are altogether "quenched, [1 Thessalonians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.19)." And in many instances has he been driven away by the obstinacy of those with whom he had striven. Of Saul we are told, that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul; and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, [1 Samuel 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.14)." And it was not without reason that David prayed, "Cast me not away from your presence! and take not your Holy Spirit from me, [Psalm 51:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.11)."

When God saw his ancient people incurably addicted to idolatry, He said, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)." And what else can we expect, if we continue obstinate in our sins? The doom of Israel must of necessity be ours. Of them it is said, "They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and fought against them! [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10);" and we truly can expect no other, than that He, whose solicitations we refused to follow, as a Friend, shall send forth his vindictive judgments against us, as an Enemy!

Let me then proceed to show,

II. What is the state of a soul thus abandoned by the Lord.

Truly its condition is most pitiable. God has said, "Woe unto them, when I depart from them, [Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 9.12);" and truly it will be a woeful day for any one of us, if God should ever abandon us to ourselves! for the deserted soul is from that moment given up:

1. Yes, and given up forever to **delusion**—

It is surprising what delusions an abandoned sinner will harbor in his heart, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imaginations of my heart to add drunkenness to thirst, and sin to sin, [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19)." Refuges of lies he shall have in plenty, to administer to his composure; 'There is no future state; death is but an eternal sleep; or, at all events, God is too merciful to inflict punishment in a future state; or, at any rate, the punishment cannot be eternal. As for the Holy Scriptures, perhaps they are only the writings of fallible men, like ourselves; or, at best, they are so highly figurative, that you cannot depend upon them.'

Thus men take refuge in infidelity, so that they may rid themselves of records, which, if credited, would be subversive of their peace. And to these delusions God will give them up; as he has said, "They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations! I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them! [Isaiah 66:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3-4)."

In the New Testament, this judgment is yet more emphatically denounced, "They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," says Paul, "and for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness, [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12)."

Oh, terrible judgment!—and the more terrible, because they who are subjected to it have no conception that they are lying under it; but it will be the assured portion of all with whom the Spirit of God has ceased to strive.

2. Yes, and given up forever to **bondage**—

To the power of their own lusts will they be given up, so that Satan shall lead them captive at his will. How awful is that declaration of Solomon, "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself; and he shall be held with the cords of his own sins, [Proverbs 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.22)." Yet this must be the fate of all who constrain the Holy Spirit to depart from them. If men "will despise and reject all the counsel of the Lord, they will assuredly be left to eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices."

It was so with the Heathen, "who did not retain God in their knowledge; he gave them over to a reprobate mind, [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28)." It was so, also, with the Israelites, "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust; and they walked in their own counsels, [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12)."

What is more common than to see this very judgment inflicted before our eyes? The infidel, the drunkard, the whoremonger, the thief, the covetous man, the profane swearer, what slaves do they become to their respective habits! These show us the very truth that I am insisting on; and declare, with one voice, that the Ethiopian may as well change his skin or the leopard his spots, as they renounce the habits to which they have been given over by God.

3. Yes, and given up forever to **obduracy**—

Pharaoh, for his obstinacy, was given up to a state of hardness that is scarcely to be credited. And how many, in every age, when forsaken by the Lord, have had "their consciences seared as with a hot iron," and become altogether "past feeling, [Ephesians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.19); [1 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.2)." Behold the scoffer, who pours contempt on all religion, and, with daring impiety, cries, "Where is the promise of God's coming to judgment? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, [2 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.4)."

If reproved for their impiety, they will in effect say, "Who is Lord over us? [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)." "We know not the Lord; neither will we obey his voice! [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2)." Even in death itself, they often evince the very same hardness, and show how entirely they are given over by the Lord. Their friends around them are ready to say, "They died like lambs"—and so indeed they did, even like brute beasts that have no understanding, having no conception of the state which awaits them at their departure hence. A terrible judgment this is! and a certain prelude,

4. Yes, and given up forever to **ruin**!—

There is a time wherein God may be found, by every living man; but that season may be passed; and a time arrive, when he will no more be found, [Isaiah 55:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.6), and when all God's offered mercies shall be forever withheld. Such a period had actually arrived to the Jewish nation, when they crucified the Lord of glory. Our blessed Savior, previous to his death, took up this lamentation over them, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets, and stone them who are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate, [Matthew 23:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37-38)." "Oh that you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things which belong unto your peace! but now they are hidden from your eyes, [Luke 19:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.42)."

Thus, it is to be feared, there may be, even among ourselves, some with whom God will strive no longer; they have so long trifled with the means of grace, and been unprofitable under all the culture that has been bestowed upon them, that they shall be henceforth left only to be gathered, in due season, as fuel for the fire! [Hebrews 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.7-8). What a solemn thought, To be left only to "fill up the measure of their iniquities," and to ''treasure up wrath against the day of wrath! [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)." Better were it for a man that he had never been born, than that ever he should live for such an end as that! But such is the state of the deserted soul; and at the appointed hour, "wrath will come upon him to the uttermost!"

Address,

1. Those who are yet withstanding the motions of the Holy Spirit—

Little do you think how greatly you offend your God, or what misery you are entailing on your own souls. But let me ask, Is there one among you that does not look back upon his past rebellion with regret? Is there one who is not persuaded in his mind, that he would have been a far happier man, if he had obeyed the voice of the Lord, and followed, instead of resisting, the dictates of his conscience? How long, then, will you continue this rebellious course? Shall not the declaration in my text affect you? Shall not even the possibility of your day of grace having come to an end, appal you? Do but think how much you have at stake; and how short is the time which you have to seek the things belonging to your peace; I beg you; Arise, before it be too late, and cry unto your God, "if God perhaps may give you repentance, and you may be recovered out of the snare of the devil, by whom you have been taken captive at his will, [2 Timothy 2:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25-26)." "Today, while it is called today, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; lest you provoke God to swear, in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest, [Psalm 95:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 95.7-11)."

2. Those who through grace have obeyed his blessed will—

Truly this is of the Lord, who alone has "made you willing, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)," and has thus caused you to "differ from those around you, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)." Be thankful for this distinguishing grace; but remember that you still need his gracious influences as much as ever. There is no part of the divine life that can be carried on within you but by the operation of the Holy Spirit. He must be within you "a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and of might, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and must make you of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3)." Seek him, then, for all these gracious ends; and be careful that you "do not grieve him," by any sinful disposition, or any secret neglect, [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30). It is by him that you are to be "sealed unto the day of redemption, [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30)," and by him that you are to be "rendered fit for your heavenly inheritance." To him, therefore, "I commend you, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified, [Acts 20:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.32)."

#13

THE EXTENT OF MAN'S WICKEDNESS

**[Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5)**

"God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

The extent of man's wickedness is far greater than the generality of mankind have any conception of. While a person's words and actions are inoffensive before men, he is supposed to conduct himself acceptably to God. And even when his words and actions are blameworthy, he is judged as having nothing wrong in his intentions, and as possessing, on the whole, a good heart. But God looks chiefly at the heart, which is the fountain from whence everything that is evil proceeds, [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23); and his testimony respecting it is, that "the heart," not of this or that more egregious offender, but of every man by nature, "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked!"

In the passage before us, God assigns his reason for destroying the whole world by a universal deluge. And that we may be suitably affected by it, I shall set before you,

I. The testimony of God respecting man—

He speaks more immediately respecting the antediluvian world—

In general, the wickedness of man was great in the earth. No doubt, every species of wickedness was committed, in the most shameless manner. But, more particularly, "the hearts" of men were evil, "the thoughts" of their hearts were evil, "the imaginations" of the thoughts were evil, and this too without exception, without mixture, without intermission; for every imagination was evil, and "only" evil, and that "continually." What a solemn statement is here!

But how could this he ascertained? Who could he competent to judge of this? and on what authority is this declared? I answer, It is the declaration of God, who can discern all things; for "all things are naked and opened before him! [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13);" and he himself says, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them, [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.5)." And, as he knows everything, so he is able to estimate the quality of everything; for "he weighs the spirits, [Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.2)." And this is his testimony, after a thorough inspection of every human being.

But the same must be spoken of man at this day—

God himself repeats the same testimony, in relation to those who survived the deluge, and of all their descendants, [Genesis 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.21). And it is as true of us, as it was of them. In proof of this, I will appeal to your own observation and experience.

What, from observation, would you yourselves say was the state of the world around you? Do you not see that evil of every kind reigns to a vast extent; and that piety, except in some very narrow circles of people whom the world regards as weak enthusiasts, is altogether banished; insomuch that you may mix in society for months and years, and yet never once hear them speak with admiration and gratitude respecting all the wonders of Redeeming Love! Of what passes in the hearts of others you are not able to judge; and therefore, in relation to that, I appeal to every man's own experience. What has been the state of your hearts? As to your words and actions, I will suppose them to have been correct; but your "hearts," your "thoughts," "the imaginations of your thoughts," what report must you give of them? Have they been all correct? Or, could you bear that man should see them as God has seen them? The proud, the envious, the uncharitable, the angry, the vindictive, the impure thoughts, say, (whether carried into effect or not) have they not sprung up within your hearts as their proper soil, and so occupied the ground, that no holy fruits would grow unto perfection? If occasionally a transient thought of good has arisen, how coldly has it been entertained, how feebly has it operated, how soon has it been lost! And, at all events, if compared with what the Law requires, and what God and his Christ deserve at your hands, tell me whether it does not fall so short of your duty, that you cannot venture to call it good, but only evil of a less malignant kind?

Know then, all of you, that this is your real state before God! And now learn,

II. What effect it should produce upon you—

Certainly this view of our state, and especially as attested by the heart-searching God, should produce in us,

1. Humiliation—

Even on a review of our words and actions, I am convinced there is not any one of us who has not reason to be ashamed, especially if those words and actions be tried by the standard of God's holy Law. But who among us could bear to have all his thoughts inspected and disclosed? Who would not blush, and be confounded before God and man, if his heart were exposed to public view, so that every imagination of every thought of it should be disclosed? Yet God beholds it all; and has as perfect a recollection of all that has passed through our minds from our earliest infancy to this present moment, as if it had passed not an hour ago.

What then befits us, but the deepest humiliation? In truth, our religious thoughts, when compared with what they ought to have been in number and intensity, are no less a ground of humiliation, than those which have sprung from a more impure source; since they prove, indisputably, how defective are our conceptions of God's excellency, and how faint our sense of the Redeemer's love. I call on you then, every one of you, my brethren, to "loath yourselves for your abominations," and to "abhor yourselves," as Isaiah did, and as holy Job did, "in dust and ashes! [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5) and [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

2. Gratitude—

We have often told you that God has sent to us a Savior, even his only dear Son; and that through Him all our iniquities, however great they may have been, shall be forgiven. But methinks, this is only "a cunningly-devised fable;" for, how can it be supposed, that God should ever have shown such mercy, and manifested such love, towards such vile creatures as we?

But, brethren, however incredible it may appear, it is true, even the very truth of God. Notwithstanding all you have done amiss, "God is not willing that any of you should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live." Yes, brethren, he has laid all your iniquities on his only-begotten Son; who, agreeably to the Father's will, has expiated them by his own blood, and will take them away from your souls forever. Tell me, then, whether gratitude does not well befit you? Tell me, whether there should be any bounds to your gratitude? What, do you think, would the fallen angels feel, if such mercy were shown to them? And what are millions of the redeemed now feeling before the throne? Oh, let your souls be penetrated with a measure of their love, and your songs of praise abound day and night, even as theirs.

3. Fear—

Though your hearts may have been renewed by divine grace, you are renewed, brethren, only in part; you have still the flesh within you, as well as the Spirit; and you carry about with you still "a body of sin and death," from which, to your dying hour, you will need to be delivered. In fact, your whole life must be "a putting-off of the old man, and a putting-on of the new." I need not tell you what precautions people take, when they carry a light in the midst of combustibles, which, if ignited, will spread destruction all around. Know, that you carry such combustibles about you, wherever you go; and you know not how soon you may come in contact with something that may cause a desperate explosion.

You all know how David fell, in an unguarded moment; and what a dreadful web of evil was produced by one sinful imagination. Know then, what corrupt creatures you are; be sensible of your proneness to commit even the vilest abominations; and pray, day and night, to God, to "hold up your goings in his ways, that your footsteps slip not."

It was from sad experience that Peter spoke, when he said, "Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary, the devil, goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, steadfast in the faith, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8)." He had indulged self-confidence, and had slept when he should have watched; and hence arose his fall, which speaks loudly to every one of us. "Be then, not high-minded; but fear;" and "what I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch!"

#14

GOD'S DETERMINATION TO DESTROY MAN

**[Genesis 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.6-7)**

"And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

The evil of sin is visible wherever we turn our eyes. Not only has a manifest deterioration taken place in the intellectual and moral qualities of man, but the material world itself, together with all the brute creation, bears marks of God's displeasure, and of the curse inflicted on account of sin. The spring with all its vivifying powers, or the autumn with all its profusion of matured fruits, does not more surpass the desolate appearances of winter, than the earth at its first formation did the state to which it is now reduced. It was then the garden of the Lord, replete with beauty, and productive of nothing which did not minister to the comfort of its inhabitants; but it is become a waste howling wilderness, infected with plagues, agitated with storms, and fruitful in occasions of sorrow.

Whether any additional curse was inflicted on it at the time of the deluge, we cannot say; but the shortening of man's life from eight or nine hundred years to less than one tenth of that period, seems to indicate, that both the frame of our bodies, and everything that contributes to their support, have undergone a further change, and "become subject to vanity" in a yet greater degree, than they were before the deluge. However this may be, it is certain that, of all the judgments with which God has ever visited his rebellious creatures, the deluge was the most tremendous. All other expressions of God's anger have been limited to a few individuals, or cities, or nations; but the flood extended over the face of the whole earth.

That we may view aright this appalling dispensation, let us consider,

I. The wicked state of the antediluvian world—

The degeneracy of mankind had been advancing with rapid strides from the time that Adam fell, to the time spoken of in our text.

1. Their state was characterized by **general wantonness**—

Our blessed Lord informs us, that "in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, [Matthew 24:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.37-39)." By this he did not mean to condemn the use of those means which God himself had appointed for the maintenance of life and the preservation of our species, but to inform us, that the people were altogether addicted to carnal and sensual indulgences, without paying any regard to their spiritual and eternal interests. The great ends of life were quite forgotten by them; and their only study was, how to dissipate care, and spend their time in pleasure.

2. Their state was characterized by **awful depravity**—

The expressions used in the preceding and following context clearly show, that wickedness of every kind was practiced without restraint, [Genesis 6:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.11-13). The words themselves are strong; but the frequent repetition of them greatly increases their force. The law of God being disregarded, and human laws not having been framed and executed as they are among us, the strong and violent oppressed the weak and peaceable; and whatever any man's interest or inclination prompted him to do, that he did without shame or remorse.

We may form some idea perhaps of the state which then existed, from what still exists among uncivilized nations, and among us also, when the restraints of human laws are withdrawn How ready are men to embark their property and risk their lives in privateering expeditions, when they can obtain a licence to rob and plunder their unoffending neighbors! And how terrible are the atrocities committed by victorious armies!

3. Their state was characterized by **obstinate impenitence**—

For a hundred and twenty years did Noah continue to warn that wicked generation, [1 Peter 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.19-20). By his practice also as well as by his preaching, did he condemn them. Before their eyes "he prepared (with vast expense and labor) an ark for the preservation of his household, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7);" giving them thereby a certain pledge that the threatened judgments would be inflicted on the impenitent and unbelieving. But they, no doubt, ridiculed his precautions as absurd and visionary; and the longer the judgment was delayed, the more bold was their confidence, and the more bitter their derision! [2 Peter 3:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.3-6).

Among us, the Gospel, though generally, is not universally, despised; some are brought to listen to its benignant overtures; but to such a degree did the contemporaries of Noah harden themselves against the gracious messages of Heaven, that in that whole space of time there was not (as far as we know) one single person awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger.

Fearful indeed must have been their state, when we consider,

II. The regret which man's sin excited in the bosom of Jehovah—

We must understand the language of the text, not in a literal sense, but figurative sense—

We are not to suppose that God did not foresee what would happen; for prescience is an essential perfection of His nature; take away his foreknowledge, and you deny him to be God. Nor must we suppose that his happiness was really interrupted by what he saw in his creatures; for he is as immutable in his happiness, as in his nature. The language of the text is accommodated to our feeble apprehensions; it is taken from what passes among men, when they are disappointed in their expectations and endeavors. As a potter, finding that a vessel which he has formed with the utmost care does not answer the desired purpose, regrets his labor, and casts out of his sight the worthless object with indignation and grief—so God represents himself as "grieved at his heart" that he had bestowed upon mankind so much labor in vain.

Nevertheless the figure of speech conveys to us much plain and solid instruction—

The same figure occurs in various other parts of holy writ; sometimes it imports a change from anger to pity, [Jonah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.10), and sometimes the reverse, [1 Samuel 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.11). It is used in both senses, and in connection with the foregoing illustration, [Jeremiah 18:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.3-10). In the text, it is intended to intimate, that God is not an unconcerned spectator of human actions; that he expects men to answer the end of their creation, by seeking his glory and their own happiness—and that he will manifest against sin his heavy displeasure, making all who practice it the objects of his fiery indignation!

The feelings of our Creator on account of man's apostasy are more plainly shown by,

III. The resolution God adopted in consequence of it—

To destroy all the human race was indeed **a fearful resolve**—

We can form little conception of the distress occasioned through the habitable globe, when once the flood began to rise above its accustomed limits. Every contrivance would be resorted to, and every eminence be made a refuge, in hopes that the waters would subside, and that a premature death might be avoided. When one place was covered, happy would they feel themselves who could flee to some lofty mountain, and carry with them provision for their subsistence. But they would soon find that they indulged a vain hope; a suspense, more painful than death itself, would soon occupy their minds; and the waves, fast approaching, would at last terminate their lives, which fear and terror had already half destroyed.

It is probable that many would seek admittance into the ark, and cling to it, when every other refuge had failed. Many too would, doubtless, betake themselves to prayer in the midst of their distress. But the time of judgment was come; and mercy, whether exercised or not in the eternal world, could not be extended to them.

Thus it was with Saul, [1 Samuel 15:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.25-26). Children in vain solicited their parents' aid; in vain did the fond mother clasp them in her arms, or the affrighted husband strive to support his beloved wife! All, in quick succession, were swept away; and neither man nor beast (those only in the ark excepted) were permitted to survive the wreck of nature.

But, however **terrible** this judgment was, it was strictly **just**—

The punishments inflicted by human governors, of necessity, involve the innocent with the guilty; the children suffer through the misconduct of their parents; yet no one on that account exclaims against the laws as unjust. Why then should that be deemed unjust in the government of God, which is approved as just in the governments of men? But God, who is the giver of life, and by whom alone it is maintained—has a right to take life away at any time, and in any manner that he sees fit. Does anyone arraign his providence, if numbers both of men and children are carried off by a pestilence, or overwhelmed in a storm? By what authority then do we prescribe limits to God, and say unto him, "Hitherto shall you go, and no further?" We might as well condemn the Governor of the Universe for inflicting disease and death upon one single infant, as arraign his justice for destroying many. The lives of all are forfeited by sin; and whether he takes them away after a longer or shorter period, or cuts them off singly or at once—he is still the same, "a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." The Judge of all the earth will do right; and who are we that we should reply against him?"Whoever reproves God, let him answer it."

Inferences:

1. We are not at all the more safe for having **many**on our side—

No doubt, the antediluvians fortified themselves against the warnings of Noah, by the consideration that they acted only like those around them. They probably replied, as many at this time do, "If I perish, then what must become of all the world? Is God so unmerciful as to destroy the whole world?" But the outcome showed the folly of all such reasonings; and we should learn from it to expect safety in no other way than in turning from all iniquity, and seeking refuge in Christ Jesus.

2. There will certainly be a day of future retribution—

From the judgment executed at the deluge it is manifest that God will punish sin; but from the indiscriminate manner in which that punishment was inflicted, we may be assured, that there shall be a day in which justice shall be more equitably dispensed, [2 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4-5); [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.9), or, as it is called in Scripture, "a day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Then shall every one receive according to his deeds, whether they are good or evil. "The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." May God prepare us all for that great and solemn day!

3. It befits us all to grieve and mourn for our past sins—

Have the sins of men caused God himself to "repent and be grieved at his heart" that ever he formed man; and should not our sins awaken sorrow and contrition in our hearts? O that we could but view them aright! O that we could mourn over them, as it befits us, and weep in dust and ashes! Surely if we go on impenitent in our sins, the day will come, when we shall repent that ever we were created; we shall wish that we had died in our mother's womb; we shall find that "it would have been better for us if we had never been born."

#15

NOAH'S OBEDIENCE

**[Genesis 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.22)**

"Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did."

Never, from the foundation of the world to this hour, if we except the sacrifice which Christ made of himself upon the cross for the sins of men, was there such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as that which was given at the universal deluge. All flesh having corrupted their way, God determined to execute vengeance upon all, and to destroy from the face of the earth every living thing.

There was, however, one favored servant, whom, together with his family, he was pleased to exempt from the general judgment. Noah was a righteous man, and obtained favor in his sight; and, by means prescribed to him by God himself, he was preserved. Let us consider,

I. The obedience rendered by Noah—

It is not easy to form a just estimate of this—

Let us contemplate the circumstances in which he was placed. He was appointed "a preacher of righteousness," unto all who came within the reach of his ministrations; and he was commanded to declare that God would overwhelm the whole world with a deluge. Of such a judgment there was no appearance whatever for the space of 120 years, during the whole of which period he proclaimed its approach. If at the beginning of his ministrations any were impressed with fear, they soon were led to deride the menace; and to conclude, from the delay, that the threatened calamity would never come upon them.

Let us next notice the means he was directed to use for the preservation of God's chosen remnant—

He was to build a vessel of stupendous magnitude, capable of holding two of every kind of animals that breathed, and of containing also provision for them. The expense and labor employed in constructing this ark must have been immense; and the ridicule which it must have excited, year after year, must have been almost beyond endurance.

Let us, lastly, observe his perseverance in the use of those means, until he had completed the work assigned him—

Nothing could induce him to desist from his work, until it was perfected in every part. Then he, with his whole family, entered into the ark, having first assigned to every living creature its place; and then "God shut him in!" On that very day the rain descended, and the flood commenced, which speedily reached above the highest mountains, and destroyed every living creature from the face of the earth.

Truly this obedience was of a most exalted character—

It showed how firmly he believed the divine testimony, while yet there was not only no sign of any such calamity, but no conceivable mode by which the threatened judgment could be inflicted.

It showed how much he stood in awe of God; and how determined he was, while yet the means of safety were within his reach, to avail himself of the opportunity that was afforded him, lest he also should be involved in the general ruin.

It showed, too, how boldly he faced reproach, when cast upon him for executing the divine commands. Had such a conduct been called for during the space of a few days only, we would have been the less astonished at it; but when it continued without intermission or abatement for the space of 120 years, we cannot but reckon it among the sublimest acts of obedience ever rendered unto God by fallen man.

But in perfect accordance with this, is,

II. The obedience required of **us**—

1. The danger to which **we**are exposed is similar—

God has declared that he will call the whole world into judgment; and that in that day "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)." We see not, indeed, any preparation for such a judgment; and are ready to think that it never can be executed. But God has denounced it against the whole world; and executed it shall be, whether men will believe it or not. Multitudes who assisted in building the ark, would not believe the declarations of God, until the threatened judgments were inflicted.

So it is with us. Multitudes laugh at the threatenings of God; and will continue to do so, until their day of grace shall have passed, and the wrath of God shall fall upon them to the uttermost!

2. The means provided for our escape are similar—

God has provided an ark for us—even his only dear Son; an ark, into which all who believe shall be admitted, but which will speedily be closed against the unbelieving world. Many think it altogether absurd to imagine that such an ark is provided for us; they would prefer one of their own constructing, and for which their own good works shall afford the materials. To enter into Christ by faith, and to look for salvation through faith in him, is in their eyes an unsuitable device; and it is derided accordingly, as an indication of weakness and folly. But this, after all, will be found "the wisdom of God," yes, and "the power of God unto salvation" to all those who embrace it!

3. The distinction that will be made between the believing and unbelieving world will also be similar—

Of those who believed the testimony of Noah, not one perished; of those that disbelieved it, not one was saved. Just so it will be at the last day. Those who are "found in Christ," will be monuments of God's sparing mercy; while those who have neglected and despised him, will be monuments of his righteous indignation forever and ever!

To expound more, either on the original fact, or on its typical adaptation to our circumstances, will not be necessary; the whole taken together in one combined view will be found, I apprehend, more instructive.

Learn then, from the whole,

1. The office of faith—

It was to his faith that Noah's conduct on this occasion must be ascribed, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7). He did not reason on the subject that was revealed to him. He did not say, How can such a deluge be produced?

Or, How can it be supposed that a merciful God should exercise such severity?

Or, How can it be hoped, that, if all the rest of the world be destroyed, any vessel that I can build will preserve me?

It is probable that others argued thus; but he believed, and acted upon, the divine testimony.

Now it is precisely in that way that we must exercise faith in the divine records. We are not to argue, How can it be, that any should be punished with endless torments in Hell?

Or, that so great a part of mankind should be doomed to that fate?

Or, that a simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should be sufficient to deliver those, who without such faith must inevitably perish? We are to give credit to the divine testimony; and to assure ourselves, that whatever God has spoken shall surely come to pass—that "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him! [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36)."

2. The necessity of fearing God—

By this also was Noah actuated; and under the influence of it he prepared the ark, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7). And if we believe God's threatenings against sin and sinners, how can we but fear? The wrath of God is not to be disregarded, as a matter of no concern! No, in truth, it befits us to tremble at it, and to flee from it with all imaginable earnestness. Well would it have been for them, if the people whom he warned had feared God also; but, because they would not fear, they perished. So will it be with us also, [Matthew 24:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.37-39). It shall surely be found a truth at last, that "A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy! [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1). [2 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.5); [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.9)."

3. The benefit of obedience—

Here you behold with your eyes what shall be again realized in the day of judgment. Behold Noah as an object of universal derision for 120 years; but now, with his family, borne above the waves in perfect safety, while all the rest of the world, not excepting the very builders of the ark, are overwhelmed in one common destruction! Thus let the ungodly world laugh at piety now, if they will; but such will be the outcome of their contemptuous proceedings, when those who were the objects of their scorn will be honored by their God, and be saved with an everlasting salvation. "Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done! [Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10-11)."

#16

PRESERVATION OF NOAH

**[Genesis 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 7.1)**

The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation."

The Church of God has frequently been at so low an ebb, that its existence cannot now be traced. There have been times, even since the promulgation of Christianity, when the righteous have been but few; they appear to us indeed much fewer than they really were; and, if we had authentic records respecting them, as we have concerning the Jews, it is probable that we would find several thousand worshipers of Jehovah, for one whose name has been transmitted to us, [1 Kings 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.14); [1 Kings 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.18).

But in the patriarchal ages we are certain that the knowledge of God was very limited; yes, so universal was the degeneracy of man before the flood, that piety was confined to one single family; nor were all of them truly pious, though for their parents' sake they were all made partakers of the same deliverance.

The history before us presents to our view a most distressing scene; a world of sinners doomed to destruction; and the only righteous family in the world selected out of them, to be monuments of God's sparing mercy. The account given of Noah in the text will lead us to show,

I. The **provision** made for Noah's security—

Righteousness is universally an object of God's regard; and though it is not meritorious in his sight so as to justify men before him—yet is it so pleasing and acceptable to him, that he will on account of it bestow many temporal blessings, and in the eternal world will confer a more exalted state of glory, [Ezekiel 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.4) with [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8). On account of his eminent piety, God distinguished Noah, and instructed him to make an ark for the saving of himself and his household.

This ark was typical of the Church of Christ. Peter compares it with baptism, by which we are initiated into the Church; and tells us that as Noah was saved by his admission into the ark, so are we by our introduction into the Church, [1 Peter 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.20-21).

To mark the resemblance between the type and antitype, we may observe that:

1. The ark was **divinely appointed**—

As the Tabernacle in the time of Moses, so the Ark in Noah's times was made according to a pattern devised by God himself.

Noah never could have thought of constructing such a vessel himself; the suggestion originated with God; the model for it was given by God; nor was even the smallest part of it left to be formed after man's device.

And who among men ever conceived the idea of saving man through the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son? Who could ever have imagined that Jehovah's Fellow should become a man; that He should submit to this degradation, yes, moreover should endure the accursed death of the cross, for the purpose of reconciling us to his offended Father, and of "gathering together into one body all things both in Heaven and on earth, [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10)." Who, I ask, would have ever thought of forming a church in such a way, and of saving man by such means? The whole plan bears the stamp and character of a divine origin, according to what is said by the Apostle, "By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8).

2. The ark was **wisely framed**—

The ark, it must be confessed, did not accord with those principles of navigation which obtain among us; it was defective in some of the most essential points; it had no mast, no sails, no rudder. But it was so constructed as to convince all who were saved in it, that their salvation was of God alone, and that to him alone was all the glory due. At the same time it was so formed, that every creature in it found ample accommodation.

The Church too is constituted far otherwise than human wisdom would have framed it. Man would have left room for the display of his own skill, and for the establishment of his own righteousness. He would not have chosen to stand indebted wholly to the righteousness of another; that is too offensive to his natural pride; it is "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23)." To have no sails or rudder left for him to manage, would be disgusting; because it would necessitate him to feel his entire dependence on God, and to acknowledge, that "it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy, [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16)." Yet in all these things God's wisdom is displayed.

This way of salvation is justly called, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God, [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24)." It cuts off all possible occasion for boasting, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27), and compels us to say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise!" At the same time it is the most suitable plan of salvation that can possibly be imagined. "While the moral and discreet are constrained to seek refuge in Christ, the vilest prodigal is not left to despair of mercy; he may enter in at the same door with others, and participate in the salvation which God has provided for him.

3. The ark was **richly furnished**—

There was in the ark an abundant store of provision both for man and beast; so that no creature, from the largest animal to the smallest insect, lacked anything that was needful for it.

Surely in this respect it beautifully represents the Church of Christ, wherein the ordinances of divine grace are administered, and "exceeding great and precious promises are given" for our support. There is not a person in it, from the greatest to the least, who may not find all that can conduce to his health and comfort. There is milk for babes, and meat for those who are of full age, [Hebrews 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.13-14). There is "a feast of fat things" provided for our daily sustenance. There are the richest cordials, "even wines upon the lees well refined," that are dispensed freely to all who desire them. Nothing is lacking; we need never fear lest the store should be exhausted. Nothing is grudged to the lowest servant in the family; all is given to one as well as to another; and to every one, "without money and without price."

We may yet further trace the typical import of the ark in,

II. The **directive** given in reference to for Noah's security—

Noah having finished the ark, waited for further intimations of the divine will, which at length were given him. The direction, as it relates to us, implies two things:

1. That we should use the appointed means of salvation ourselves—

God having formed his church, and provided everything requisite for the preservation of our souls, now speaks to every one of us, "Enter into the ark."

Christ says to us, "I am the door;" "I am the way, the truth, and the life." By Him therefore we are to enter in, [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.9)." By faith in him we shall be placed beyond the reach of harm, and may "rejoice in hope of the glory of God [Romans 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.2)." This is the duty to which we are called.

We are not to amuse ourselves with indulging idle speculations about the fitness of the ark to answer its intended purpose; we have no time to lose; the danger is imminent; if we lose the present moment, we may be undone forever. We have nothing to do but to "enter in," and to commit ourselves to the care of our heavenly Pilot.

2. That we should exert ourselves for the salvation of others—

We should not be contented to go to Heaven alone; we should say with the church of old, "Draw me, and we will run after you, Song of Solomon 1:4." It is the height of impiety to ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We are all appointed to watch over each other; What the Minister is among his flock, that every Parent and Master is among his children and servants. We should employ all the influence we possess, for the advantage of those around us.

God testified his approbation of Abraham on account of his fidelity in improving this talent; and inflicted signal judgments upon Eli for neglecting to exert his parental authority. If, like Lot, we cannot prevail upon our relatives to follow our advice, we shall not be responsible for them; but if they perish through our neglect, their blood will be required at our hands, [Ezekiel 33:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.8-9). We should therefore warn our children and servants to flee from the wrath to come. We should open to them the way of salvation through faith in the crucified Savior. We should declare faithfully to them, that there is "no other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ!" and we should urge them with all possible earnestness to seek acceptance through him. In short, we should separate both ourselves and them from an ungodly world, and" seek to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith in him."

III. We are aware that many **objections** will arise against this advice; which therefore we will briefly consider.

1. We are in the ark already—

It is granted, that as far as the ark designates the visible Church of Christ, we are all inclosed in it In the baptismal service, we pray, that, "as Noah and his family, were saved in the ark from perishing by water, so we, being received into the ark of Christ's Church, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that we may be finally brought to the land of ever-lasting life." But we must distinguish between the visible and the invisible church.

Our blessed Lord has taught us carefully to distinguish between the fruitful and unfruitful branches; which, though they are both "in him," will be very differently dealt with by the great Gardener, [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.2).

The Gospel net incloses many kinds of fish; but only the good will be preserved; the bad will be cast away! [Matthew 13:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.47-48).

In the field, the tares grow together with the wheat; but a separation will be made at last; the one for the fire of Hell, the other for the granary of Heaven! [Matthew 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.30).

The Jews were the peculiar people of God; and Paul tells us, that "to them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;" Yet "he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart on account of them;" which he would not have had, if he had thought that the possession of those outward privileges was sufficient. But he accounts for his feelings by saying, that "all are not Israel, who are of Israel, [Romans 9:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.3-6)." And he elsewhere assures us, in still stronger terms, that it is not any outward privilege or profession that constitutes us Christians, but an inward change of heart, which approves itself to the all-seeing God! [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29).

Let us not then deceive ourselves, or imagine that we must of necessity be saved because we have been baptized; for there was an "accursed Ham" in the ark, as well as a righteous Noah; but let us inquire into the dispositions and habits of our minds; let us examine whether we have given up ourselves unreservedly to God; and whether we are striving to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his!"

2. We do not see that we are in any danger—

This was the case with the antediluvian world. They saw no appearance of any deluge; they could not persuade themselves that God would ever inflict such a tremendous judgment on the earth; and they imputed the concern of Noah to superstition, credulity, and folly. But did their unbelief make void the truth of God? Yes rather, did it not harden them to their own destruction? What security then will our unbelief afford us? We see not any symptoms of that wrath which is threatened against an ungodly world; but will it therefore never come? Will the Word of God fail of its accomplishment? Is it safe for us to set up our opinions against the positive declarations of God, and to found all our hopes of salvation upon the presumption that "God will lie"? Seen, or unseen, our danger is the same; and if all perished at the deluge who took not refuge in the ark—so will all perish at the day of judgment who have not "fled for refuge to the hope set before them."

3. We shall become singular—

This is an objection which we cannot but allow; and it is with pain and grief that we confess its force. We acknowledge that, if we will seek the salvation of our souls in earnest, we must be singular. But whose fault is this? It was not Noah's fault that he was singular in the old world; it was the fault of those who refused to listen to the voice of mercy, and to obey the commands of God. And surely Noah would have paid a very unfitting deference to the world, if he had followed their example rather than his own convictions, and consented to perish with them, rather than secure his own salvation. Why then should we carry our complaisance to such a criminal extent, when the everlasting salvation of our souls is at stake?

We regret that we are compelled to be singular; but we must confess, It is better to be saved with Noah and his little family, than to perish with an ungodly world! It is better to walk in the narrow and unfrequented way which leads unto life, than to go in the broad road which terminates in eternal destruction.

IV. Dismissing then your objections, "allow a word of exhortation"—

To every one we would address the words of our text, "Enter with all your family, into the ark." Consider, how near the day of mercy may have come to its close! The day of judgment may be far off, as it respects the world at large; but it may be near at hand as it respects ourselves. The hour of death may be much nearer to us than we imagine; and that will, in effect, be the day of judgment to us. O what shall we then do, if we are not found in the true ark? What shall we do, if we belong not to Him "of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named," and be not numbered among his "little flock," on whom alone the kingdom of Heaven will be conferred?

Let us only paint to ourselves the distress we would have felt, if we had seen the waters rapidly surrounding us, and the ark shut against us; yet this would be a very faint image of what we shall feel, when the vials of God's wrath shall be poured out upon us, and no hope of deliverance be afforded.

Let us then "not seek merely, but strive, to enter in." Let us endeavor to bring all we can along with us. It will be a painful sight, if we are saved ourselves, to see our wife, our children, our servants, our friends perishing around us, and swallowed up in "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." On the other hand, what a joy will it be to present them unto God, saying, "Here am I, and the children you have given me!" Let us then exert our influence while we can; and I pray God that our labors may be crowned with success; and that, instead of going to Heaven alone, we may all have some to be "our joy and crown of rejoicing" in that solemn day!

#17

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

**[Genesis 9:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 9.12-16)**

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations; I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

Man has no claim whatever upon his God, any more than a vessel has upon the potter who formed it. He is indebted to God for the existence which he has, and depends altogether on his will for the continuance of that existence. But God has been pleased to lay himself under voluntary engagements with his creatures, in order that they may know how gracious he is, and be encouraged to serve him with more lively gratitude. When he had formed man at the first, he entered into a covenant with him to bestow on him blessings to which he could not otherwise have been entitled. And after the extreme wickedness of the world had provoked him to destroy it, he given to make another covenant with Noah, whom he had preserved in the ark. He knew that the severe judgment which he had inflicted on the human race would, for a time at least, strike terror into succeeding generations, and perhaps deter them from cultivating the earth. He therefore gave to Noah an assurance that he would never again destroy all his creatures with a flood; and confirmed this promise by a covenant and an oath.

It will be instructive to mark,

I. The **peculiarities** of the Noahic covenant—

In many things it differs very widely from any other covenant that God has ever entered into. Its peculiarity is visible,

1. In the **parties** with whom the Noahic covenant was made—

The covenant made with Adam, included him and his posterity.

The covenant made with Abraham, extended only to him and his believing Seed.

The covenant made with Moses, was limited to the Jewish nation.

But the covenant with Noah comprehended the whole creation. It embraced the beasts of the field, as well as the human race; every living creature, not excepting the lowest reptile, was interested in it.

2. In the **blessings** which the Noahic covenant promised—

All other covenants held forth spiritual and eternal blessings to those who were admitted into them. Even the Mosaic covenant, which dwelt so much upon the enjoyment of the promised land, can by no means be considered as confining the prospects of the Jews to temporal happiness; for the presence of God among them was very distinctly promised them, together with the special manifestations of his love and favor; and the very land itself was regarded as typical of a better rest, which they were hereafter to receive.

But the covenant made with Noah, promised only that the earth should not any more be destroyed by a flood. It engaged indeed that there should be a constant succession of the seasons until the end of time; but it gave no intimation whatever of spiritual mercies. Being made with the whole creation of beasts as well as men, it promised only such blessings as all the creation could partake of.

3. In the **seal** with which the Noahic covenant was confirmed—

Every covenant has a seal affixed to it, as a pledge of its accomplishment.

The Adamic covenant was confirmed by the tree of life;  
the Abrahamic covenant was confirmed by circumcision;  
the Christian covenant was confirmed by baptism.

In each the seal was significant, either of duties undertaken, or of benefits conferred. But the seal that was chosen for the covenant with Noah, was very peculiar. It was the rainbow. Whenever a rainbow appears, it is a sign that there is rain at that very moment descending on the earth; (for a rainbow is nothing more than the rays of the sun reflected from the drops that fall); consequently, it is in itself rather a ground for apprehending that another deluge may come. Yet God was pleased to appoint that as a token and pledge, that he never will deluge the earth again; he has chosen that, I say, which is an intimation of our danger, to be his pledge for our security.

Without insisting any longer on these subordinate matters, we proceed to notice,

II. Wherein the Noahic covenant accords with the Christian covenant—

There certainly are some striking features in this covenant, which, if not intended absolutely to typify the Christian covenant, are at least well calculated to draw our attention to it.

1. The Noahic covenant was founded upon a sacrifice—

This is particularly deserving of notice. As soon as Noah had come out from the ark, he built an altar and offered sacrifices upon it. These sacrifices were to God "a fragrance of a sweet smell;" yes, so acceptable were they to him, that he immediately "said in his heart, I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake, [Genesis 8:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.20-22)."

Can we refrain from acknowledging the correspondence which this bears with the covenant of grace? The hopes which God has been pleased to give us of deliverance from the curses of his law, are altogether founded on that great sacrifice which was once offered on the cross. The covenant indeed was made thousands of years before our blessed Savior became incarnate; but he was, in the divine intention and purpose, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world!"

From the moment he undertook our cause, he engaged to "make his soul an offering for sin, [Isaiah 53:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-12);" and it was on that ground that he was to have a people given to him for "a purchased possession, [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.14)."

Let us never forget this glorious truth, "Our curse was removed by Christ being made a curse for us! [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13);" Our reconciliation with God was effected solely by the blood of his cross! [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20); God smelled the sweet savor of his sacrifice, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2), and determined that all who came to him through Christ would find acceptance with him; and that "through the blood of the everlasting covenant" he would be a God of peace unto them! [Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21).

2. The Noahic covenant embraced all, without any respect to their moral character—

In the passage before cited, [Genesis 8:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.20-22). God declares that "he would not anymore curse the earth, though the imagination of man's heart was evil from his youth." It was not on account of the merits of mankind that God made that covenant with Noah, nor would he withhold the blessings of it on account of their demerits; yes, though he foresaw that men would still be naturally and universally prone to evil, he voluntarily entered into this covenant, in order that he might display his own grace and mercy towards them.

And what did God find in our fallen race that could induce him to enter into covenant with his Son on their behalf? Had he respect to any merit of theirs; or was he prevented by what he foresaw in reference to their demerit? Had he, in short, any other view than that of displaying "the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus?"

The parallel in this respect is exact. There is indeed a point connected with this, which forms rather a contrast than a parallel; and we the rather specify it, because the mention of it is necessary to guard against all misconception of our meaning.

The covenant made with Noah not only extended its benefits to the ungodly, but left them still as ungodly as ever; whereas the covenant of grace makes provision for the change of men's characters, [Jeremiah 31:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.33); it offers indeed all its blessings to the most unworthy; but when they embrace it, they are made partakers of a new and divine nature, 2 Peter 1:4, which secures the gradual renovation of their souls after the image of their God. "Sin is no longer allowed to have dominion over them, because they are not under the law, but under grace, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14)."

Nevertheless, we repeat it, the Christian covenant includes none on account of their superior goodness, nor rejects any on account of their more atrocious sinfulness; but embraces all who will accept its benefits, and imparts salvation to them freely "without money and without price."

3. The Noahic covenant was immutable and everlasting—

It is over four thousand years since the covenant was given to Noah; and no part of it has ever yet failed. There have been partial inundations, and partial suspensions of fruitful seasons; but at no period, from the deluge to this hour, has anything occurred like the desolation that was inflicted in the days of Noah. And we may rest assured, that the revolutions of night and day, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, will continue until the day of judgment, when the earth, and all that is therein, shall be destroyed by fire.

And can we not affirm the same respecting the covenant of grace? Is not that "ordered in all things and sure?" We are told that "God, in order to show the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to Christ for refuge, might have strong consolation, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)." And when did He ever violate his solemn engagements? Who that ever sought to lay hold on this covenant, was rejected? Who that firmly trusted in it ever found it to fail him in any one particular? We challenge the whole world to produce a single instance, wherein "God has ever broken his covenant, or altered the thing that had gone out of his lips, [Psalm 89:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.34)."

The comparison between the two covenants in this particular is not forced or fanciful; it is suggested by God himself; who assures us that the covenant of his grace and peace shall be more immovable than rocks or mountains, yes, as unalterable as the covenant which he made with Noah, [Isaiah 54:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.8-10).

We will close the subject with two suitable **reflections**:

1. What reason have we to admire the forbearance of God!

The continuance of the world, considering the state of its inhabitants, is a most astonishing proof of God's mercy and forbearance. Let us only look around, and see whether mankind are not almost universally living as they did before the flood, "they were then eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," and regardless of the warnings of God's righteous Word.

This is precisely our state; yet God has spared us, instead of inflicting on us the judgments we have deserved. He has even sent us "fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." What reason then have we to bless and magnify his name! But let us rather turn our eyes inward, and see what reason God has had to make us monuments of his vengeance.

Let us contemplate how many of our fellow-creatures are at this moment suffering the just desert of their deeds, while we continue upon mercy's ground, and have all the offers of salvation still sounding in our ears. Let us "account this long-suffering of God to be salvation," let us "seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near."

2. What encouragement have we to seek his grace!

Without ever once adverting to it in our minds, we are at this moment enjoying the benefits of the covenant made with Noah; and, notwithstanding all our unworthiness, we are yet daily invited to embrace that better covenant, the covenant of grace.

What shall we do then? Shall we continue regardless of God's mercies, until our day of grace is irrevocably past?

O let us "not despise the riches of his patience and long-suffering and forbearance; but let his goodness lead us to repentance."

Let us "not receive such stupendous grace in vain."

Let us entreat him to "look upon the face of his anointed," as he looks continually upon the rainbow; and for the sake of Jesus to pity and pardon us. Then shall we find favor in his sight, and be delivered from the eternal desolations which must at last come upon the unbelieving world!

#18

THE TOWER OF BABEL

**[Genesis 11:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 11.4-8)**

"And they said, "Come, let us build a city for ourselves, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city."

There are many things observable in the world, of which neither reason nor history enables us to give any account. One would naturally suppose that Noah and his family speaking the same language, their children should speak the same; and that the same would be transmitted to their latest posterity. Small alterations might be expected to arise; but they would only be different dialects of the same language.

But instead of this, there are hundreds of different languages in the world. Even in this island there are no less than three. Learned men have indeed endeavored to trace various languages to one; but though by their efforts they have displayed their own ingenuity, they have never been able to establish their hypothesis. The true origin of this diversity of languages is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures.

In the passage before us we are informed respecting the time and manner and occasion of their first introduction. The descendants of Noah were building a city and tower in order to prevent that dispersion of their families, which God had ordained for the replenishing of the earth; and God, in righteous displeasure, confounded their languages, so that they could not understand each other; by this means they were necessitated to relinquish their project, and to fulfill the designs of his overruling Providence.

In our observations on the history of these builders we shall notice,

I. Their intentions—

It does not appear that they designed to fortify themselves against another deluge; for then they would have built on a mountain rather than a plain. They had principally two things in view:

1. The advancement of their own honor and fame—

They said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." They thought that by raising this city they should immortalize themselves, and be famed for their wisdom and energy to the remotest generations.

Here we see the principle which actuates all the world—love of fame. What is it but the desire of fame which impels the warrior to the field of battle? What has greater influence on the philosopher, or more forcibly animates him in his researches after knowledge? What is it that actuates the rich in constructing and decorating their spacious edifices, but a desire to display their taste and opulence?

Even the charitable are too often under the influence of this motive. To this, in many instances, must be ascribed the founding of colleges, or endowing of hospitals, or contributing to the support of established institutions. If, in any public charity, the publishing of the names of its supporters were to be discontinued, a difference would soon be found in the amount of the contributions!

Would to God we could exempt the professors of religion also from this imputation! Where the heart is really right with God, it is on its guard against this base principle; but there are too many hypocrites, whose chief aim is to be accounted religious, and to be admired either for their talents or their virtues.

There will at times be a mixture of sinful and honorable principles in the best of men, which it is the labor of their lives to detect and rectify. There is in all who are truly conscientious, a commendable desire to approve themselves to their fellow-creatures in the discharge of their several duties. It is not in reference to either of these that we now speak. It is rather in reference to those in whom the love of fame has a predominant ascendancy; of them we say, as of the builders of Babel, that they are the objects of God's just and heavy displeasure. See this exemplified in Nebuchadnezzar ([Daniel 4:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.30-31).) Herod ([Acts 12:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.22-23).) and even the pious Hezekiah ([2 Kings 20:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.13-18).).

2. The gratification of their own wishes and desires—

God had ordered that the survivors of the deluge should "increase and multiply, and fill the earth, [Genesis 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 9.1)." Of course, if the whole earth was to be filled, the rising generations must gradually enlarge their borders, with a view to occupy every quarter of the globe. But the builders of Babel thought that such a dispersion would deprive them of many comforts, and be attended with many inconveniences. As for the divine will, they were not much concerned about it; all they thought of was, their own ease and pleasure; and if obedience to God stood in competition with the gratification of their own wishes, they did not hesitate to sacrifice duty to inclination.

In this respect their example is very generally followed. God has prescribed a line of conduct to us which is difficult and self-denying. He requires us to sit loose to the vanities of this world, and to seek our rest and happiness above. This ill suits our earthly and sensual dispositions. Hence we choose not to submit to such restraints; we think we are at liberty to please ourselves; we pronounce the commands of God to be unnecessarily strict and severe; we content ourselves with such a conformity to them as will consist with the indulgence of our own desires; and we prosecute our plans without any reference to His will, or any subjection to His control.

Look at the young, the mirthful, the worldly, the ambitious; and say whether they are not all treading in the steps of these infatuated builders? Say whether they do not systematically shun a life of self-denial, and follow their own inclinations rather than the commands of God?

How offensive such a life is to God we may collect from those declarations of the apostle, That "to be carnally-minded is death," and that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God! [Romans 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.6); [Romans 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.8)."

Since their purpose was directly opposite to God's decree, we shall not wonder at,

II. Their disappointment—

God in this place, as also in several other places, speaks in the plural number, "Let us go down, [Genesis 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.26); [Genesis 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.22)." By this form of expression he gave, it should seem, an early intimation of the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity, which was afterwards to be more clearly revealed. Moreover, speaking after the manner of men, he represents himself as coming down from Heaven to inspect their work, and as feeling an apprehension, that, if he did not interrupt its progress, his own plans respecting the dispersion of mankind would be defeated. He then declares his determination to frustrate their design, and to accomplish his own purposes, by confounding their language.

Now in this their disappointment it will be profitable to notice:

1. The time—

God interrupted them in the midst of all their hopes and projects. They had made considerable progress in their work, and were, doubtless, anticipating the satisfaction they would feel in its completion. And thus it is that the expectations of those who are seeking their happiness in this world are generally disappointed. They form their plans; they prosecute their designs; they advance in their prospects; partial success animates them to a more diligent pursuit of their favorite object; but sooner or later God stops them in their career, and says to them, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you!" "When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as a thief in the night, or as travail upon a woman with child!"

2. The manner—

The means which God used to stop the progress of the work was the most unlooked for that can be imagined. The people engaged in it might conceive it possible that they should be stopped by quarrels among themselves, or by another deluge, or by fire from Heaven; but they could never entertain the remotest idea of such an interruption as they experienced.

Thus does God generally interpose to disappoint the expectations of worldly men. He has ten thousand ways in which to render their plans abortive, or to embitter to them the very things in which they have sought their happiness. We have labored for honor and distinction; he allows us perhaps to attain our wishes; and then makes our elevation a source of nothing but disquietude and pain. Many have looked for enjoyment in the acquisition of a partner or a family; who after a time would give the world perhaps to loose the indissoluble knot, or to have been "written childless in the earth." In short, the Governor of the Universe is never at a loss for means to confound the devices of the wise, or frustrate the counsels of the ungodly.

Moreover, as the disappointment of the builders was strange and unlooked for, so was it in a way that perpetuated their disgrace. The building which they had raised would, for many centuries perhaps, be a witness against them; every time also that they opened their lips, they would be reminded of their folly and wickedness by the very language which they spoke; and as long as the world shall stand, the different nations of the earth will exhibit the sad effects of their impiety, the indelible records of their shame!

And where can we turn our eyes without seeing memorials of human folly, and evidences that all creature-confidences are vain? Ask the aged and they will testify; inquire even of the young, and they will confess; that the creature, however fair its appearance or promising its prospect, is only "a broken cistern which can hold no water." All of them, both rich and poor, "have gone to it with their vessels, and come away ashamed, [Jeremiah 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.3)." They renew indeed their applications from time to time; but only to experience repeated disappointments. There are but few who have not found their cup, notwithstanding its occasional sweets—so distasteful on the whole, that they are almost weary of the world by the time that they have half completed their destined course. And the more eager they have been in their pursuit of earthly good, the more painfully have they been made to feel, that it was all "vanity and vexation of spirit!"

If we look into the eternal world, what monuments shall we there find of disappointed ambition! What multitudes are there, who once said, 'I aspire after happiness; I shall find it in the attainment of wealth, and in the gratifications of sense!' They passed their time in dreaming of happiness which they never realized; and knew not that they had been dreaming, until "they awoke to shame and everlasting contempt." And though, while in this world they justified their choice, they themselves will to all eternity be witnesses for God, acknowledging the folly of their former conduct, and the justice of their present doom.

We cannot conclude without **observing**,

1. How greatly do we at this moment suffer under the curse inflicted on them!

Difference of language has not only placed obstacles in the way of commercial order, but has given occasion to contiguous or distant nations to consider each other as enemies. Moreover, it has been the means of excluding the greater part of the world from all the advantages of Scripture revelation. And if a benevolent person, desirous of diffusing the knowledge of Christ among the heathen, engage in the arduous undertaking, he must first lose several years before he can attain a competent knowledge of the languages in which he is to address them; even then he labors under the greatest disadvantages in speaking to them; and, after all, he must limit his exertions to two or three nations at the uttermost. Multitudes there are who would gladly encounter labor and fatigue in the service of their fellow-creatures; but they are discouraged by these difficulties, and are compelled to restrain their benevolent wishes through a conscious incapacity to carry them into effect.

Nor is this all; for the unlearned of our own nation sustain incalculable loss through the introduction of foreign words, and foreign idioms, into our own language; insomuch that, if they hear that a book has been penned for the edification of the learned, the author is, in fact, "a barbarian to them," almost as much as if he spoke in another language.

Suffering thus as we do for the transgression of those builders, we ought at least to shun a repetition of their sins, and to humble ourselves before God for all the pride and worldliness of our hearts.

2. How graciously has God blended mercy with judgment!

When the plan of salvation was perfected, and the time for the more extensive propagation of the Gospel was arrived, God inspired holy men, without any previous instruction, to speak all manner of languages, and to diffuse the knowledge of the truth through all nations; that as by the division of languages he had dispersed men through the earth—so by the gift of languages "he might gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad, [Acts 2:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.3-6) with [John 11:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.52)."

The end of that gift of languages having been in a measure attained, and the gift itself withdrawn, he stirred up men of learning and piety in different countries to translate the Scriptures into their respective languages, so that the unlearned might read them in the language which they understood.

What do we of this nation owe to God, and, under God, to our Reformers, for giving us the Bible in our own tongue! If the volume of inspiration were locked up in the languages in which it was first written, how deplorable would be our state! Oh, never, never can we be sufficiently thankful that the fountains of divine knowledge are open and accessible to all!

Moreover, though the languages of men are still different, there is a language in which all the children of God throughout the earth agree—the language of the heart. As far as respects the work of God upon their souls, they all speak precisely the same thing. Sighs and groans and tears are universally the expressions of their sorrow on account of sin. They all agree in exalting Christ as "their wisdom, their righteousness, their sanctification, and their complete redemption." They glory in Him, and in him alone. They are indeed Barbarians to the ignorant ungodly world, who are ready to say of them as the Jews did of the Apostles, "These men are full of new wine!" they are foolish, they are mad. But they understand each other; though brought from the most distant parts of the earth, there will be found such an agreement between them, as will unite their hearts to each other in the closest bonds of love. What was said of them before their dispersion, may be said of them now again, "They are all one, and they have all one language." Though Egyptians by nature, they have learned the language of Canaan! [Isaiah 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 19.18), and are again united in building an edifice that shall last forever.

Let us then bless our God for these rich mercies; and from being "strangers and foreigners, let us seek to become fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

#19

CALL OF ABRAM

**[Genesis 12:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.1-4)**

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran."

Our God has been pleased to teach us, no less by example than by precept; and the instruction to be gathered from the life and conduct of his saints, commends itself to us with peculiar force, as being less open to the evasions of criticism, or the objections of prejudice. Doubtless we must exercise a sober judgment in determining how far we are to follow the Patriarchs, Prophets, or Apostles; for there were many things in their conduct which were peculiar to their situation and circumstances. But we can never materially err, if we attend to the spirit of their actions; here they were patterns to us; and as far as relates to this, we are to be "followers of those who through faith and patience now inherit the promises." We are bidden particularly to "walk in the steps of our father Abraham;" one of the most remarkable of which is that which is mentioned in our text.

We shall endeavor to observe that sobriety of interpretation, while we consider,

I. The Call of Abram—

The command given to him was most extraordinary—

The world had speedily relapsed into idolatry. Abram was brought up, it would seem, in the common idolatry. But it pleased God to separate him from the idolatrous world, in order that he might be a living witness for Jehovah, and preserve in his family the knowledge of the true God. For this end God appeared to him, and commanded him to leave his country and friends, and to go into a land which would afterwards be shown to him.

But however strange this may appear, a similar command is given to every one of us—

We are not indeed called to leave our country and connections; but we are called to withdraw our affections from earthly things, and to fix them upon things above, [Colossians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-2).

The whole world around us lies in wickedness, [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19).

We are expressly forbidden to be of the world, any more than Christ himself was of the world, [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16).

We are not to love the world, or anything that is in it, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16).

We are not to be conformed to the world, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2).

We are not to seek the world's friendship, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4).

We are rather to come out from the world, [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17-18).

We are to be altogether crucified to the world, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

We are to regard it as a wilderness through which we are passing to our Father's house; and in our passage through it to consider ourselves only as strangers and pilgrims, [Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13). If we meet with good accommodation and kind treatment, we are to be thankful. If we meet with briers and thorns in our way, we must console ourselves with the thought, that it is our appointed way, and that every step will bring us nearer home, [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22). Nothing good is to detain us; nothing evil to divert us from our path. We are to be looking forward to our journey's end, and to be proceeding towards it, however adverse is the weather, or however difficult is the road, [Hebrews 11:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.14-16).

The direction given to the church, is the same in every age, "Hearken, O daughter, and incline your ear; forget also your own people and your father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in your beauty! [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)." There is no exemption granted to any, no difference allowed. Some from their occupations in society must be more conversant with the world than others; but in heart and affection all must be withdrawn from it, "not partaking of its sins, lest they should receive also of its plagues, [Revelation 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 18.4)."

There will not appear to be anything harsh in the command given to Abram, if we consider,

II. The inducements offered to him—

These were far more than equivalent to any sacrifice he could make—

He was to be blessed in himself, and a blessing to others. In respect of temporal things, he was blessed in a very signal manner to the last hour of his life, [Genesis 24:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 24.1); [Genesis 24:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 24.35). He was loaded also with spiritual and eternal benefits, being justified and accounted righteous before God, and being exalted after death to the highest seat in his Father's house. He was also a blessing to many; for his children and household were governed by him in a way most conducive to their best interests. The people among whom he sojourned could not but be edified by his instructions and conduct; and to this day the whole of his life affords a stimulus to the church to serve God after his example.

But most of all was he a blessing in being the Progenitor of the Messiah, "in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, [Acts 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.25), and [Galatians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.8); [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16)." Every person will be blessed or cursed according as he accepts or rejects that promised Seed.

Similar inducements are offered to us also—

Everyone who, for Christ's sake, will renounce the world, shall be blessed. He may not possess opulence and honor; but "the little that he has, shall be better to him than all the riches of the ungodly." In his soul he shall be truly blessed. View him in the state least enviable according to human apprehension; see him weeping and mourning for his sins; yet then is he truly blessed! [Matthew 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-4). He shall have pardon and acceptance with his God; he shall experience the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; he shall have "joys and consolations which the stranger cannot imagine;" and in due time "he shall be blessed with faithful Abraham," in the eternal fruition of his God.

He shall be a blessing too to all around him. View him in his family connections; view him as a husband, a parent, a master, a friend—who is so kind, so benevolent, so anxious to promote the happiness of those connected with him? View him in the church, or in the state; what blessings does he communicate by the light of his example! what evils does he avert by his prevailing intercessions! Suppose the Christian to be instrumental to the salvation of one single soul; the whole world is not equivalent to the good that he has done! Nor is it that individual soul only that shall acknowledge him as its benefactor; for, all the good that shall arise through the medium of that soul to the remotest posterity, shall be traced up to him as its author; and shall occasion thanksgivings to God on his behalf to all eternity!

Let these inducements be duly weighed, and how light will the vanities of this world appear in comparison to them!

From a believing prospect of these benefits arose,

III. His ready obedience—

Notwithstanding all the obstacles in his way, he without hesitation obeyed God's call—

His friends and relatives would consider his conduct as an indication of consummate weakness and folly; especially, when he could not so much as tell them where he was going; they would be ready to pity him as insane. But as, on the one hand, he valued not the comforts of their society, so neither, on the other hand, did he regard their contempt and ridicule; every consideration gave way to a sense of duty, and a desire of the promised blessings. He believed, firmly believed, all that God had spoken. He believed especially that the Savior of the world would spring from his loins; and that, through the merits of that Savior, he himself, together with all his believing posterity, would possess that good land, even Heaven itself, of which Canaan was a type and shadow. Under the influence of this faith he was contented to forego all the comforts that he would lose, and to endure all the sufferings that would come upon him, [Hebrews 11:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8-10).

In this he was a pattern and example to all believers—

If we renounce the world for Christ's sake, and set ourselves in earnest to seek the land of promise, we shall be despised and hated, even as Christ himself was, [John 15:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-20). But this we are not to regard. We are "not to confer with flesh and blood;" but instantly and perseveringly to pursue our destined course. What though we have never seen Heaven, nor can even tell where it lies? It is sufficient for us to know that it is a land flowing with milk and honey, and that it is "kept for us until the time appointed by the "Father." Nor need we doubt but that it will far more than counterbalance all the sufferings that we can endure in our way to it! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18). Let us only exercise the faith of Abram, and we shall instantly set out to follow his steps.

Address,

1. Those who are at ease in their native land—

It may appear harsh to say, that, "if you hate not father and mother, and houses and lands, yes and your own life also, you cannot be Christ's disciple! [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26);" but this is the word of Christ himself. It is true, we are not to understand it in a literal sense; for we are not to "hate" even our enemies; but when our friends, or even life itself, stand in competition with Christ, we must act as if we hated them; we must sacrifice them all without one moment's hesitation. On lower terms than these Christ never will accept us, "We must forsake all, and follow him."

2. Those who have set out towards the land of promise—

Terah the father, and Nahor the brother, of Abram, accompanied him as far as Haran; and there (from what motive we know not) they all abode five years. God then renewed his call to Abram; but alas! his father was dead; and Nahor was weary of a wandering life; so that, on the recommencement of his journey, Abram had no associate but his Wife and Nephew. We pretend not to determine anything of the spiritual state of Terah or Nahor; but their never entering into the land of Canaan may well be a caution to us to "beware, lest, having received a promise of entering into God's rest, any of us should seem to come short of it! [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1)." It were better never to have begun our journey heavenward, than to turn back, even in our hearts! [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21); [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39).

#20

ABRAM'S JOURNEY TO CANAAN

**[Genesis 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.4-6)**

"So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land."

The call of Abram is one of the most instructive subjects that can occupy the human mind; both because the perfections of Almighty God were most gloriously displayed in it; and because, in it, Abram showed himself one of the brightest patterns of obedience that ever the world beheld.

He had had a revelation from God while yet he was at Ur, in the land of the Chaldees; by that revelation he was directed to leave his native country; which was immersed, as he also and his father were, in idolatry, [Joshua 24:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.2). At Haran he abode until his father's death; when he received from God a further direction to go into Canaan, with an express assurance that the whole land of Canaan would be given to him and his posterity for an inheritance, and that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. See [Acts 7:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.2-4). With this direction he complied; he took his wife and family, and all that he possessed, and set out upon the journey; as it is said in the words before us, "They went forth, to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

Now this call of Abram is very instructive; no less as displaying the glorious perfections of God who called him, than as exhibiting the distinguished virtues of him who obeyed the call.

I propose then, in illustrating this subject, to set before you:

I. The perfections of God for your admiration—

To this we are particularly led by that expression of Stephen, "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham." Observe, then,

1. God's sovereignty—

Why was Abram distinguished above all other of the sons of men, to be so blessed in himself, and such a blessing to the world? He and all his family were idolaters, as also were all around him; yet was he selected by Almighty God from among them, and made the friend and favorite of Heaven.

Can any account for this? Can it be traced to anything but the sovereign will and pleasure of Jehovah? However adverse any man may be to the idea of God's sovereignty in the dispensation of his blessings, he cannot deny, he cannot question it, in this case.

Yet this is really what is done in the conversion of every soul to God. The Almighty Sovereign of the universe "has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)." "It is God, and God alone, who has made any of us to differ" from our fellows, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7). Every saint, whether in Heaven or on earth, must say, "By the grace of God I am what I am! 1 Corinthians 15:10."

2. God's power—

Nothing less than omnipotence could have effected such a sudden and total change in the heart of Abram as was wrought at this time; nor, in truth, could anything less than omnipotence have sufficed to accomplish for him all that was now promised. And is less power required for the "turning of any man from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" It is a new creation, and is expressly called so by God himself! [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10). It is compared by Paul to the power which the Father exercised in raising his Son Jesus Christ from the dead, and exalting him to glory far above all the principalities and powers, whether of Heaven or Hell! [Ephesians 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-21).

From the first awakening of a sinner to his final exaltation to glory, he must say, in reference to the whole work, "Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5)."

3. God's faithfulness—

Abram had not one foot of land; nor for twenty-five years after the promise was made to him, had he the child to whom the promises were made. The time was past in which, according to the course of nature, it was possible for him and Sarah to have a child. Yet the child was given him; and to his posterity all the land of Canaan; and in due time, the seed also, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.

Thus, in like manner, are all the promises fulfilled to every one who believes in Christ; not one jot or tittle of God's Word is ever allowed to fail, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14). "The promises of God in Christ are, not yes and nay, but yes and amen, to the glory of God! [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20)," and to the everlasting salvation of all who rely upon them. However numerous their dangers are, or great their difficulties, "they shall never be plucked out of God's hands, [John 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.29)," but shall be "kept by his power unto full and complete salvation! [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)."

Let us now set before you that which is no less conspicuous in our text; namely,

II. The virtues of Abram, for your imitation—

We are told, on divine authority, that if we be Abram's seed, we shall do the works of Abram. Behold, then,

1. Abram's simple faith—

He received implicitly all that God spoke unto him. To whatever it referred, and however improbable, humanly speaking, the accomplishment of it was, he never for one moment doubted the truth of God's Word, "nor ever staggered at any promise through unbelief." Now in this most particularly he is set forth as an example to us; who are required to "walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had while he was yet uncircumcised, [Romans 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.12)."

More especially are we to imitate him in relation to the faith which he exercised on the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he beheld at the distance of two thousand years as the Savior of the world. If any person ever could be justified by his works, Abram might have claimed that honor; but, as eminent as his obedience to the divine mandates was, "he had nothing whereof to glory before God;" and, sensible of his own utter unworthiness, he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness, and was justified solely by faith in him.

And why is this so minutely recorded concerning him? Was it for his sake, that he might be honored? No; it was altogether for our sakes, that we might know how we also are to be justified, and may look simply to Christ as our all in all!

2. Abram's prompt decision—

It is said concerning him, that "when he was called to go out into a place which he would after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed." There was in him no hesitation, no delay. And in this way must we also obey the divine call, when bidden to "forsake all and follow Christ." We must "not confer with flesh and blood, [Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.16);" but must, like the Disciples with their nets, and Matthew at the receipt of custom, leave all for Christ. We must be on our guard against specious excuses, "Lord, let me go home and bury my father," or "say goodbye to my friends;" we must not be looking for "a more convenient season;" our obedience must be prompt, our decision firm and unchangeable; while it is called today, we must avail ourselves of the opportunity that is afforded us to do the will of God; to hesitate, is treason; to delay, is death. "What our hand finds to do, we must do it instantly, and with all our might!"

3. Abram's self-denying zeal—

Doubtless Abram felt that attachment which men usually do to their native country; and found it painful to turn his back upon all his friends, and to forsake all the comforts which he enjoyed in opulence and ease. No doubt, too, he had much to explain to his friends and acquaintances. He was leaving his native country, and yet "he knew not where he was going." How strange must this appear! yes, what a folly and infatuation! But "he knew in whom he had believed," and had no fear but that the Lord Jehovah, who had called him, would guide his feet, and keep him in all his ways.

Just so, shall not we also have much to contend with, if we obey the call of God in his Gospel? To renounce the world, to "mortify our members upon earth, to cut off a right hand, to pluck out a right eye, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts"—is surely no easy work. The very terms in which these duties are expressed sufficiently declare what self-denial is necessary for the discharge of them.

From without, also, our difficulties will be increased. We shall have foes without number to obstruct our way; and most of all, "those of our own household." Hence our blessed Lord warned his followers, saying, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me!" In truth, "if we hate not father and mother, and houses and land, yes, and our own lives also in comparison with him, we cannot be his disciples." Let not this appear a hard saying; obey it, like Abram; and, like him, you shall find it "a light burden and an easy yoke."

4. Abram's prudent care—

Abram collected together all the substance which he could conveniently carry with him, and took it along with him for his support. To have acted otherwise, without necessity, would have been to tempt God, rather than to trust in him. He had many dependent on him; and it befit him, as far as with propriety he could, to provide for their support.

The same prudent care befits us also. It is one thing to improve the means we possess, and another to trust in them. We must never say to gold, "You are my hope; or to the fine gold, You are my confidence;" but at the same time we are to employ the talents which God has committed to us that we may support ourselves, and not be chargeable to others. A prudent attention to our worldly circumstances tends rather to honor, than disgrace, religion. Abram, as the head of a family, provided for his own; and he did right in this; yes, if he had not done it, he would have "denied the faith, and been worse than an infidel."

Whatever, then, is your situation in life, endeavor to discharge the duties of it in a befitting manner; and let your determination through grace be like that of David, "I will be careful to lead a blameless life, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)."

5. Abram's persevering diligence—

In stopping at Haran until his father's death, I suppose, he judged that to be, or rather, that it was for the time, his proper destination. But being afterwards directed to go to Canaan, he went forth, and turned not aside until he came there; and there he abode for many years. Indeed, to the very end of his life he held on in the good way which God had directed him to pursue.

Just so, it is that we also must approve ourselves to God. We must "not turn back; for, if we do, God's soul will have no pleasure in us." If we "turn back" at any time, it is to certain "perdition." Let us "remember Lot's wife!" In fact, it were better for us never to have "known the way of righteousness, than after having known it, to depart from it." Go on then, like Abram, "as pilgrims and sojourners here," "showing plainly, that you are seeking a better country, [Hebrews 11:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.9-10); [Hebrews 11:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-16)." And be assured, that "if, by patient continuance in well-doing, you seek for glory and honor and immortality, you shall in the end attain eternal life! [Romans 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.9)."

#21

SEPARATION OF ABRAM AND LOT

**[Genesis 13:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 13.8-11)**

"So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company"

Wealth is almost universally considered as a source of happiness, and in that view is most eagerly desired. That it may conduce to our happiness in some respects, especially when it is improved for the relief of our fellow-creatures, we admit; but it is much oftener a source of trouble and vexation than of satisfaction and comfort. "As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? [Ecclesiastes 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.11)."

A multitude of servants increases our care. Their disagreements among themselves, or disputes with the servants of others, frequently become an occasion of disquietude to ourselves. The envy also and jealousy that are excited in the bosoms of others, operate yet further to the disturbance of our peace. In how many families have contentions arisen from this source! How many who have spent years together in love and harmony, have been distracted by feuds and animosities as soon as ever they were called to share the property that has been bequeathed to them! Even piety itself cannot always prevent that discord, which the pride or covetousness of others is forward to excite.

Abram and Lot had lived together in perfect amity, while their circumstances were such as to preclude any jarring of interests; but when their opulence increased, occasions of jealousy arose; their servants, espousing too warmly their respective interests, quarreled among themselves; and it became expedient at last, on account of the difficulty of finding pasturage for such numerous flocks and herds, and for the sake of preventing more serious disputes, that a separation should take place between them.

The manner in which this separation was effected will afford us much instruction, while we consider,

I. The proposal of **Abram**—

His conduct on this occasion was indeed such as befit his exalted character. It was:

1. Abram's proposal was **conciliatory**—

Abram well knew the value and blessedness of peace. He knew that "the beginning of strife is as when one lets out water;" the breach, however small at first, being quickly widened by the stream that rushes through it, and speedily defying all the efforts of man to prevent an inundation. He had learned that valuable lesson, "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out, [Proverbs 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 17.14);" knowing that when it is once begun, no man can tell when or how it shall terminate.

Hence he was desirous of promoting peace between the herdsmen, and more especially between himself and Lot. The consideration of the relation subsisting between himself and Lot, rendered the idea of contention still more hateful in his eyes, "Let there be no strife, I beg you, between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren." How amiable was this spirit, how engaging was this address! and how happy would the world be, if all were thus studious to prevent contention, and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!"

2. Abram's proposal was **gracious**—

Abram, as standing in the superior relation of an uncle, and as being the person peculiarly called of God, while Lot was only a Nephew and an attendant, might well have claimed the deference and submission that were due to him. But, instead of arrogating to himself any authority or asserting his own rights, he was ready to act the part of an inferior; rightly judging that condescension is the truest honor, and that to be the servant of all is to imitate most nearly the character of our blessed Lord, [Matthew 20:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.26-28). Accordingly the proposal came from him, that, since circumstances imperiously required a separation, they should separate in a manner that befit their holy profession.

How many angry disputes, and bitter quarrels, and bloody wars might be avoided, if the contending parties, instead of proudly requiring the first advances from each other, would strive who should be foremost in making proposals for peace!

3. Abram's proposal was **generous**—

Common justice required that the partition of land should be such as to secure to Abram equal advantages with Lot. But Abram waved his rights, and cheerfully conceded to his nephew whatever portion he chose to take. Though he could not but know that there was a great difference between the lands on either side of him, the one being far more fertile and better watered than the other, he desired Lot to occupy whichever he preferred, and to leave the other to him.

What a noble, unselfish, generous mind did this manifest! Would to God that such an indifference about carnal interests were more prevalent in the world, and especially among the professors of religion! This would show a befitting deadness to the world; it would give an evidence, that our hearts were set on things above, and not on things below; it would illustrate, more strongly and convincingly than ten thousand words, the efficacy of faith, and the excellence of true religion.

Admirable as was the example of Abram, we observe a perfect contrast to it in,

II. The choice of **Lot**—

Whether Lot was at that time a converted man, we cannot say; it is certain that twenty years after this he was a truly righteous man, and a most distinguished favorite of Heaven, [2 Peter 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.7-8); and it is not improbable that the change of heart which he experienced, arose from the troubles which his present choice entailed upon him. But without determining his general character, it is very plain that his conduct in the present instance argued:

1. Lot's choice manifested too great a concern about his temporal interests—

As far as the history informs us, we have no reason to think that Lot felt any reluctance in parting with Abram. He had now an opportunity of gratifying his covetous desires; and he seems to have embraced it with greediness and joy. If he had not been blinded by selfishness, he would have returned the compliment to Abram, and given him his choice; or, if he had accepted Abram's offer, he would at least have endeavored to make an equitable division of the lands, so that each might have his proper portion of the more fertile country. But instead of this, he surveyed with pleasure the well-watered plains of Jordan, which were beautiful and fruitful like Eden of old, and took the whole of them for himself; regardless of what difficulties his uncle might experience; and intent only on his own interests.

Who does not see the baseness and illiberality of this conduct? Who does not see that worldliness and covetousness were the governing principles of his heart? If the man who requested our Lord to interpose in order to obtain for him his proper share of his father's inheritance, needed that caution, "Take heed and beware of covetousness," then much more did the choice of Lot betray a very undue concern about his temporal interests, and a selfishness that was deeply reprehensible.

2. Lot's choice manifested too little regard to the interests of his soul—

Lot could not but know the character of the people of Sodom; for they declared their sin before all, and without the least reserve; and he ought to have considered, "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character, [1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.33)." But as he left Abram without regret, so he went to dwell in Sodom without fear. What benefits he was losing, and what dangers he was about to rush into, he little thought of; his earthly prosperity was all that occupied his mind; and whether the welfare of his soul were forwarded or impeded, he did not care.

This conduct every one must blame; yet how many are there who pursue the same heedless and pernicious course! How many for the sake of temporal advantage will leave the places where their souls are nourished with the bread of life, and take up their abode where there is an incessant "famine of the word!" How many will form their connections even for life upon no better principle than this! Well will it be for them, if the troubles which they bring upon themselves, operate, as they did on Lot, to bring them to repentance.

Let us learn from hence,

1. To guard against the love of this world—

It is not without reason that John says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16)." We see in the instance before us what unhappy dispositions the love of this world generated, and what unworthy conduct it produced. Indeed the folly as well as sinfulness of this disposition is strongly illustrated in the present case; for Lot had enjoyed his portion but a little time before he was plundered of all that he possessed, and himself and family were carried into captivity, [Genesis 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.12); and, after his restoration to liberty and opulence, he at last was forced to flee for his life, and to leave all his property, and part also of his family, to be destroyed by fire from Heaven, [Genesis 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.14); [Genesis 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.17); [Genesis 19:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.25-26).

Thus shall a love of this world be recompensed to all. If God have designs of mercy towards them, he will either take away from them the objects of their idolatrous regard, or embitter to them the possessions in which they have sought delight.

Let us then be on our guard against that "love of money which is the root of all evil." "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs," [1 Timothy 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.9-10)."

2. To cultivate an affectionate and self-denying spirit—

If we look no further than this present life, the exercise of love and self-denial has greatly the advantage over selfishness, even when it is most successful. Let us compare the feelings of Abram and of Lot on this occasion; how refined, how enviable were those of Abram in comparison with Lot's! Give to Lot all the joy of successful covetousness, and conceive him to be filled with exultation at the portion he had gained, and at his prospects of increasing opulence. Suppose, on the other hand, Abram impressed with thankfulness to God for having enabled him to sacrifice his own interests rather than contend about them, and for having disposed his mind to generosity and love. Which of these two had the more solid happiness? No man who has any just notions of happiness, can entertain a doubt. What then we admire in another, let us cultivate in ourselves; and what we cannot but acknowledge to be highly virtuous and laudable, let us labor to attain, let us endeavor to preserve in constant exercise. "Let us be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love, in honor preferring one another, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10)." Let us, "look not on our own things only, but rather and principally on the things of others, [Philippians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4-5)."

Thus "walking in the steps of our father Abraham," we shall approve ourselves to be his children. Yes, we shall resemble that greatest of all patterns, the Lord Jesus Christ, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many, [Matthew 20:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.26-28)." And as Abram was immediately visited by God, and refreshed with more assured prospects of the promised land, verses 4–17, so shall every one who denies himself for God, be recompensed with present consolations, and eternal joys! [Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.14).

#22

MELCHIZEDEK BLESSING ABRAM

**[Genesis 14:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.18-20)**

"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

War is a calamity arising out of the state of fallen man. We have innumerable lusts which cannot be satisfied without trespassing on others, and which lead us to retaliate injuries with vindictive ferocity. Hence there is no nation, whether savage or civilized, which is not frequently engaged in war; and if there were any one nation determined to cultivate peace to the uttermost, it would still be necessary for them to learn the art of war, in order that they might be ready, when attacked, to repel aggression, and to maintain their liberties.

The first war of which we read in history, was that recorded in the chapter before us. Chedorlaomer king of Elam, with three confederate kings, invaded the cities of the plain, who had combined for their mutual defense; and, having defeated the combined armies, took Sodom and Gomorrah, and plundered them of all that was valuable or useful.

Abram, as we have already seen in his conduct to Lot, was a man of peace; and from the history before us it is clear, that he was not under the influence either of covetousness or ambition; but, living in the midst of hostile nations, he had wisely trained his servants, 318 in number, to the use of arms; and finding that his nephew Lot had been carried captive by the victorious invaders, he determined, with God's help, to rescue him. Accordingly he armed his little band, and, with a few allies, pursued the victors. He speedily came up with them, and, by a stratagem suited to the inferiority of his force, prevailed against them. Having dispersed or slain his enemies, he recovered all the captives and the spoil; and returned in triumph to those whose cause he had espoused. In this way he received the testimonies of God's approbation mentioned in the text. To elucidate these, together with the circumstances connected with them, we shall consider,

I. The respect which Melchizedek paid to Abram—

Melchizedek was a person of most singular and mysterious character—

Some have thought that he was the same as Shem; but Shem's parentage was known; whereas Melchizedek's was not. Others have thought that he was Christ, who just for that occasion assumed the appearance of a man; but he was a person "made like unto the Son of God;" and therefore could not be the Son of God himself. Whoever he was, he was certainly a very eminent type of Christ.

His name imported that he was king of righteousness, while at the same time, as king of Salem, he was king of peace. See [Hebrews 7:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.1-2). He was also "a Priest of the most high God," ministering, not to one peculiar people, as the Levites afterwards did, but to mankind at large without any distinction. In these respects he typified the Lord Jesus, whose "scepter is a right scepter, [Psalm 45:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.6)," who "makes peace for us by the blood of his cross, [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20)," and who is "the great High Priest" that once ministered on earth, and is "now passed into the heavens" to offer incense before the throne of God, [Hebrews 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.14). In Jesus alone, after Melchizedek, were combined the offices of King and Priest; He and he only is "a Priest upon his throne, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13)."

Moreover, Melchizedek was a type of Christ in those things which we do not know concerning him, as well as in those things which we do know; yes, there were many things concealed from us, on purpose that he might be a more illustrious type of Christ. We are not informed of his birth, or parentage, or death. We are not told who preceded him in his office, or who followed him. He is merely introduced on this occasion as "without father, without mother, without beginning of life or end of days," that he might fitly represent that adorable Jesus, who was without father, as Man, and without mother, as God, and who abides a priest continually! [Hebrews 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.3).

As God's servant, he came forth on a remarkable occasion to honor Abram—

Abram was returning with his victorious bands, laden with the spoil that he had recovered from the slaughtered kings. For the refreshment of his weary troops, Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine. It is certainly a striking coincidence, that this, even bread and wine, is the provision which our great High Priest has appointed to be received by all his people to refresh them after their conflicts; but we do not on the whole apprehend that there was anything more intended by the bread and wine, than to administer suitable nourishment to Abram and his attendants after their fatigues. But from the other tokens of respect which Melchizedek showed to Abram, there is much instruction to be derived.

Melchizedek blessed Abram for the zeal he had manifested, and blessed God for the success he had given. In blessing Abram he showed what obligations we owe to those who go forth to fight in our defense, and by their valor procure to us the peaceful enjoyment of our possessions. If Abram had not stood forth on that occasion, what misery would have been entailed on those who had been taken captive, and on those who were left behind to bewail the loss of their dearest relatives, and experience the pressure of poverty and famine! And we also may easily conceive to what a deplorable state we of this nation would soon be reduced by our envious and ambitious neighbors, if we had not fleets and armies ready to maintain our cause. It is to be lamented indeed that all our warriors are not so peaceable in their principles, and unselfish in their patriotism, as Abram was; but still they are instruments of good to us; and we ought to acknowledge with gratitude the benefits they confer upon us.

Had Melchizedek rested there, he would have ill-performed the office of a priest. But he proceeded to bless God also; showing thereby, that all success must ultimately be traced to God, "the giver of every good and perfect gift." It would have been impiety indeed not to give him the glory of so complete a victory, obtained by so small a force over four confederate and triumphant kings, without the loss of one single follower. But he should be acknowledged in every instance of success, whether more or less complete, and whether more or less dearly purchased; for "it is God who gives victory unto kings;" "he raises up one and casts down another;" "he saves whether by many or by few."

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The return which Abram made to him—

Had we been told that Abram gave Melchizedek a present in return for his kindness, we should merely have considered it as a proper compliment suited to the occasion. But we are informed that" he gave him tithes of all." This circumstance is peculiarly important. If we attend to it, and consider it according to the light reflected upon it in other parts of Scripture, we shall find in it,

1. An acknowledged duty—

Melchizedek was God's Priest. In the performance of his high office, he had taken a lively interest in the concerns of Abram; he had not merely congratulated him as a friend, but blessed him officially as a priest; and had rendered thanks also to God for him as his representative. In short, he had been a kind of Mediator between God and Abram, acting, as Priests are ordained to do, for each, with and towards the other, [Hebrews 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.1).

Abram, viewing him in this light, gave him the tithes, not as a friend, but as God's representative. Doubtless Abram accompanied the present with sincere expressions of personal respect and gratitude; but still, though he might intend it in some measure as a token of love to man, he designed it principally as a tribute of piety to God.

And herein he has shown us our duty towards the Ministers of God. If they perform their office, as Melchizedek did, with a tender concern for those among whom they minister, and with real piety towards God, they ought to be "esteemed very highly in love for their work's sake." "While they serve at the altar, they ought to make their living from the altar;" and "while they minister unto us of their spiritual things, we should feel happy in imparting to them of our temporal things."

What if our property be earned with the sweat of our brow, or purchased, as Abram's was, at the risk of our life; we should account a portion of it due to God, who has enabled us to acquire it; and we should consider the support of his Ministry and his religion as having the first and most urgent demand upon us.

2. A hidden mystery—

We would have seen nothing particular in this transaction, if God had not been pleased to reveal it to us. But by the light of the New Testament we see in it nothing less than the abolition of the whole Jewish polity, and the establishment of Christianity upon its ruins.

The tribe of Levi were by God's special command ordained to be priests; and the tithes of everything (which God claimed as his property) were to be given to them for their support. They were to be considered as God's representatives; and therefore they had, in this respect, a superiority above all the other tribes. But Melchizedek ministered in the priesthood four hundred years before they had any designation to the office; and a hundred and fifty years before Levi himself existed; and to him Abram, the father of all the tribes, paid tithes.

The same superiority therefore which the tribe of Levi claimed on account of the priesthood above their brethren, Melchizedek claimed above Abram himself, and consequently above Levi also; for "Levi being in the loins of his father Abram, may be considered as paying tithes in Abram." Here then at once we see, that Melchizedek's priesthood was superior to that of Levi. Now the priesthood of Christ was to be, not after the order of Levi, but after the order of Melchizedek; (for God foretold, even while the Levitical priesthood was in all its plenitude of sanctity and power, that another priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek, [Psalm 110:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.4).)

Christ therefore had a priesthood of a higher order than that of Levi. This further appears from the circumstance of his being appointed to the priesthood with an oath, ("The Lord swore, and said, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,") whereas the Levitical priests were appointed without any such solemnity. Moreover, as we before hinted, there was no successor to Melchizedek in his priestly office; which intimated, that Christ would have none in his; but that his priesthood would be everlasting; whereas the Levitical priests could not continue in their office by reason of death.

From all this it appears, that Christ's priesthood was intended to supersede that which was appointed by the law; and consequently, that the law itself, which was so intimately connected with the priesthood, was to yield to the dispensation which Christ would introduce. For if Melchizedek's priesthood, which was only typical, was superior to that of Levi, much more must Christ's priesthood be superior; because the things which exalted the person and office of Melchizedek, were merely figurative and shadowy; whereas those which dignify the person and office of the Lord Jesus, are real and substantial. He is really in his person the eternal God, and will execute to all eternity the office he has undertaken. See the whole seventh chapter to the Hebrews.

Behold, then, how deep a mystery is contained in that which appears at first sight so unimportant! O that we may all bear it in mind, and present to him, not a portion of our property only, but "our bodies and our souls also to be a living sacrifice unto God!"

To **improve** this subject, we would earnestly entreat of you these two things:

1. Study the Scriptures with earnest prayer to God for the teaching of his Spirit—

In every part of God's Word there are many important truths which cannot be discerned, unless God is pleased to open our eyes to see them, and our understandings to understand them. We do not mean by this observation to refer to mysteries merely, but to great practical truths. We may understand the letter of Scripture, and yet be extremely ignorant of its spirit.

Take, for instance, such an expression as this, "God is love;" What, I ask, can we understand of it without humble meditation and prayer? Yet if we have meditated and prayed forever so long a time, there would still be unsearchable riches in those words to reward our continued search; yes, eternity itself will not suffice to explore their full meaning. Exactly as we might have meditated a thousand years upon the text, and not found out the truths which by the light of subsequent revelations we discover in them, so it is with ten thousand other passages, which we cannot duly comprehend or feel, until God is pleased to reveal them to us by his Spirit. The Bible is "a sealed book;" and neither the unlearned nor the learned can open it by themselves, [Isaiah 29:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.11-12). It contains inexhaustible "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" which God alone can impart. Let us then search the Scriptures with humility and diligence, lifting up at the same time our voice to God for understanding; for it is God alone who gives wisdom, "out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6).

2. Let every mercy you receive, lead you to God the giver of it—

Ungodly men would have been rioting upon the spoil, and abusing the gifts which God had bestowed upon them, [1 Samuel 30:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.16). But Abram and Melchizedek made this victory an occasion of glorifying God. O that we could learn of them! Our successes too often lead to intemperance and riot; yes, mercies of every other kind have but little effect to solemnize the spirit, or to change the heart. Deliverances from sickness, how little are they improved as they ought to be! Instead of devoting our renewed strength to the service of our God, we too commonly lose the impressions that were upon us, and forget the vows which we made in the day of our calamity. But let it not be thus in future; let the honor of God be dear to us; let it be the first desire of our hearts to render unto him our tribute of praise and thanksgiving; and the more visible his interpositions have been in our favor, the more earnest let our endeavors be to live to his glory!

#23

ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE FEARFUL

**[Genesis 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.1)**

"After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

We may here observe:

I. The most eminent saints need encouragement—

They are apt at times to feel discouragement:

1. From a review of past difficulties—

Persons under the immediate pressure of their trials are often not aware of their blessedness. God mercifully conceals it from them, lest their energies should be weakened. But when they see, in their calmer moments, what difficulties they have had to encounter, they are amazed at themselves; I had almost said, They are amazed at God; and they tremble, lest there should be a recurrence of similar trials; apprehending nothing but a failure under them. This was the special case with Abram at this time.

2. From a prospect of future trials—

Trials in prospect are always formidable; and the imagination often paints them in the deepest colors. A sense of weakness gives rise to fears; and the most eminent saints are apt to be appalled.

3. From an apprehension of disappointed hopes—

Confidence in a time of ease is apt to fail when the hour of trial comes; for example, Peter, on the waves; and Moses, [Exodus 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.22-23); and Joshua, [Joshua 7:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.7-9). And you too, my brethren, who have hoped that sin would be entirely slain, are apt to be discouraged when you find it still working in you.

II. The encouragement which God affords them—

God affords them the richest encouragement:

1. He assures them of protection—

He provides armor for his people; and that armor shall be effectual. But he himself is in the place of armor; and our enemies must break through him, to reach us. He is "a wall of fire," that devours the assailants. See how this is represented by Paul ([Colossians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3)), "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." Who can fear, who has such a protection as this? The weakest Christian may laugh all his enemies to scorn.

2. He gives himself to them, as their portion—

Happiness too, as well as protection, will he afford them: happiness here, and eternal happiness hereafter. Conceive of all the glory of heaven—how rich a reward! But Heaven is nothing in comparison with the reward provided; it is the God of Heaven who is our portion! See him in all his perfections, in all his glory, in all his blessedness; he is yours forever—your eternal portion, your invincible inheritance! Say, fearful saint, whether here is not sufficient encouragement?

And now, is there here a timid saint? Come with me, and survey your enemies. Who are they? what are they? They are "crushed before the moth." And look at your Almighty Friend; survey him—his power, his goodness, his fidelity. Have you now any cause for fear? Be strong! Fear not! See [1 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.10).

To the careless unbeliever let me also speak. Tell me, Have not you cause to fear?

Think of the danger to which you are exposed. And where will you find "a shield?"

Think of the recompense that awaits you; how different from that of the believing soul! Exceeding bitter will be "your reward!" O that I could awaken you to fear! The world and the devil say, "Fear not." But I say, "Fear, and tremble." Yet will I say, that Abram's God may still be yours; he was once an idolater, as you are; the sovereign grace that elected him, may fix on you! The covenant made with him is open to you; and all the blessings of it will be yours, if, like him, you will be "strong in faith, giving glory to God." The seed for whom he waited, has come; the blessings, to which he looked forward, are poured out upon all the families of the earth. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ, and they shall all be yours.

#24

ABRAM JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

**[Genesis 15:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.5-6)**

"He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And Abram believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness."

The enjoyment of the divine presence is truly satisfying to the soul. In having the light of God's countenance, we have all that we can desire; we are elevated above earthly things; the possession of them cannot add to our happiness; the lack of them cannot diminish it. Yet, in another sense, the soul is not satisfied; the more it has of God, the more it desires; nor will it ever be satisfied, until it shall have attained the full, uninterrupted, everlasting fruition of him.

Unspeakably blessed was the state of Abram, when God, in return for his active and unselfish zeal in rescuing Lot from captivity, gave him that promise, "I am your shield, and your exceedingly great reward." This was sufficient to dissipate all fear with respect to confederacies that might be formed against him, and to confirm that contempt of lucre which he had shown in refusing to accept even a thread of a shoe-latchet of all the spoil that he had taken.

But was Abram contented with this promise? No. God had before promised that he would have a child, from whom in due time the Messiah would spring. He had waited already ten years, and had no child; and as he and his wife were far advanced in years, the prospect of outcome became, daily, more dark and discouraging. He therefore could not be completely happy until he could see this great point accomplished. Hence, notwithstanding the declaration which God had just made to him, he expressed his regret at not having an offspring to inherit his substance, and to confirm his expectations of the promised Messiah, "Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Behold, to me you have given no seed; and lo, one born in my house is my heir." We cannot suppose that it was merely an concern to have an heir to his fortune, that produced this reply to God; that, though natural enough, would have been unworthy of so eminent a saint, and especially at the very moment when he was receiving such communications from God.

But, if we suppose his concern to have respect chiefly to the Messiah, then was it every way worthy of his high character. Indeed the answer which God gave to him in the text, clearly shows that Abram's views extended not to an immediate progeny, so much as to a remote posterity, who should "be blessed through him." And in this view the conduct of Abram strongly exemplifies our introductory observation.

We do not apprehend that he doubted whether the promise formerly given him would be fulfilled; but, that he began to be impatient for its accomplishment. The repetition of the promise, however, with all its attendant circumstances, confirmed his faith; in the exercise of which he obtained renewed testimonies of his acceptance with God.

We shall endeavor to set before you:

I. The faith Abram exercised—

The promise which was now given to Abram, was very extensive—

It being early in the morning before sunrise, God "brought him forth abroad, and told him to count, if he could, the stars of Heaven;" and then told him that "his seed should be, like them," innumerable. This doubtless respected, in the first instance, his natural seed; and though he waited fifteen years longer for the birth of that child from whence that numerous progeny was to spring—yet it was accomplished, as Moses repeatedly declared, previous to their taking possession of the promised land, [Deuteronomy 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 1.10); [Deuteronomy 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.22). But the promise, taken as it must be in connection with that which had been before given to him, [Genesis 12:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.2-3), and that which was afterwards given, [Genesis 17:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.4-7); [Genesis 22:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.17-18), (for they were all either different parts, or only repetitions of the same promise), had an ulterior, and more important view. It assured to him that he should have a spiritual seed; that the Messiah himself should spring from his loins; and that multitudes, both of Jews and Gentiles, should, through faith in the Messiah, become his spiritual children.

That the promise had this extensive meaning, we cannot doubt; for we are told, that the seed promised to Abram, was Christ, [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16); and that in this promise the Gospel was preached unto him, [Galatians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.8). Now the Gospel includes everything respecting the work and offices of Christ, and the call of the Gentiles to believe in him; and therefore these were the things to which Abram was taught to look forward when this promise was given to him.

The faith which Abram exercised, had respect to the promise in all its parts—

He believed that he would have a numerous progeny; yes, fifteen years afterwards, when it was more plainly declared that he would have a child by Sarah, notwithstanding he was about a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, and both the deadness of his own body and of Sarah's womb forbade all hope that a child should be born to him in the natural way, "he, against hope, believed in hope." God had said to him, "so shall your seed be;" and "he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded, that what he had promised he was able also to perform, [Romans 4:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18-21)."

At the same time, in this progeny he beheld the promised seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. Of this we can have no doubt; for our blessed Lord himself said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad! [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.56)." What can be the meaning of this? can it mean only that he foresaw that this progeny could continue so many hundreds of years? In truth, he had no reason to rejoice, if that were all; for the terrible destruction that was speedily to terminate their political existence, had far more in it to make him weep, than the prolongation of it to that period had to make him rejoice.

There can be no doubt but that by "the day of Christ" is meant, the whole scheme of Christianity as promulgated by the great Founder of it, together with its establishment throughout the world by the ministry of his apostles. In this he might well rejoice, because he himself was to be saved by what Christ would do and suffer; and myriads even to the remotest corners of the earth would be made partakers of the same salvation.

That his faith thus terminated on the Lord Jesus, seems intimated even in the very words of our text; for when the promise was given him, it is not said merely that he believed the Lord, but that "he believed in the Lord." We do not indeed mean to lay any great stress on this; because we are aware that to believe, and to believe in, may be considered as synonymous expressions; but, as agreeing with the universal testimony of Christ and his apostles, it ought not to be overlooked.

The faith of our father Abraham is constantly said to be the same with ours, [Romans 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.12); [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16). But if his faith had not respect to Christ, it is essentially different from ours; if it related only to the power of God, it agreed as much with the faith of those who crucified the Lord Jesus, as of those who trusted in him for salvation; and therefore we are sure that, like the faith of all his believing children, his faith terminated upon Christ.

It is this view alone of Abram's faith that can account for,

II. The benefit Abram obtained—

Every exercise of faith in God's Word insures the accomplishment of that word to the believing soul, "God cannot deny himself." But as the faith of Abram respected in this instance the whole of God's promises relating to the work of redemption, it brought not merely one single benefit, but all the blessings of redemption into his soul, "it was counted to him for righteousness." This expression is the foundation of much and important reasoning in the New Testament; we shall endeavor therefore to state to you what we apprehend to be its precise import.

1. It does **not**mean that the act of faith constituted Abram's righteousness, or that he was in any way justified by faith as an act—

Faith, considered as an act, is the same as any other act of the human mind. As hope, or love, or fear, or any other grace, is a work of man; so faith, considered as an act, is a work of man; and if Abram was justified by it in this view, he was justified by works; but the whole Scripture positively contradicts this, and affirms that he was justified by faith as opposed to works.

Paul, referring to the words of our text, says, "What says the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness, [Romans 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.3);" then explaining himself more fully, he adds, "We say that faith was counted to him for righteousness, [Romans 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.9). " He afterwards calls it "the righteousness of faith," as opposed to the works of the law, [Romans 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.13); and repeats again, respecting his faith, that "it was imputed to him for righteousness, [Romans 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.22). See also [Galatians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.6)."

Moreover if the mere act of faith constituted Abram's justifying righteousness, he had whereof he might glory before God; he could say, 'I performed an act which was the true and proper ground of my salvation; so that my salvation was not altogether a gift of free grace, but, as far at least as respected that act of mine, it was a debt paid to me in consideration of the work which I had performed.'

But this idea also Paul expressly controverts; and maintains, in opposition to it, that Abram "had not anything whereof to glory before God," but that the reward given him was of grace, and not of debt;" and from thence he deduces this general position, that "to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness! [Romans 4:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.2-5)."

2. The meaning is, that Abram's faith, as laying hold of Christ and of his righteousness, was the means or instrument whereby he was justified—

Much has been said on the subject of imputed righteousness; and controversies have been raised about the words, while in substance the same thing has been intended. That we should "contend earnestly for the faith," is certain; but "strifes of words" we should avoid; and if we hold fast that which we have stated to be the import of the expression, we hold that in which all good men are agreed, without relinquishing one atom of important truth.

We have before shown that Christ and his salvation were contained in the promises made to Abram; and that Abram's faith had respect to them. Now we say that by his faith Abram became savingly interested in all that Christ did and suffered, precisely as we do at this day. The only difference between Abram and us is this: Abram believed in a Savior that would come; and we believe in a Savior that has come.

As to the efficacy of Christ's death, there is no difference at all between those who preceded, or those who followed him; he was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The righteousness of Christ also availed as much for the justifying of believers under the Old Testament, as of those who were his more immediate followers.

The parallel drawn by Paul between the sin of the first Adam and the righteousness of the second Adam, is equally just, whether it is referred to Abram or to us; it designates the way in which Abram was justified, as well as the way in which we are justified, "By one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." "As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of One the free gift comes upon all men to justification of life." "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous, [Romans 5:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.17-19)."

In a word, "Christ, who had no sin of his own, became a sin-offering for" Abram, just as he did for us; and Abram, by believing in Christ, became, as all other believers do, "the righteousness of God in him, [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21)."

APPLICATION—

We entreat you, Brethren,

1. To bear in mind in what way you yourselves are to be saved—

You have heard how Abram's faith "was counted to him for righteousness." But was this only a historical fact; a fact in which you have no personal interest? Far from it; Paul assures us, that "it was not recorded for Abram's sake only, but for ours also, to inform us, in what manner we are to be justified, and to assure us that righteousness shall be imputed to us also, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification! [Romans 4:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.23-25)."

Now in this passage there is an express parallel drawn between the manner of Abram's justification, and of ours. While therefore it proves on the one hand that Abram had respect to the death. and resurrection of Christ; it shows us, on the other hand, that we must seek for justification, not by our works, but by faith in Christ Jesus. For if so eminent a man as Abram, who had forsaken his country and kindred, and sojourned willingly in a strange land where he had not the smallest possession, and even offered up his own son, at the command of God, if he was not justified by his works, but by his faith in the promised Messiah—then it must be madness indeed for us to dream of justification by works, or to hope for acceptance in any other way than through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus.

It is worthy of observation also, that as his being justified by his faith before he had performed any of the good works for which he was so eminent, proves that he was justified by faith alone; so its being spoken of him after he had performed these acts, proves that he was justified by faith alone from first to last.

This it is of great importance to notice; for it shows us that we also must be justified from first to last in the very same way. It is true that God will reward our works; but the reward will be of grace, and not of debt; the only meritorious ground of our acceptance from first to last must be the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. We must exercise the faith of Abram, if we would be numbered among his children, [Galatians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.7); [Galatians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.9).

It may be objected indeed that James says, "Abram was justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar, [James 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.21)." But Abram was justified by faith twenty-five years before Isaac was born, which alone is an absolute demonstration that James did not speak of the same justification that Paul did, since that mentioned by Paul had taken place at least fifty years before.

The truth is, James speaks of Abram's works as manifesting the truth and excellence of his faith; for the whole scope of his argument is to show, that we are not saved by a dead faith, but by a living and operative faith; in confirmation of which he observes, that the perfection of Abram's faith was displayed by that consummate act of his obedience; and that it was this living faith, and not a dead faith, that was imputed to him for righteousness. There is therefore no real opposition between the two apostles, nor any argument to be derived from James that can in the smallest degree invalidate the foregoing statement.

We recur then to what we have before said, and urge you to believe in Christ for the salvation of your souls, [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39).

2. To be concerned about nothing as much as the manifestation of Christ to your souls—

Nothing dwelt so much upon the mind of Abram as the promise given to him relating to the Messiah; Nor could anything that God himself could say to him, allay the thirst which he had after that unspeakable gift. His longing after Christ arose, as we would think, even to impatience and ingratitude. But God approved of it; and instantly renewed his promises to him in a more plain and express manner than before. And thus will he do towards us, if we manifest the same holy ardor after the knowledge and enjoyment of Christ.

He will permit us to say to him, 'What are all your gifts to me, or all your promises, if I go Christless, or have no assured hopes of a saving interest in him!' Yes, he would be pleased with such apparent ingratitude; and would speedily return unto us an answer of peace.

Let then everything which you possess, appear as nothing in your eyes in comparison with Christ.

Let nothing comfort you while you are destitute of Christ.

Let it not satisfy you to have embraced the promises which relate to Christ; but endeavor to obtain brighter prospects of their approaching accomplishment.

Like the holy Patriarch of old, entreat of God that you may not die until you have embraced Jesus in your arms, and can confidently say, "My eyes have seen his salvation! [Luke 2:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.28-30)." This is the boldness which Jacob exercised when he wrestled with the angel, [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26); and similar importunity shall surely be crowned with similar success.

#25

THE COVENANT CONFIRMED TO ABRAM

**[Genesis 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.8)**

"But Abram said: O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

The innumerable instances of God's condescension which occur in the holy Scriptures, familiarize the idea of it so much to our minds, that we cease to wonder at it even on the most stupendous occasions.

In the history before us we are ready to conceive of God as if he was a man like ourselves. His appearances to Abram are so frequent, his fellowship with him so intimate, his regard for him so tender and affectionate—that we really lose sight of the Deity in the Friend. Every fresh manifestation of himself seems only introductory to still higher exercises of his condescension and grace.

In the preceding verses God had been pleased to allay the fears of Abram, and confirm his hopes of a numerous posterity; but, Abram being still desirous of receiving stronger assurances respecting his possession of the promised land, God graciously complied with his request in this respect also, and confirmed his expectations of it in a manner that deserves particular attention.

Let us consider,

I. The inquiry which Abram made—

We may perhaps be disposed to blame this inquiry, as savoring of vain curiosity, or sinful distrust. To obviate such misconceptions, we shall distinctly state,

1. Its nature—

The very same act may be good or evil, according to the principle from which it proceeds.

Had this inquiry arisen from unbelief, it would have been decidedly sinful. It would have resembled the question which Zachariah asked when the angel told him from God, that he should have a child, "How shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years, [Luke 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.18);" for which unbelieving question he was immediately struck dumb.

If, on the other hand, it expressed a wish to be informed more clearly respecting the divine purposes, or to receive those superabundant testimonies which God himself was willing to communicate, then it was perfectly innocent, and consistent with the strongest faith. It was for the purpose of instruction only that the blessed Virgin inquired of the angel, how she would have a child, since she was a Virgin, [Luke 1:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.34).

The question did not materially differ from that of Zachariah; but the principle was different; and therefore the one received a gracious answer; the other a severe rebuke.

Many instances are recorded where God has been graciously pleased to give signs to his people for the confirmation of their faith, when there was not any doubt upon their minds respecting either his faithfulness or power.

When he appeared to Gideon, and told him that he would deliver his country from the yoke of Midian; Gideon said, "If now I have found grace in your sight, then show me a sign that you talk with me;" in answer to which, God caused fire to come out of the rock, and consume the kid and cakes which Gideon had prepared for him, [Judges 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.14); [Judges 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.17); [Judges 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.21); and presently afterwards, he gave him another sign, making the dew to fall alternately on the fleece and on the ground, while the other remained perfectly dry, [Judges 6:36-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.36-40).

In the same manner he gave to Hezekiah a choice of signs, offering to make the shadow on the sun-dial to go backward or forward ten degrees, according as he should desire, [2 Kings 20:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.8-11).

From hence it appears that the inquiries which proceed from faith, are good and acceptable to God; and that Abram's was of this nature is manifest; because his faith on this occasion was specially commended by God himself.

2. Its importance—

If we were to limit the inquiry to the mere circumstance of Abram's inheriting Canaan in his own person, it would be indeed of very little importance; for he never did possess (except the burying-ground which he purchased) one single foot of ground in the country, [Acts 7:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.5); nor, as far as appears, had he any expectation of gaining any permanent settlement in it. But, viewed in its just extent, the inquiry comprised in it nothing less than the happiness of Abram and of all mankind. We are willing to allow that the prospect of having a posterity so numerous and so renowned, must be gratifying to flesh and blood; but that was, at best, but a very small part of Abram's hope; he regarded the promised land as the scene of all those wonderful transactions, where God would be honored and enjoyed by his posterity; where the redemption of mankind would be effected by the Messiah; and where the final rest of the redeemed should be typically exhibited. In the possession of that, all his hopes centered; yes, all his happiness in time and in eternity was bound up. If by any means that were prevented from taking place, the day of Christ, which he had foreseen, would never arrive; and consequently all his own prospects of salvation, as also of the salvation of the whole world, would be altogether annihilated. Canaan was in his estimation the pledge of Heaven, [Hebrews 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.10); [Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13); [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16); and if he failed of the one, both he and all mankind must fail of the other also! Surely when so much depended on that event, the most reiterated assurances respecting it were no more than what it befit him to desire.

We shall be yet more fully convinced that Abram's inquiry was proper, if we notice,

II. The way which God took to satisfy him respecting it—

God commanded Abram to take of every animal that was proper to be offered in sacrifice, whether of beasts or birds; each beast was to have attained its full age and perfection (for nothing but an absolutely perfect sacrifice could avail for ratifying of God's covenant with man), and, after being slain, their parts were to be divided and placed opposite to each other, so that a sufficient space should be left for a man to pass between them. Whether this way of making covenants had prevailed before, or whether it was first suggested by God on this occasion, we cannot tell; but we have notices of it in the heathen world, both among the Greeks and Romans; and it was certainly practiced by the Jews also, [Jeremiah 34:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 34.18-19). But, whatever was its origin, God appointed it now for the purpose of satisfying Abram's mind.

1. The sacrifice being prepared, God accompanied it with **significant emblems**—

God designed to give Abram a just conception of the manner in which the desired object should be accomplished; and by various emblems showed him that it would be against much opposition, after many troubles, and long delays. The opposition was signified to Abram by "the birds that came down upon the carcasses," and that were with difficulty driven away.

Just so, it is no uncommon thing for the enemies of our salvation, whether men or devils, to be represented by this figure, [Jeremiah 34:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 34.20) and [Matthew 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.19). And it was indeed verified by the efforts which the Egyptians made to detain them in bondage, and the confederacies which the nations of Canaan formed to obstruct their entrance into the land, or to dispossess them of it when they were there.

The horror of great darkness that fell upon Abram when he was in a deep sleep, denoted the heavy troubles that his posterity should endure in Egypt; such troubles as made them groan for anguish of spirit, and made "the soul of God himself to be grieved for the misery of Israel, [Judges 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.16)." Perhaps too, the judgments inflicted on them through the various oppressions of the Midianites and Philistines, the Assyrians and Chaldeans, might be represented to his mind.

The long interval of time that passed between the promise and the ratification of it, even from the earliest dawn, while the stars were yet shining bright, to the return of darkness after the setting of the sun—all this time had Abram to wait; and though part of it would be consumed in the preparing of the sacrifices—yet a considerable part was occupied in his endeavors to drive away the birds, and in the supernatural sleep and horror that came upon him. This lapse of time, I say, intimated the delay that would take place before the promise would be fulfilled, or his wishes receive their final completion.

If in deciphering these emblems we seem to have gone beyond the line of sober interpretation, let us turn to the explanation which God himself gives us of them, and we shall see all these particulars distinctly enumerated—the opposition they should encounter, the troubles they should endure, and the delay they should experience, even four hundred years. And so far from exceeding the limits of sobriety, we are by no means certain that much more is not intended under these emblems, even to designate the trials and conflicts which the children of Abraham shall experience on their way to the promised land.

2. The sacrifice being prepared, God accompanied it with **demonstrative attestations**—

After the parts of the sacrifice were properly disposed, it was customary for the parties who covenanted with each other, to pass between them, [Jeremiah 34:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 34.18-19); intimating, if not expressing, their willingness to be cut asunder in like manner, if they should ever violate their engagements. God therefore, assuming the appearance of a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, passed visibly between the pieces that were placed opposite to each other; and thereby ratified the covenant on his part; just as Abram, in all probability, did on his part. Why God assumed these diversified appearances, we cannot absolutely determine. But at all times, if he did not assume the human or angelic shape, he revealed himself in the likeness of fire. It was in a burning bush that he was seen by Moses, [Exodus 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.2); and in a burning mountain by Israel, [Exodus 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.18) with [Hebrews 12:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18); and in a pillar of smoke and fire that he went before his people in the wilderness, [Exodus 14:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.19-20); [Exodus 24:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.17). From whence we are disposed to think that, though the appearances were diverse, the intent was one; namely, to represent himself to Abram, as he did to his descendants, as "the Glory and Defense" of all his people, [Isaiah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.5). Under this character he showed himself to Abram, and, passing between the pieces of the sacrifice, pledged himself for the accomplishment of all that he had promised.

Let us learn from hence,

1. To make a similar inquiry relative to the inheritance which **we**seek—

We profess to be looking for Heaven and eternal glory. Ought we not then, every one of us, to ask, "How shall I know that I shall inherit it?" Surely the inquiry is as important to us, as Abram's was to him; and we have more encouragement to ask the question, because God has provided us with such ample means of solving it.

As for anything to confirm the veracity of God, nothing can be added to what he has already done; he has sent his only dear Son into the world to die for us; he has given his Holy Spirit to instruct us; he has already brought myriads, of Gentiles as well as Jews, to the possession of the inheritance; so that nothing remains but to inquire into the marks whereby he has taught us to judge of our own character.

Am I "poor in spirit?" Then is the kingdom mine, and I shall surely inherit it! [Matthew 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3).

Am I living daily upon Christ, as the Israelites did upon the manna? Then I have, and shall have, everlasting life! [John 6:53-58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53-58).

Am I "keeping his commandments diligently and without reserve?" Then I may know from hence my interest in his favor! [1 John 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.24) with [1 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3-4).

We are not to expect visions, such as were given to Abram, "we have a more sure word of prophecy; and to that it behooves us to take heed, [2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19)." Let us then "examine ourselves whether we are in the faith;" let us "prove our own selves, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5);" thus shall we "make our calling and election sure, [2 Peter 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10)," and be enabled to say with confidence, "I know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, I have a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1)."

2. To look forward to the full possession of our inheritance without regarding any difficulties that we may have to encounter in our way to it—

Abram was not discouraged either with the difficulties or delays which he was instructed to expect. He never once regretted the losses he had sustained in leaving his native country; nor was he wearied with the inconveniences of a pilgrim's life. He steadily pursued the path of duty in expectation of the promised blessings, [Hebrews 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.15). Let us then "walk in the steps of our father Abraham." Let our prospect of the inheritance reconcile us to the hardships of our pilgrimage; and our view of the prize animate us throughout the whole of our course.

If enemies oppose us, and troubles come upon us, and our possession of the inheritance be delayed—it is no more than what God has taught us to expect. But God has said, "He who endures to the end, the same shall be saved." Let us therefore confide in that promise, and expect its accomplishment to our souls. Let us not be weary in well-doing, "for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not!"

#26

THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

**[Genesis 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 16.13)**

"She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: You are the God who sees me!"

Sanctified afflictions are among our greatest mercies. Hagar would have known less of herself, and less of God, if she had not experienced domestic trouble. She had indulged an exceeding bad spirit in despising her mistress on account of her barrenness; and, when she had thereby provoked the resentment of her mistress, she could not bear it; but fled away towards her own country. The gracious and seasonable visit however which she received from God, brought her to a better temper; it led her to return to that station which she had left; and to adore that God, whom as yet she had altogether neglected.

The person that appeared to her is called "an angel;" but he was "the Angel of the Covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ, under the semblance of an angel. This appears from the promise which he gave her, "I will multiply your seed;" and, still more clearly, from the discovery which was made to her, that it was "the Lord Jehovah who spoke to her;" and from the name by which she called him, "You are the God who sees me!"

From this name of God we shall be naturally led to speak of his Omniscience; but we will not occupy our time with proofs that this attribute belongs to God, or with uninteresting speculations respecting it; we will rather endeavor to impress the consideration of it upon our minds, and to mark its aspect upon the different states and conditions of men.

I. The consideration then of the Omniscience of God is suited to produce in us, **conviction and humility**—

Men commit iniquity under an idea that God does not notice them, [Psalm 73:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.11); [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14). Hence, though they know that they have sinned, they are regardless of the consequences of their sin. They are afraid of being detected by man, but not of being judged by God, [Job 24:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 24.15-17) with [Proverbs 30:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.20). But God has indeed been privy to every one of their most secret thoughts! [Jeremiah 23:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.24); [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.5). This is not only asserted by God, but acknowledged by men, [Job 34:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.21-22); [Job 42:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.2); [Psalm 139:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.1-12); and exemplified in Achan, Gehazi, and Ananias.

God has noticed them in order that he may bring them into judgment, and make them the foundation of his own decisions at the last day! [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.10). What a fearful thought is this! And what a necessity does it impose on every one to search out his iniquities, and to humble himself for them in dust and ashes! [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24).

II. The consideration then of the Omniscience of God is suited to produce in us, **circumspection and fear**—

"God will not judge according to appearance, but will judge righteous judgment." If he saw only our outward actions, we might hope perhaps to find a favorable acceptance with him; but he discerns the motives and principles of our actions, [1 Samuel 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.7); [Psalm 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.4); [Job 26:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 26.6); [Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.2); he sees whether they flow from a regard to his authority—whether they are done in the precise manner that his word requires—and whether, in doing them, we seek the glory of his name. If we do the best things under the influence of a corrupt principle—then they are no better in his sight than splendid sins! [Isaiah 1:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-15); [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3); [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32); [Matthew 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.8). What self-examination then is requisite, to ascertain the secret springs of our actions, and to guard against the delusions which we are so prone to foster!

III. The consideration then of the Omniscience of God is suited to produce in us, **consolation and hope**—

In seasons of temporal affliction, we may be ready to think that our state is altogether desperate. This was certainly the state of Hagar under the harsh treatment of her mistress; and was probably so when the angel appeared to her.

Under false accusations especially, we may be incapable of establishing our own innocence, and of vindicating our character from the vilest aspersions. This was David's case, when fleeing from Saul, and accused by him of treason, [Psalm 35:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.11-14); [Psalm 35:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.22).

But it is consoling to reflect that, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account! [Hebrews 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12-13); 1 Corinthians 4:3-5;" and that he can, whenever it shall seem good to him, extricate us from all the miseries that we either feel or fear, [2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9); [Psalm 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.18-19).

Under spiritual trouble also, O how consolatory is it to know, that God is thoroughly acquainted with the inmost desires of our souls; that if, on the one hand, he has seen our corruptions, he has, on the other hand, beheld our conflicts, and can bear witness to the ardor and sincerity of our exertions. He testified that there was some good thing in the heart of young Abijah, [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13); and will bear witness even for those who only "think upon his name." [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17).

What a comfort is it to know, that he sees us striving after universal holiness, and plunging daily and hourly, as it were, into "the fountain that was opened for sin," and relying, as the very chief of sinners, upon his covenanted mercy in Christ Jesus, [John 1:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47-48). In this view, the most desponding soul may cast itself at the foot of the cross, and may say, "If I perish, I will perish here!"

ADDRESS—

Endeavor to realize the thought of God's presence with you, wherever you are; and to behold, as it were, the name of God inscribed on every place, "You are the God who sees me!" Endeavor also to "set the Lord always before you," and to order all your actions, words, and thoughts with a direct reference to his approbation in the future judgment, [Psalm 44:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 44.20-21) with [1 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9).

#27

THE CIRCUMCISION OF ABRAHAM

**[Genesis 17:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.9-10)**

"Then God said to Abraham: As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised."

[Editor's note: We find Simeon's Anglican theology expressed in this section to be unbiblical.]

To a Jewish auditory, the subject before us would be so familiar, that it might be treated without any difficulty. But as it is otherwise with us, we shall wave everything relative to the right of circumcision, and fix our attention upon the ends for which circumcision was instituted. The writings of the New Testament, as well as of the Old, abound with references to this ordinance; and a just knowledge of its original design is necessary to a due understanding of the corresponding ordinance under the Christian dispensation. Let us then state to you,

I. What were the great ends of circumcision—

The importance attached to this rite under the Jewish dispensation, clearly shows that it was not a mere arbitrary imposition, but an ordinance fraught with instruction. It was imposed on Abraham and all his posterity:

1. A seal of their privileges—

Abraham had from the first believed the promises which God had given him relative to a numerous posterity, and to "that seed in particular, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed;" and, in consequence of that faith, he was justified before God; or, to use the expressive language of Scripture, "his faith was counted to him for righteousness." But when twenty-five years had elapsed, and it was more distinctly made known to him that the promised seed was to spring from Sarah, he had some pledges given him that God's Word, however improbable, should be fulfilled. His name was changed from Abram, which means high father; to Abraham, the high father of a multitude. His wife's name also was changed, from Sarai, my princess, to Sarah, the princess of a multitude, verse 15.

Now also circumcision was enjoined on him and fill his posterity; and Paul expressly says, that it was "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised, [Romans 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.11)." To Abraham and his believing seed, this seal assured the certain enjoyment of "God as their God" and Portion forever, verse 8; but as administered to infants, it assured only that they should participate all the blessings of God's covenant, as soon as ever they exercised the faith of Abraham, and "walked in his steps, [Romans 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.12)." But towards all, it had the same force as a seal has when annexed to a covenant; it was God's seal impressed on their flesh, that he would fulfill to them all the promises which he had given.

2. A memorial of their engagements—

In the verse following our text, God calls circumcision "a token of the covenant between him and his people." It was designed by God that his people should be separated from all the world, and that they should be constantly reminded of their engagements to him. When they submitted to that rite, whether it were in infancy or at an adult age, they were no longer to consider themselves as at their own disposal, but as dedicated to the service of their God. Paul, in reference to the scars and bruises with which his body had been covered in the service of his Lord, said, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus! [Galatians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.17)." The same language might with propriety be used by every Jew in reference to this sacred memorial; for, having in his own person the appointed sign of his relation to God, he must be continually reminded "whose he was, and whom he was bound to serve.

3. An emblem of their duties—

We cannot doubt but that this painful rite was intended to represent the mortification of sin. The Scripture speaks much of the "putting off the whole body of sin;" "the crucifying of the flesh with the affections and lusts;" "the putting off the old man, and putting on the new." These expressions exactly coincide with the chief intent of this ordinance; they show, that we bring a corrupt nature into the world with us; and that it must be the labor of our lives to put away sin, both original and actual, both root and branch. Indeed Paul explains the ordinance in this way, and calls it "a putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh."

But there are also other expressions of Scripture which show that this rite imported the highest degrees of sanctification and holiness. Moses repeatedly speaks of "the circumcising of the heart to love the Lord with all our heart and all our soul! [Deuteronomy 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.16); [Deuteronomy 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.6)." And the prophet Jeremiah's language is singularly emphatic, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, [Jeremiah 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 4.4)."

From all these passages we learn, that the ordinance was figurative, and designed to instruct the Lord's people in. the nature and extent of their duties towards him.

This rite however being dropped, it will be proper to show,

II. How those ends are attained under the Christian dispensation—

The rite of circumcision has been superseded by the rite of baptism, just as the Passover has given way to the supper of our Lord. The dispensations being changed, a change was made of the two great ordinances which were adapted to Judaism; and others were introduced more immediately suited to Christianity. Paul, in reference to the ordinances which we are now comparing, distinctly draws the parallel; and shows that, though different in their nature, they were of precisely the same import, "In Christ," says he, "you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead, [Colossians 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.11-12)."

1. In Baptism we have **a seal of our privileges**—

When Christianity was first preached, the ordinance was principally administered to adults, because they alone were capable of that instruction which the Apostles were sent to convey. To them the baptismal rite was administered after they had believed in Christ, and after "their faith had been imputed to them for righteousness;" and to them it was, precisely what circumcision had been to Abraham, "a seal of the righteousness which they had being yet unbaptized." It assured them, that they were "accepted in the Beloved;" that, "they had redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins;" that "grace and glory should be given them;" and that while the inheritance of Heaven was kept for them, they also should by the mighty power of God be preserved for it, [1 Peter 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4-5).

But to their infant offspring the ordinance of baptism assured nothing more than an external right to these blessings, and a certainty of possessing them as soon as they believed. It was of the unbelieving and impenitent Jews that Paul said, "Theirs is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises, [Romans 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.4)." This therefore must be understood of the title to these things which they enjoyed by means of their admission into covenant with God. The actual enjoyment of these things they could not have, until they became obedient to the commands of God.

It is exactly in the same manner that our Church instructs children to say, that in their baptism they were made "members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven." They have a title to these privileges, as a woman has to the estate of her deceased husband, which yet she cannot legally possess, until she takes out administration; so these cannot attain the actual enjoyment of their privileges, until they sue them out by believing.

2. In Baptism we have **a memorial of our engagements**—

The effects of the baptismal water are not indeed long visible upon the body; but the name given to us at our baptism (emphatically called our Christian name) continues with us until death; and the name of the society into which we are introduced (that of Christians) is an indelible badge of our profession, and of the solemn engagements that we have entered into. It is worthy of observation that, when the sacred historian says, "They were first called Christians at Antioch," he uses a word, which, with one only exception, always implies a divine appointment. It is used nine times in the New Testament; [Matthew 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.12); [Matthew 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.22); [Luke 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.26); [Acts 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.22); [Acts 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.26); [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5); [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7); [Hebrews 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.25). See also [Romans 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.4); and in the passage that we except, it may very properly be so interpreted [Romans 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.3). If it is considered that our Lord abolished the polygamy which prevailed by divine connivance, and in some cases, as it should seem, by divine appointment, the excepted case will perhaps be thought no exception at all.

Now, in this view of the subject, the divine appointment of the name Christian, to those who had before no right or title to it, is exactly equivalent to the change of Abram's and of Sarai's names; and in thus being brought to "name the name of Christ, we are taught to depart from all iniquity." We can never recollect to what society we belong, or hear ourselves addressed by our Christian name, but we have a striking memorial, that "we are not our own; and that, having been bought with a price, we are bound to glorify God with our body and our spirit which are his, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20."

3. In Baptism we have **an emblem of our duties**—

In our Catechism we are told that baptism is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, "nor are we at any loss to declare what that grace is which it was intended to represent; the symbol is clear enough of itself; but it is explained by God himself; who informs us, that it is "not the putting off of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God, [1 Peter 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.21)."

In this, of course, the cleansing of ourselves from outward pollutions is intended; but there is also much more implied, even a life of entire devotedness to God; for thus it is said in another place, "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, [Romans 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.4)." While our blessed Lord sojourned upon earth, he set us a perfect example of the divine life; but in his resurrection and ascension to Heaven he left us, if I may so speak, a visible exhibition of our duty; he showed us that it consists in "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness;" and in having "our conversation henceforth, as much as possible, in Heaven."

The instruction which we would further suggest as arising from this subject, is comprised in two things:

1. We learn from it, why infants ought to be baptized—

The great argument for not baptizing infants, is that they are incapable of performing the duties of the Christian covenant, and therefore they ought not to have the seal of that covenant applied to them. Now if children had never been admitted into covenant with God at all, this argument would have had some weight. But under the Jewish dispensation they were admitted into covenant with God at eight days old; and the seal of that covenant was applied to them. Moreover, this was done by the absolute command of God; who ordered, that a despiser of this ordinance should be cut off from his people. This objection therefore can be of no validity under the Christian dispensation.

It is further objected, that God does not particularly order children to be baptized. True, he does not; nor was it necessary that he should; for there was no change of the people who were to be admitted into covenant with him, but only of the rite by which they were to be admitted. If there was to be a change of the people as well as of the rite, we might well expect that he should have revealed his will to us respecting it. But there is not one syllable in the whole New Testament that will admit of any such construction; and if God has not deprived children of the honor and privilege of being admitted into covenant with him, who are we that we should take it away from them? By thus robbing them of their privileges, we represent Jesus Christ as less merciful to children now, than he was to the children of Jewish parents; and we put an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of the Jews; who, though convinced of the truth of Christianity, might justly keep back from embracing it, on account of their children; seeing that, while they remain Jews, their children are partakers of the covenant; but, when they become Christians, their children are cut off from all interest in it.

Some indeed are superstitiously anxious about the early administration of this ordinance to their children, as if their salvation entirely depended upon it. That it should not be needlessly delayed we grant; but the command to circumcise the children on the eighth day sufficiently shows, that the children who died under that age, did not perish for the mere lack of that ordinance; and Christian parents may be equally assured, that, if their infants die before they have been initiated into the Christian covenant by baptism, the lack of that ordinance will not at all affect their eternal welfare. It is the avowed contempt of the ordinance, and not the providential seclusion from it, that makes us objects of God's displeasure.

2. We learn from it, how baptized people ought to live—

Though this idea has been in part anticipated, it may very properly be repeated in our practical application of the subject. The people whom we address, have all been devoted to God in their infancy. But have all remembered the obligations which their baptism entailed upon them? Have all experienced "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit? [Titus 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.5)." Are all walking worthy of Him into whose sacred name they have been baptized? Are not many at this hour still "uncircumcised in heart and ears?" If we are not conformed to the death and resurrection of Christ, to what purpose are we called Christians? We are told by Paul, that "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29)." All this is true in reference to those who have been baptized. Our baptism is, in fact, no baptism, [Romans 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.25), if we are not washed from our "filthiness, both of flesh and spirit." "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but the keeping of the commandments of God, [1 Corinthians 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.19) and [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6)."

Paul, in holy contempt and indignation, calls the ungodly Jews, "the concision," as being unworthy of the name by which the more pious among them were designated, [Philippians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.2). Let us know then, that even the heathen themselves are in a better state than we, if we "walk not worthy of our high calling, [Ephesians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1);" and that, if we would be Christians indeed, we must answer to the character given of them by the apostle; we must "worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3)."

#28

SARAH REPROVED FOR HER UNBELIEF

**[Genesis 18:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.13-14)**

"Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

There is no time, no situation, no circumstance wherein we are not in danger of falling into sin! Whether we are in good company or in bad, we have need to be on our guard against the influence of our indwelling corruption. We may be engaged in the most sacred duties, and yet be assaulted by the most horrible temptations; we may be performing the kindest offices to others, or be receiving the most important instructions from them; and the things which in their own nature tended only to good, may through the depravity of our hearts become occasions of sin!

Abraham and Sarah were occupied in a way truly pleasing to God. The aged Patriarch, seeing three strangers at a distance, ran and invited them to his tent; and having brought them there, gave immediate directions for their hospitable entertainment. He desired his wife to make ready some cakes; and ran himself and fetched a young calf from the herd; and, when it was dressed, he set it with butter and milk before them. In this he is proposed as a pattern to us; and we are told for our encouragement that "he entertained angels unawares." No doubt, Sarah also performed her part with as much alacrity as Abraham himself; yet behold, the very kindness with which her hospitality was rewarded, called forth the latent evil of her heart; and occasioned her to commit a sin, which brought down upon her a severe rebuke.

We propose to consider:

I. The reproof given to Sarah—

Sarah, occupied in her domestic engagements, was not present while these illustrious strangers partook of the refreshment provided for them; but, being close at hand, she overheard the inquiries made after her, and the assurance given to Abraham that she would bear him a son. Not able to credit these tidings, she "laughed within herself." But the Lord (for he was one of the guests in human shape) knew what passed in her heart, and testified his displeasure on account of it. In his reproof, we notice,

1. A just expostulation—

Sin of every kind is unreasonable; but unbelief in particular; because it questions every perfection of the Deity, and contradicts all the records both of his providence and grace. However secret may be its actings, or however specious its appearances, God will not fail to notice and reprove it. Sarah might have said, that she had done nothing but what Abraham himself had done, the very last time that the divine purpose respecting a son had been announced to him, [Genesis 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.17); but though the external act of laughing was the same both in her and in him, the principle from which it sprang was widely different:

Abraham's was a laugh of admiration and joy.

Sarah's was a laugh of unbelief and distrust.

But instead of attempting to extenuate her fault, she denied the fact altogether. Alas! how awfully prolific is sin! it never comes alone; it generally brings a multitude of others to justify or conceal it. But it is in vain to cover our iniquities; God sees through the cobweb veil, and will charge upon us the aggravated guilt which we thus foolishly contract. And sooner or later he will call every one of us to account, 'Why we did such or such?' and especially, 'Why we disbelieved his word?'

2. A convincing interrogatory—

Unbelief has not respect so much to the veracity, as to the power of God. "He has given water indeed, but can he give bread also; can he provide meat for his people?" Even Moses doubted how God could supply the Israelites with meat in the wilderness, since it would require all the flocks and herds that they possessed, to feed them one single month, [Numbers 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.22). But God has given abundant evidence of his power, so that no apparent impossibilities ought at all to shake the steadfastness of our faith.

Did he not form the universe out of nothing, by a simple act of his will?

Did he not give laws to all the heavenly bodies; and does he not still preserve them in their orbits?

Does he not also supply the needs of every living creature upon earth?

Is he not moreover the true and proper Father of all who are born into the world, and especially "the Father of their spirits?"

How absurd then was it to suppose, that her age, together with that of her husband, was any effectual obstacle to the accomplishment of God's Word? "Can anything be too hard for the Lord?" One moment's reflection on his omnipotence should banish unbelief from the heart forever.

3. A reiterated assurance—

It is most humiliating to think what a necessity our unbelief imposes upon God to repeat and renew his promises to us; and the earnestness with which the promise so often given, is here repeated, shows the just displeasure which Sarah's unbelief had excited in the bosom of her God. We cannot indeed but be filled with amazement that he did not rather say, 'Since you treat my promises with profane derision, you shall never be made a partaker of them.' But God well knows the weakness of the human heart; and therefore, in condescension to it, he has confirmed his promise with an oath, that we might have the fuller assurance, and the stronger consolation, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18). It is thus that he tenderly reproved the church of old, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, saying, My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding! [Isaiah 40:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-28). Then see the additional promises, 29–31. See also [Isaiah 49:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.13-16)."

Were he to allow our unbelief to make void His truth, no one of his promises would ever be fulfilled. But he has assured us that this shall not be the case, [Romans 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.3-4) with [2 Timothy 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.13). If anything will put to shame our unbelief, surely this must. Such tenderness cannot but prevail upon us more forcibly than ten thousand threats.

While we contemplate the reproof so long since administered, let us consider,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

In truth, it sets before us many an instructive lesson. Among many others, it teaches us,

1. What need we have to guard against the workings of unbelief—

Sarah, fifteen years before, had manifested her unbelief, in giving her servant Hagar into Abraham's bosom, in order that she might obtain through her the child which she despaired of obtaining in her own person. She had waited ten years, and began to think that the promise would fail, if she did not resort to such an expedient as this Similar to this was Rebekah's policy, [Genesis 27:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.6-10). And though she had been deservedly punished for her unbelief by the petulance and contempt of Hagar, and by the workings of envy and wrath in her own heart—yet she still yielded to the same evil principle as soon as a fresh occasion for its exercise arose.

It is astonishing what deep root this malignant principle of unbelief has taken in our fallen nature. From the moment that our first parents questioned the fulfillment of that word, "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die," man has been prone to doubt the veracity of God. There is not a promise or a threatening, to which we do not find some objections, and some imagined ground for doubting its accomplishment. If we do not directly contradict the declarations of God, we still entertain a secret suspicion, that they will not be verified. But let us be on our guard; for though the sin of unbelief is but small in human estimation, it is exceedingly offensive to God, and will, if allowed to gain an entire ascendency over us, assuredly exclude us from his heavenly kingdom! [Hebrews 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.19); [Hebrews 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.11).

2. How ready God is to mark the good that is in our actions, while he casts a veil over the evil with which it is accompanied—

At the very time that Sarah yielded to unbelief, she exercised a reverential regard for her husband; and though our duty to man is certainly inferior to our duty to God, God has passed over in silence the unbelief she betrayed, and recorded with peculiar approbation the terms in which she spoke of Abraham, "After I am grown old, shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also?" Peter, I say, records this, and proposes her as a pattern to all married women; saying, "In this manner in the old time the holy women who trusted in God adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands; even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord."

We see in the Scriptures many instances wherein God has manifested the same condescension to his frail and sinful creatures. In the reproof which our blessed Lord gave to Peter, he acknowledged that he had a little faith, at the very time that he had been yielding to unbelieving fears. And because there was some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel in the heart of young Abijah, God was pleased to distinguish him from all the family of Jeroboam by giving to him a peaceful death, and an honorable interment, [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13).

This is a great encouragement to us amidst all the weakness that we feel; and we may be assured that if, on the one hand, the evils of our heart will be disclosed, so, on the other hand, there is not a good purpose or inclination that shall not be made manifest, in order that every one may have his due proportion of praise from God, [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5).

3. What a mercy it is to have our secret sins detected and reproved—

From this time we hear no more of Sarah's unbelief; on the contrary, the reproof given her on this occasion was effectual for the confirming and establishing her faith. In the account given of the most eminent Saints who were distinguished for their faith, Sarah herself is mentioned; and her faith is said to have been instrumental to the accomplishment of that very promise, which in the first instance she had disbelieved, [Hebrews 11:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.11-12). And how many have found similar reason to bless God for the fidelity of their friends, or for the inward rebukes of their own conscience! Had their sin passed without notice, they had lived and died under its dominion; but by a timely discovery of it they have been led to repentance, and stirred up to the exercise of the virtue they had overlooked. Let us then "in any wise rebuke our brother, and not allow sin upon him." And let us be studious to improve the instructions we receive, that we may be radically amended by them, and "make our profiting appear unto all."

4. How essential to our best interests, is a right knowledge of God—

Had Sarah duly adverted to the omnipotence of God, she would have escaped the shame and the reproof which her unbelief drew down upon her. And what is it that is really at the root of all our sin? Is it not an ignorance of God?

If we duly considered how great he is, would we not be afraid to provoke his displeasure?

If we reflected properly on his goodness, would we not be shamed into a sense of our duty?

If we were mindful of his truth and faithfulness, would we not expect the certain completion of every word that he has ever spoken?

We are told, that the Jews "would not have crucified the Lord of Glory if they had really known him." In like manner we may say of every sin we commit: We would not have committed it, if we had known what a God we sinned against! Let us then endeavor to obtain just views of God, and of all his perfections. Let us not limit either his power or his grace; but knowing him to be "God Almighty, let us walk before him, and be perfect, [Genesis 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.1)."

#29

ABRAHAM'S CARE OF HIS FAMILY

**[Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19)**

"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Wonderful is the condescension of Almighty God. His attention to his own peculiar people surpasses almost the bounds of credibility. Who would think that He "whose ways are in the great deep" should yet so far humble himself as to "do nothing without first revealing his secret unto his servants the prophets, [Amos 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.7)." He had in his righteous judgment determined to take signal vengeance on Sodom and Gomorrah for their horrible iniquities. But he had a favored servant who was particularly interested in the fate of those cities; and he knew not how to proceed in the work of destruction until he had apprised him of his intention, and given him an opportunity of interceding for them, "The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" No; I will not, "for I know him," how faithful he is in the discharge of all his duties to me; and since he so delights to honor me, I also will delight to honor him.

The duties, for the performance of which Abraham was so highly commended, were of a domestic nature, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord." He eminently excelled in the observance of what may be called, family religion. And this being of such incalculable importance to the maintenance of piety in the world, I will propose him as an example to you; and with that view will show,

I. The use we should make of **influence**—

Influence, of whatever kind it be, should be diligently improved:

1. To enforce the commands of God—

Nothing should be of importance in our eyes in comparison with the honor of God. To uphold it should be our chief aim. The power given us, of whatever kind it is, is bestowed for this end. It is, in fact, God's own power, delegated to us; and, so far as we possess it, we are responsible to him for the use of it.

Magistrates are invested with it by him, and are therefore called "his Ministers" and Viceregents upon earth [Romans 13:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-6).

Masters in like manner bear his authority, and are his Representatives in the exercise of it [Colossians 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.24). To encourage virtue, to repress vice, to enforce the observance of "justice and judgment," and to make men "keep the way of the Lord," this, I say, is the true end of authority, whether it be official or personal, civil or religious. In particular, everything that dishonors God, no less than that which is injurious to society, must be opposed with determined vigor. All kinds of profaneness, must be discountenanced to the utmost; and all the maxims and habits of the world, as far as they are contrary to the commands of God, must be held up to decided reprehension. The Gospel too, which above all things most exalts the honor of God, must be patronized, inculcated, enforced. The utmost possible exertion should be made to diffuse the knowledge of a crucified Savior, "in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells," and "in whose face all the glory of the Godhead shines!" In a word, the legitimate use of power is, so to exercise it "that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus! [1 Peter 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.11)."

2. To promote the best interests of men—

Were this poor world our only state of existence, it would be sufficient so to use our authority as most to subserve the present happiness of mankind. But men are immortal beings; and their chief concern in this life is to prepare for eternity. In this work then we should aid them to the utmost of our power. To this should all our instructions and exhortations tend. We should, as far as we are able, make known to them "the way of the Lord," and especially the way in which they may find acceptance with Him in the last day. With this view we should enable, and indeed require, them to attend upon the ordinances of religion. We should inquire from time to time into their proficiency in divine knowledge, and their progress in the heavenly road. This is not the duty of Ministers only, but of all, according to their ability, and to the measure of influence which they possess. Parents should pay this attention to their children; and Masters to their servants and apprentices. They should not be content to see those whom God has committed to their care prospering in a worldly view, but should be anxious for the good of their souls, praying for them, and praying with them, and using every effort for their eternal welfare. Paul speaks of his "power as given to him for edification, 2 Corinthians 10:8;" and the same may be said of all influence whatever; it is a talent committed to us for the benefit of others; and we are not to hide it in a napkin, but to improve it for the good of all around us.

Of course, the nearer any are to us, the stronger claim they have upon us for our exertions in their behalf; and hence our domestic duties are of primary obligation. But we are not to say in reference to any man, "Am I my brother's keeper?" but to do him good in every way that we can, and to the utmost extent of our ability. As our blessed Lord did all imaginable good to the bodies of men—yet did not neglect their souls, so in relation to these more important duties we must say, "These ought we to do, and not to leave the others undone."

That we may be stirred up to exert our influence in this way, let us consider,

II. The benefit of using our influence aright—

This is great,

1. To those who exercise it—

So Abraham found it; he was approved of his God, and had the most astonishing testimonies of Divine approbation given to him. 'I know him,' says God; 'and he shall know that I know him. Go, my angels, and make known to him my purposes respecting Sodom and Gomorrah. He has a zeal for my honor, and a love for his fellow-creatures; go, give him an opportunity of exercising both. He has relations in Sodom; go and deliver them. This holy man shall never want a testimony of my love; I will fulfill to him in their utmost extent all the promises of my covenant!'

And shall any other person "give unto the Lord, and not be recompensed again, [Romans 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.35)." The ungodly have indeed said, "What profit is there that we should serve him, [Malachi 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.14)." but he never gave occasion for such an impious charge. Say, you who have endeavored to live for His glory, has he not favored you with his visits, and "lifted up upon you the light of his countenance?" Has he not shed abroad his love in your hearts, and "by the witness of his Spirit enabled you to cry, Abba, Father?" Yes, his promise to you is this, "Because he has set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation, [Psalm 91:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.14-16)." This, I say, is his promise to his faithful servants; and the whole of it shall be fulfilled to you in its season. "Faithful is He who has called you; who also will do it, [1 Thessalonians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.24)."

2. To those over whom it is exercised—

It is said, "Train up a child in the way he shall go, and when he is old he will not depart from it [Proverbs 22:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.6)." This is not to be understood as a universal truth; for it is in many instances contradicted by experience; but it is a general truth; and there is ample ground to hope for its accomplishment. At all events some benefit must accrue to those who are brought up in the fear of God. Innumerable evils, which under a different education would have been committed, are prevented; and good habits are, for a time at least, induced. And though afterwards the force of temptation may prevail to draw them aside from the good way—yet in a season of trouble they may be brought to reflection, and the seed long buried in the earth may spring up, and bring forth fruit to their eternal welfare. The prodigal son is no uncommon character. The advantages of a father's house may be forgotten for a season; but in a day of adversity they may be remembered, and be realized to an extent greater perhaps in proportion as they were before neglected and despised.

That this subject may be more deeply impressed on our minds, let us pursue it,

1. In a way of **inquiry**—

Are we, Brethren, "walking in the steps of our father Abraham?" Can God say respecting each of us, "I know him."

'I know his principles; he regards all that he possesses, his wisdom, his power, his wealth, his influence altogether—as a talent committed to him by me, to be improved for the good of others, and the glory of my name.

I know his inclination; he has a zeal for my honor, and longs to be an instrument of exalting and magnifying my name. He has also a love to his fellow-creatures, and desires to benefit them in every possible way to the utmost of his power.

I know his practice too; he calls his family together from day to day, to unite in worshiping and serving me. He catechizes his children; he instructs his servants; he labors steadily and affectionately to guide them all into the way of peace. His heart is set upon these things; he enters into them as one who feels his responsibility, and has no wish but to approve himself to me, and to give up a good account of his stewardship at last.'

Say, Brethren, whether the heart-searching God can testify these things respecting you? Must he not rather, respecting many of you say, "I know him," that he cares no more for the souls committed to him than he does for his flocks and herds, or for the cattle which are employed in his service? If only they are well, and serve his interest, and do his work, it is all he is concerned about. Even his very children are not regarded by him as immortal beings; if they do but get forward in their respective callings, and prosper in relation to the present world, he is satisfied, and leaves all the rest to "time and chance."

Alas! alas! what an account will such people have to give at the judgment-seat of Christ, when the Lord Jesus shall say to them, 'Is this the way in which you dealt with the souls committed to you, the souls which I purchased with my own blood?' Beloved, brethren, if you are so unlike to Abraham in this world, do you think that you can be numbered among his children in the world to come? O judge yourselves, that you may not be judged by the Lord in that great and fearful day!

2. In a way of **reproof**—

Surely this subject administers a severe reproof not only to those who never employ their influence at all for God, but those also who exert it only in a tame and timid ineffectual way.

Think, you who have children, servants, apprentices—have you no responsibility on their account? Has not God constituted you watchmen to give them warning of their subtle enemy, and to show them how they are to escape from his assaults? And, if they perish through your neglect, shall not their blood be required at your hands? Did God entrust them to you for your comfort and advancement only, and not at all for their benefit? And the many Sabbaths which he has given you to be improved for them, shall not a fearful account be given of them also? Is it pleasing to Him, think you, that you suffer the ordinances of divine worship to be neglected by them, and the Sabbaths to be wasted in idle vanities, instead of being employed by them and you for their welfare?

But perhaps you will say, 'I do occasionally give them good advice.' What is that? Abraham did not satisfy himself with giving good advice to his children and his household, but "commanded them"—he maintained authority in his family, and exercised that authority for God. And thus should you do also. Eli could say to his sons, "Nay, my sons, this is no good report that I hear about you; you make the Lord's people to transgress." He even went further, and reminded them of the day of judgment, "If one man sins against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" But was this all that his situation called for? No; he should have "commanded them," and have thrust them out from the priestly office, if they did not obey his injunctions; and because he neglected to do this, God sent him a message that "made the ears of all that heard it to tingle."

And some awful message shall you also have, if you neglect to employ for God the authority you have received from God; for "those who honor him he will honor; and those who despise him, shall be lightly esteemed [1 Samuel 2:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.22-23)."

3. In a way of **encouragement**—

True it is, that though you may command, you cannot ensure obedience to your commands; and notwithstanding your utmost care, there may be much amiss among those who are under your control. In Abraham's family, there was a mocking Ishmael, in Isaac's family, there was a profane Esau, and in Jacob's family, there were many a sinful character. But still, if you fail in many instances, and succeed in only one, will not one soul repay you for all your trouble? The testimony of your own conscience too, confirmed by the witness of God's Spirit—is this no recompense? Will not this amply repay every effort you can make, even though you should never succeed in one single instance? Reflect too on the testimony which God himself will give you in the last day, "I know him;" I know how he persevered under the most discouraging circumstances; I know the battles he fought for me; I know the contempt he endured for me; but he was determined to persevere; and "he was faithful unto death; and therefore I award to him a crown of life!"

Say, Brethren, is there not enough in such a prospect as this to carry you forward, though your difficulties were ten thousand times greater than they are? Say not, 'I am not able to conduct family worship, and to instruct my family.' If this be the case, as doubtless in many instances it is—are there not helps sufficient to be obtained from books of instruction and from forms of prayer? Do your best; and beg of God to bless your endeavors; and you shall not labor in vain nor run in vain; for "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God will ordain strength, and perfect praise."

#30

ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION FOR SODOM

**[Genesis 18:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.32)**

Then Abraham said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?"

He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

Abraham intercession was on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah; an intercession the most instructive of all that are recorded in the sacred volume. When Abraham understood that this divine Person with his attendant angels was come to destroy those wicked cities, he entreated that, if fifty righteous people could be found in them, the wicked might be spared for their sake. Having prevailed thus far, he in five successive petitions reduced the number to ten, and obtained a promise that if only ten could be found, the rest should be spared for their sake. What an astonishing idea does this give us of God's regard for his people!

Let us observe,

I. How dear to Him are their persons!

We forbear to notice the honorable appellations which he gives them (as his jewels, his peculiar treasure, etc.) or the great and precious promises made to them, or the blessings of grace bestowed upon them; we shall confine our attention solely to the interpositions of his providence in their behalf; because it is in that view only that they are noticed in the text. But in marking God's kindness to them, we shall notice it as manifested,

1. God's kindness to them personally—

We cannot conceive anything so great, but God has actually done it for his people!

He has controlled the elements. The earth has opened at his command to maintain the authority of his chosen prophet Moses, and to swallow up his insolent competitors, [Numbers 16:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.32). The air has raised itself into tempests, and shot forth its lightnings, and shaken the foundations of the earth, with its thunders, in order to punish the enemies of his people, [Exodus 9:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.23-25), or vindicate their injured honor, 1 Samuel 12:16-18. Fire also has suspended its destructive energies, in order to defeat the persecuting rage of a tyrant, and rescue from his hands the children of oppression, [Daniel 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.27). Nor has the water been backward to obey his will, when any signal benefit was to be conveyed to his favorite people. It has repeatedly stood as a wall, to open an avenue for them through the rivers, [Joshua 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 3.15-16); [2 Kings 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.8); [2 Kings 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.14), and through the sea [Exodus 14:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.21-22).

God has compelled all classes of the brute creation also to consult their benefit. The birds, though of the most voracious kind, have served up the stated meals of bread and food to his prophet in a time of dearth and necessity, [1 Kings 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.6). The beasts, though fierce and hunger-bitten, have shut their mouths before the saint, whom they were invited to destroy, [Daniel 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.22). The fish have swallowed up a drowning prophet, to discharge him again in safety upon the dry land, [Jonah 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.10); [Jonah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.10); or taken into their mouth a bait unsuited to their appetite, that the Savior in his humiliation might be enabled to pay his tax, [Matthew 17:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.27). The insects too have united their irresistible efforts to punish a proud and cruel nation, and to assert the liberties of God's oppressed people, [Exodus 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.17); [Exodus 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.24).

We may add also, that even the heavenly bodies have been overruled by God for the purpose of aiding, or comforting, or honoring those who were dear to him. The sun and moon stood still for the space of a whole day, to witness the triumphs of his chosen servants, [Joshua 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.13). "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera, [Judges 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 5.20)." And the shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz returned ten degrees, that a pious and afflicted monarch might be assured of the deliverance which his soul desired, [Isaiah 38:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.6-8).

How dear to God must they be, to whom the whole creation is thus made subservient, and for whose benefit the government of the universe is administered!

2. God's kindness to others for their sake—

For their sakes blessings have been imparted to the undeserving, and judgments averted from the wicked. For Jacob's sake God multiplied the flocks of Laban, [Genesis 30:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 30.27); and from respect to Joseph he prospered the house of Potiphar, [Genesis 39:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.5). If ten righteous could have been found in Sodom, the impending destruction would have been turned from all the cities of the plain; and notwithstanding the extreme wickedness of its inhabitants, the city of Zoar was exempted from the common fate, at the intercession of Lot, [Genesis 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.21); nor could the storm be poured out upon Sodom, until Lot was placed beyond its reach, [Genesis 19:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.22). The mercy shown to a whole ship's company on account of Paul, deserves peculiar notice. There were 276 souls on board; the storm was so violent that there was no hope left for their preservation; they were just ready to be swallowed up in the tempestuous waves. But there was one saint on board; a saint, hated by men, but beloved byf God; and for his sake the whole were preserved from death, and not a hair of their heads was allowed to perish! [Acts 27:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.24); [Acts 27:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.34). When God was about to send the Jews into captivity, he told them, that if they could find one righteous man in Jerusalem, he would spare them all, [Jeremiah 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.1); and after he had inflicted his judgments upon them, he assigned as his reason for it, that not one had been found to stand in the gap, and to intercede for them, [Ezekiel 22:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 22.30-31). After the murder of the Messiah, the Jewish nation was devoted to utter destruction; but when the days of vengeance came, "they were shortened for the elect's sake;" yes, it was out of respect to them alone that there was not an utter excision of the whole human race, [Matthew 24:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.22).

What stronger proofs can be given of God's love to his chosen people?

But we shall have a further insight into this subject, if we consider,

II. How acceptable to Him are their prayers!

Who can contemplate one single individual interceding, as Abraham did, for all the cities of the plain, and not admire the condescension of God to his praying people? He has heard and answered them, for whoever they made their supplications; whether,

1. For themselves—

No limits whatever, except those which were necessarily fixed by a concern for his own honor, have been assigned by God to the exercise of his own grace in answer to his people's prayers. God has said to them, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it!" "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." Agreeably to these promises he has done for them not only what they have asked, but exceeding abundantly above their most optimistic hopes.

The prayer of Jonah ascended up even from the bottom of the sea, and brought him a deliverance unprecedented in the annals of the world. The situation of the Canaanite woman may be considered in some respects still more desperate, because her request had been repeatedly refused; but by persisting in her supplications she obtained the desire of her heart, [Matthew 15:22-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.22-28).

No kind of blessing has ever been denied to the prayer of faith. David sought information whether the men of Keliah would betray him; and God told him that they would, [1 Samuel 23:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.11-12). He desired direction, when and in what manner he should attack the Philistine armies; and God pointed out to him the precise time and place for making his attack successfully, [2 Samuel 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.19); [2 Samuel 5:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.23-24). Thus also when they have implored mercy after the most heinous transgressions, God has shown the same readiness to hear and answer their requests, [Psalm 32:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.5); [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13). "He has never said to any of them, Seek my face in vain."

2. For each other—

Mutual intercession is a duty which has been expressly enjoined, and to which we have been encouraged by the most signal tokens of God's acceptance. The deliverance given to Peter deserves particular attention. He was secured in prison with all the care that human foresight could devise.

He was chained between two soldiers, and guarded by many others. Prayer was made for him by the church; but apparently to no purpose. The day appointed for his execution was almost arrived. But at midnight God returned an answer; an answer which as much surprised the suppliants, as it confounded their enemies; his chains fell off, the iron gates opened to him of their own accord, and his adversaries were put to shame, [Acts 12:4-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.4-19). It was from a full persuasion of the efficacy of intercession, that Paul was so earnest in requesting the prayers of others for him, [Romans 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.30), and that he was so unwearied in his prayers for them, [1 Thessalonians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.10); [Philippians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.4); [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12). And it is particularly in reference to intercession for the saints, that James says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much! [James 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16)."

3. For the ungodly—

The iniquities of a nation may indeed arrive at such a height, that if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, those holy men should not prevail, except for the preservation of themselves, [Ezekiel 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.14). But the instances wherein God has heard prayer on behalf of the ungodly are very numerous, and very encouraging. How speedily did the supplications of Amos remove the threatened judgment from his country, [Amos 7:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 7.1-6).

How irresistible, if we may so speak, were the intercessions of Moses! God had determined to execute vengeance on his people for making and worshiping the golden calf. He therefore, fearing, as it were, that Moses would interpose in their behalf, and prevent the execution of his purpose, said to him, "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them;" that is, 'If you intercede for them, you will bind my hands; therefore let me alone, that I may inflict upon them the judgments they have deserved.' But Moses would not "let him alone;" he instantly "besought the Lord," and, as it were, prevailed against him; for "the Lord repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto his people, [Exodus 32:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.10-11); [Exodus 32:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.14)."

While in such instances as these we contemplate the condescension of our God, we cannot fail to notice the love which he bears to his chosen people, and the peculiar delight which he feels in hearing and answering their prayers.

Observe,

1. What blessings are God's people in the places where they live!

Our blessed Lord represents them as "the lights of the world," and "the salt of the earth;" because, without them, the world would be immersed in total darkness, and speedily become one mass of corruption. Little does the world think how much they are indebted to the saints. They are ready to traduce the characters of God's people, and to represent them as "the troublers of Israel;" but, were they viewed aright, they would be considered rather as "the shields of the earth," who ward off from it the judgments of the Almighty. Only let us duly notice the tokens which God has given them of his regard, and the mercy he has shown to others for their sake—and we shall know how to appreciate their value, and ardently pray for their increase in the earth.

2. What encouragements have the ungodly to pray for themselves!

Has God shown himself so willing to hear the prayers of a single individual in the behalf of populous cities—and will he not hear the prayers of individuals for themselves? Never from the foundation of the world has he rejected the petitions of a real penitent; nor, as we have before observed, has he prescribed any limits to our petitions for spiritual blessings. "The Lord will not be angry," however frequently we renew, or however largely we extend, our supplications, "If we ask, we shall have; if we seek, we shall find;" yes, if we ask for all the glory of Heaven, it shall be given to us. O that men were duly sensible of the privilege of prayer, and that they would plead for mercy while yet a throne of grace is open to them!

3. How diligently should the godly improve their interest in the behalf of others!

We can scarcely conceive a person so obdurate, but that if, by speaking to another, he could obtain health for the sick, and relief for the indigent—he would avail himself of such an opportunity to benefit his fellow-creatures. Yet is there among us a lamentable backwardness to the work of intercession, notwithstanding our almighty Friend is at all times accessible, and the blessings which he will bestow are infinitely greater than words can express.

O let all of us stir up ourselves to this blessed work! Let us consider how much we ourselves need the prayers of others; and let a sense of our own necessities stimulate us to, "labor fervently in prayer" for others. We are sure at least that, if we prevail not for them, we shall bring down a blessing upon our souls, and "our prayer shall return into our own bosoms."

Let us consider also that to neglect to pray for others, is to sin against our God, [1 Samuel 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.23); and that, if we have no heart to sigh and cry for the abominations or the miseries of others, we have great reason to fear and tremble for ourselves, [Ezekiel 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.4) with [Amos 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 6.6-7).

#31

LOT DELIVERED OUT OF SODOM

**[Genesis 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.17)**

As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

It is extremely profitable to observe how ready God is to honor those who honor him. Lot had been a very distinguished character in Sodom. He had seen and heard with much concern, the iniquities that were committed by those around him, "he had vexed his righteous soul with their unlawful deeds from day to day;" and had set them a pattern of piety and virtue. Nor was he inattentive to the welfare of strangers; he was ready at all times to exercise the rights of hospitality, and to show to others the same liberality which he would wish to meet with at their hands. Indeed his sense of honor in this respect carried him beyond the bounds of prudence or propriety; for when he was protecting his guests from the assaults of those who would have injured them, he even preferred the sacrificing of his daughters, to the allowing of the laws of hospitality to be so grossly violated.

That he erred in this matter, we have no doubt; because he had no right to commit one sin in order to prevent another. But he meant well; and probably was so agitated with fear and horror, as scarcely to be aware of the impropriety of his proposal.

His zeal for God, and his attention to his guests, were well rewarded. He was informed that the people whom he had received under his roof were angels in human shape; that they were sent to destroy the cities of the plain; and that they were commissioned to rescue him and his family from the common ruin. In what manner they executed their commission, we may judge from the urgent advice which they gave him in our text; and which we shall consider,

I. The urgent advice given to Lot—

If we consider the circumstances of Lot:

1. The advice given Lot was most beneficial—

The measure of this people's iniquities was now full; and God had determined utterly to destroy them. This determination had already been announced to Lot; and he had been sent to his friends and relatives to declare it to them; though, alas! they had only treated his message with contempt and derision. His own mind indeed was convinced that the wrath of God would fall upon those devoted cities; but yet he was disposed to linger, and defer his flight. Whether he felt regret at leaving so many relatives behind him, or was grieved at the thought of losing all his substance, or had an idea that some time would elapse before the threatened judgments should be inflicted—he was not sufficiently earnest to escape the impending danger. The angels therefore took him and his wife and daughters by the hand, and led them forth outside the city; and gave them the counsel which is contained in the text.

The time for executing vengeance was just at hand. There was no safety but in flight; nor any refuge but that which God had appointed. A little longer delay would prove fatal to them all! Though they were out of Sodom, they were at a considerable distance from the mountain. To reach it, required their utmost exertions; it became them therefore to strain every nerve in order to secure the offered mercy.

To promote this was the direct tendency of the advice; so suited was it to their condition, and so conducive to their welfare.

2. The advice given Lot was most benevolent—

It is obvious that the extreme earnestness expressed by the angels, together with the whole tenor of their advice, was exceedingly alarming. It was calculated to inspire Lot himself with terror, and to extinguish in the weaker females all the powers of reason and reflection. But shall we therefore say that these divine Monitors were needlessly severe? Suppose that, having received a commission to warn Lot, they had yielded to a mistaken tenderness, and forborne to alarm his fears; suppose they had gently admonished him of his danger, and suggested the expediency of providing against it; suppose that, when they saw him lingering, and knew that one hour's delay would involve him and his family in the common ruin, they had contented themselves with only hinting that more expedition would be desirable; would such conduct have befit them? Would they have acted the part of friends? Yes, would they not have been awfully responsible to God for their unfaithfulness, and been really chargeable with the death of all the family? Assuredly, the more faithful and earnest they were in the discharge of their duty, the more real benevolence they exercised; nor could they have displayed their love in any better way, than by seizing hold of them to quicken their pace, and urging them by the most powerful considerations to secure their own safety.

We shall not depart from the real scope of the advice, if we regard it,

II. The urgent advice, as applicable to ourselves—

Our condition is certainly very similar to Lot's—

God has declared that he will destroy the whole world of the ungodly, as soon as ever they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities; and the judgments that he will execute upon them were typified by those that were inflicted upon Sodom. "The cities of the plain were set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire Jude!" And it is doubtless in reference to the destruction with which they were visited, that the place of torment is described as "a lake that burns with fire and brimstone! [Revelation 20:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.10)."

But there is a place of refuge provided for us; a mountain where no storms can assail us, no judgments ever hurt us. This refuge is the Lord Jesus Christ, "whose name is a strong tower, to which the righteous runs and is safe."

On the other hand, there is no salvation for us, unless we flee to him! While we continue of the world, we must take our portion with the world. We must "come out of it, if we would not be partakers of its plagues, [Revelation 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 18.4)." We must "bear our testimony against it, that its ways are evil," and must in the whole of our spirit and conduct be separate from it, [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17).

The same advice therefore is proper for us, as for him—

Two things are indispensably necessary for us, if we would enjoy the benefits which God has offered us in his Gospel; and these are personal exertion and persevering diligence.

It had been declared to Lot, that the threatened destruction could not be executed until he should have arrived at the place provided for him, [Genesis 19:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.22). But could he therefore say, I am in no danger; I may take my leisure; I may leave myself in God's hands? Surely if he had acted in so presumptuous a manner, he would have perished with the ungodly multitude! When he had come out of Sodom, his exertions were no less necessary than before. He must flee to the mountain. He must escape as for his life. He must not delay a moment, lest he should be consumed.

Thus it is with us. We cannot say: God has sent his only dear Son to save me, and therefore I have nothing to do. We must rather say, God has offered to have mercy on me, and therefore I must "work out my salvation with fear and trembling." To found our hopes upon the secret purposes of God, would be to delude ourselves, and to ensure our eternal ruin. We might as well hope to win a race without running, or to gain a battle without fighting, as to get to Heaven without personal exertion. We must seek; yes not only seek, but strive, to enter in at the strait gate, if ever we would find admittance into it.

Nor will it avail us anything to put forth our strength to the uttermost, unless we maintain a constant, vigorous, persevering diligence in the course that we have begun. Lot's wife was a partner of his flight, but not of his preservation; for she looked back, and was therefore made a lasting monument of God's displeasure! And if Lot himself had remitted his endeavors, he also would have perished in like manner. We may "run well for a season, and yet be hindered;" we may "begin in the spirit, and yet end in the flesh;" we may "escape the pollutions of the world, and yet be again entangled therein, and at last overcome." We may come out of Egypt, and yet never reach the promised land. It is not he who begins well, but "he who endures unto the end, that shall be saved!" "If we put our hand to the plough, and look back, we are not fit for the kingdom of Heaven."

Address,

1. To those who are at ease in Sodom—

We would not willingly speak reproachful words, or address you in terms that are needlessly offensive; but we are sanctioned by the prophet Isaiah in saying, "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, and you people of Gomorrah! [Isaiah 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.10)." We bless our God that the abomination referred to in the context, is held in universal abhorrence; and that the very thought of it excites as general indignation among us, as it did in Sodom. But in all other respects those wicked cities are a looking-glass wherein we may behold ourselves. "This," says the prophet, "was the iniquity of your sister Sodom; pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, [Ezekiel 16:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.49)." And what can be conceived more characteristic of our state? Our pride, our luxury, our love of ease are not a whit inferior to theirs. Again, our Lord says, "As it was in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from Heaven, and destroyed them all! Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man shall be revealed, [Luke 17:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.28-30);" and let me ask whether it is not so at this day?

We are attending to our temporal concerns, our cares and pleasures, with avidity. But notwithstanding we are warned continually of our guilt and danger, how backward are we to flee from the wrath to come! Know then that the wrath of God is about to be poured out upon you; and that if you flee not with all earnestness to the Lord Jesus Christ, you must inevitably and eternally perish! Perhaps in warning you thus we appear "as people who mock, verse 14," or, at best, as needlessly harsh and severe. But we affirm that what we speak will soon be found true; and that in discharging our duty thus, we perform an office worthy of an angel. We believe God's denunciations, and therefore we speak; and if we should "speak smooth things to you, and prophesy deceits," we would prove to be your bitterest enemies. In this urgent matter, concealment is treachery, and fidelity is love. Arise then, every one of you; and "escape for your lives!"

2. Those who are lingering, and deferring their flight—

Many, we doubt not, are convinced of the necessity of taking refuge in Christ—yet are so immersed in worldly cares or pleasures that they know not how to commence their heavenly course. They think that a more convenient season will present itself; and that they shall carry their purposes into effect before the day of vengeance shall arrive. But how many have grown grey with age, while their convictions have led to nothing but abortive wishes and ineffectual resolutions! And how many have been overtaken with the storm, while they were thinking and intending to escape from it! There are indeed many, who have come out of Sodom so as no longer to participate in its grosser abominations; and are, in profession at least, advancing to the place of refuge; while yet in their hearts they are attached to the things that they have renounced! To such people we would say, with our blessed Lord, "Remember Lot's wife! [Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.32)." She looked back, while she was following her husband's steps. We inquire not what her motives were; it is sufficient to know that she looked back; and for that she was struck dead upon the spot; for that she was made a monument to all future ages, to assure us, that if our heart is in Sodom, we shall perish like Sodom! Whatever be our professions, or whatever our progress, if our heart be not right with God, "we shall take our portion in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death! [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)."

"Make haste then, and delay not, to keep God's commandments, [Psalm 119:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.60)," and to "lay hold on eternal life." Rest not in any purposes, professions, or attainments. Turn not back even in thought; but "forgetting what is behind, press forward toward that which is ahead." It will be time enough to "rest from your labors," when you are arrived safely in Heaven.

3. Those who are daily running in the way prescribed—

Faint not, dearly Beloved, "neither be weary in well doing." For your encouragement you are told to regard Lot's deliverance as a proof, that "God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, as well as to reserve the ungodly for punishment! [2 Peter 2:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.6-9)." Whatever difficulties therefore you have to encounter, fear not. And do not unbelievingly wish that your way were shorter than God has appointed it. This was Lot's weakness and folly. God did indeed graciously condescend to his request; and spared Zoar for his sake; but his unbelief was punished, not only in the fears which harassed him in Zoar, but in the awful dereliction that he afterwards experienced. From this time we hear nothing of him except his drunkenness and incest; and, if Peter had not given us reason to believe that he became truly penitent, we would have had ground to apprehend that he was, after all, an outcast from Heaven.

Plead not then for any other refuge, or for the indulgence of any sin. Say not of anything that God has proscribed, "Is it not a little one?" A little one it may be in comparison with others; but, whether little or great, it must be renounced; we must abandon forever our connection with it, and let our regards terminate in God alone.

But let not those who are hastening towards Heaven be contented to go alone; let them seek to take all they can along with them. Let them exert their influence to the uttermost over all their friends and connections, in order that they may be instrumental to their salvation also. Let them especially manifest their conjugal and parental affection in this way. Yet if, after all, they are derided as visionaries by some, and be forsaken in their progress by others, let them not for one moment intermit their diligence in the preservation of their own souls. If their labors prove effectual only to one or two, it will be a rich consolation to them in the day of judgment, that, though many who were once dear to them have reaped the fruits of their supineness—there are others for whom they have "not labored in vain, nor run in vain."

#32

ABRAHAM REPROVED FOR DENYING HIS WIFE

**[Genesis 20:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 20.9)**

"Then Abimelech called Abraham in and said: What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done."

We admire the fidelity of Scripture history. There is not a saint, however eminent, but his faults are reported as faithfully as his virtues. And we are constrained to acknowledge, that the best of men, when they come into temptation, are weak and fallible as others, if they be not supported from above. We are habituated to behold Abraham as a burning and shining light; but now we are called to view him under an eclipse. We see the father of the faithful drawing upon himself a just rebuke, and that too, not for some slight defect in his obedience, but for a great and heinous transgression! It will afford us a beneficial lesson to consider,

I. The offence which Abraham committed—

He was guilty of dissimulation in calling Sarah his sister, when she was in reality his wife. It is true, she was also his sister, in the same sense that Lot was his brother; she was his niece, the daughter of Haran, who was his brother by the father's side. But was there nothing wrong in this concealment? We do not hesitate to declare, that it was a very grievous sin! Consider,

1. The principle from which it sprang—

Abraham had been called out from his country to sojourn in a strange land; and, depending upon God for direction and support, "he went forth, not knowing where he was going." For the space of twenty-five years he had experienced the faithfulness and loving-kindness of his God. And he had recently received the most express promises that he would have a son by Sarah, who would be the progenitor of the Messiah. Yet behold, when he comes to Gerar, a city of the Philistines, he is afraid that the people will kill him, in order to gain possession of his wife, who, though ninety years of age, still retained a considerable measure of her former beauty. In order to secure himself, he has recourse to this expedient of denying his wife. But was not God still able to protect him? Or could the Philistines touch a hair of his head without God's permission? In what had God failed him, that now at this time he should begin to doubt his faithfulness or power? It was the limiting of these perfections that in after ages brought down upon the whole nation of Israel the heaviest judgments, [Psalm 78:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.20-22); [Psalm 78:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.40-42); and it could not but greatly aggravate the offence of Abraham in the present instance.

2. Its natural and necessary tendency—

We shudder while we contemplate the tendency of this shameful expedient. It was calculated to ensnare the people among whom he sojourned; while it exposed the virtue of Sarah to the extreme hazard. Had she been acknowledged for Abraham's wife, everyone would have known the unlawfulness of entertaining a desire after her, and would have abstained from showing her any undue attention, or from cherishing in his bosom an inclination towards her. But when she passed for an unmarried woman, every one was at liberty to insinuate himself into her affections, and to seek to the uttermost an honorable connection with her. The outcome indeed shows what might reasonably have been expected from such a plot. What other catastrophe could well be looked for? Terrible as it might have proved, both to her and to Abimelech, it was no other than the natural consequence of the deceit which was practiced.

But what was its aspect and tendency with respect to the *Messiah*? We tremble to relate. Surely the whole human race combined could not have devised or executed anything more injurious to his honor. It was but just before, perhaps a week or two, that God had promised to Abraham, that within the year he would have a son by Sarah. Suppose then that matters had proceeded according to Abimelech's intention, and that God had not miraculously interposed to prevent the execution of his purpose—it would have remained a doubt at this moment whether the promises were ever fulfilled to Abraham, and whether the Messiah did indeed descend from his loins. Consequently, the covenant made with Abraham, and all the promises made to him and his seed, would be left in an awful uncertainty. If it would have been criminal in Abraham and Sarah to concert such a plan under any circumstances whatever, how much more criminal was it to do so under the peculiar circumstances in which they then were!

3. Its having been before practiced by him, and reproved—

Had the Philistines come suddenly upon Abraham, and threatened to put him to death for his wife's sake, we should the less have wondered that they were prevailed upon to conceal their relation to each other. But he had committed this same offence many years before; and had thereby ensnared Pharaoh king of Egypt; nor was he then delivered without a divine interposition, and a just rebuke from the injured monarch, [Genesis 12:12-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.12-20). Surely he ought to have profited by past experience; he should have been sensible of the evil of such a proceeding; and, having been once rescued, as it were by a miracle, he should never have subjected himself again to such danger, reproach, and infamy. The repetition of so heinous a crime, after such a warning and such a deliverance, increased its malignity a hundred-fold.

If we consider the offence of Abraham in this complicated view, we shall not wonder at,

II. The rebuke given him on account of it—

Abimelech admonished by God in a dream to restore Abraham his wife, sent for him, and reproved him for the imposition he had practiced. In this rebuke we observe,

1. Much that was disgraceful to Abraham—

It was no little disgrace that Abraham, a saint, a prophet of the most high God—would be reproved at all by a heathen; but, when we reflect how much occasion he had given for the reproof, it was disgraceful indeed.

The uncharitableness which he had manifested was very dishonorable to his character. He had indeed just heard of the horrible impiety of Sodom; and he concluded perhaps, that if a whole city so virulently assaulted Lot for the purpose of gratifying their diabolical inclinations with the men that were his guests, much more would some individual be found in Gerar to destroy him, for the purpose of gaining access to a woman that was so renowned for her beauty. Glad should we be to offer this excuse for him; but he had before acted in the same manner without any such considerations to influence his conduct; and therefore we cannot lay any material stress on this recent occurrence.

But supposing he had been actuated by such reflections, what right had he to judge so harshly of a people whom he did not know? Abimelech justly asked him, "What did you see that you have done this thing?" He had no other grounds than mere surmise, "I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place." But why should he think so? Could not that God who had brought him out from an idolatrous country, and preserved Lot and Melchizedek in the midst of the most abandoned people, have some "hidden ones" in Gerar also? Or, supposing that there were none who truly feared God, must they therefore be so impious as to murder him in order to possess his wife? It is a fact, that many who are not truly religious, have as high a sense of honor, and as great an abhorrence of atrocious crimes, as any converted man can feel; and therefore the reproach which he so unjustifiably cast on them, returned deservedly upon his own head.

In what a disgraceful manner too, was his wife restored to his hands! How must he blush to be told that he who should have been her protector, had been her tempter; that, in fact, he had put a price upon her virtue; and that, instead of being willing, as he ought to have been, to die in her defense—he had sacrificed her honor to his own groundless fears. It must not be forgotten, that Sarah was actually given up to Abimelech, and that Abraham had forborne to claim her; so that he was answerable, not only for the consequences that did ensue, but for those also which. according to the common course of things, were to be expected.

Further, in what light must he appear to himself and all around him, when he was informed, that he had brought on Abimelech and all his household some very severe judgments, and had actually exposed them all to instantaneous death! What Abimelech had done, "he had done in the integrity of his heart;" and if he and all his family had died for it, Abraham would have been the sole author of their ruin.

We need add no more to the humiliating picture that has been exhibited. Methinks we see Abraham before our eyes ashamed to lift up his head, and with deepest penitence accepting the punishment of his iniquity.

2. Much that was honorable to Abimelech—

If we were to judge from this portion of sacred history, we would be ready to think that Abraham had been the heathen, and Abimelech the prophet of the Lord. In the reproof this offended king administered, he was a most eminent pattern of moderation, of equity, and of virtue. Considering what injury he had sustained, it is truly wonderful that he should express himself with such mildness and composure. The occasion would almost have justified the bitterest reproaches; and it might well be expected that Abimelech would cast reflections on Abraham's religion; condemning that as worthless, or him as hypocritical. But not one reproachful word escaped his lips. The only word that has at all that aspect, is the gentle sarcasm in his address to Sarah, "I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver;" admonishing her thereby no more to call him by that deceitful name.

On restoring Sarah to her husband, he endeavored to make all possible reparation for the evil which he had unwittingly committed. He loaded Abraham with presents, and permitted him to dwell in any part of his dominions; and gave him a thousand pieces of silver to purchase veils for Sarah and her attendants, that they might no longer tempt his subjects by their beauty.

Finally, we cannot but admire the utter abhorrence which this heathen prince expressed of a sin, which is too lightly regarded by the generality of those who call themselves Christians! It is observable that he never once complained of the punishment which he and his family had suffered, nor of the danger to which they had been exposed, but only of their seduction into sin. He considered this as the greatest injury that could have been done to him; and inquired what he had done to provoke Abraham to the commission of it, "How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin!" Surely a more striking refutation of Abraham's opinions concerning him it was not in the power of language to express.

On this subject we would found "a word of exhortation"—

1. Shun every species of equivocation and deception—

They are rarely to be found who will under all circumstances rigidly adhere to truth. Many who would not choose to utter a direct and palpable falsehood, will yet put such a color upon things as to convey an idea quite contrary to truth. To magnify another's faults or to extenuate their own, to raise or depreciate the value of some commodity, to avoid persecution or obtain applause—are temptations which forcibly operate to produce either exaggeration or concealment.

In disagreements especially, no person can be fully credited in his own statement. But this is dishonorable to religion. There is scarcely anything that affords a greater triumph to the enemies of religion, than to find instances of disingenuousness in those who profess it. And it requires constant watchfulness and self-command to speak the truth at all times. O let us beg of God to "put truth in our inward parts;" and let none of us think it beneath him to use that humiliating prayer of David, "Remove from me the way of lying! [Psalm 119:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.29)."

2. Guard against relapses into sin—

We may have repented of a sin, and for a long time forsaken it, and yet be in danger of falling into it again. Indeed our besetting sin, however repented of, will generally continue our besetting sin; and the power of divine grace will appear, not so much in taking away all temptation to it, as in enabling us to withstand and vanquish the temptation. The Spirit of God may form the contrary grace in our hearts, and even cause us to exercise it in a very eminent degree; but still we are never beyond the reach and influence of temptation. If we had all the strength of Abraham's faith—we might fall, like him, through cowardice and unbelief.

Let us then watch in all things, but especially in those things wherein we have once been overcome; and let our previous falls be constant monitors before our eyes, to show us our weakness, and to stimulate us to prayer.

More particularly, if we imagine that we have so forsaken our sin as to be in no danger of committing it again, let us beware, "let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

3. Be thankful to God for his protecting and preserving grace—

If God had taken no better care of us than we have done of ourselves, how many times would we have dishonored our holy profession! Who that knows anything of his own heart, is not conscious, that he has at some times tampered with sin; and laid such snares for his own feet, that nothing but God's gracious and unlooked-for interference has preserved him?

While we were in our unconverted state, "God has withheld us" on many occasions, as he did Abimelech, "from sinning against him." And since God has been pleased to call us by his grace, we have frequently been rescued by his providence from dangers, to which the folly and depravity of our own hearts have exposed us.

Let us then magnify the grace of God; and, if we are enabled to maintain a holy and consistent conduct, let us say with David, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto your statutes continually! [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117)."

4. Strive to the uttermost to cancel the effects of your transgressions—

Abraham by his prevarication had brought distress on Abimelech and all his household. But when he was humbled for his transgression, he prayed to God to remove his judgments from the people whom he had so seduced. By this means, as far as in him lay, he counteracted the evil that he had done. It is but seldom that we can cancel in any degree the evil that we have committed; but, if any way whatever present itself to us, we should embrace it gladly, and pursue it eagerly.

At all events, the measure adopted by Abraham is open to us all. We may pray for those whom we have injured. We may beg of God to obliterate from their minds any bad impression, which either by our words or actions we have made upon them. And, if we find in them a kind forgiving spirit, we should so much the more redouble our exertions, to obtain for them the blessings of salvation, which will infinitely overbalance any evils which they may have suffered through our means.

#33

ABRAHAM CASTING OUT HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

**[Genesis 21:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 21.9-10)**

"But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham:

Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

Sin, even in this world, almost always brings its own punishment along with it; and frequently the sin itself is marked in the punishment that follows it. We can have no doubt but that Sarah erred when she gave Hagar into Abraham's bosom, in hopes of having the promised seed by her. And scarcely had her device been carried into execution before she began to suffer for it. As soon as Hagar had a prospect of becoming a mother, she began to despise her mistress. Her contempt excited vehement indignation in the bosom of Sarah; insomuch that she made Abraham himself also a party in the quarrel, and accused him of encouraging Hagar in her insolence. When Abraham, to vindicate himself, empowered her to use her own discretion with respect to Hagar, she began to retaliate on her contemptuous bond-maid, and to treat her with excessive severity. Thus was domestic harmony interrupted by those very means which Sarah had adopted to increase her happiness.

Hagar, unable to bear the unkind treatment of her mistress, fled from her; and returned to her only in consequence of being commanded to do so by an angel of the Lord, [Genesis 16:3-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 16.3-9). We cannot suppose that her forced submission was attended with much comfort either to herself or her mistress; where there was no love, there would be found many occasions of vexation and dispute. At last, after about eighteen years, a quarrel arose, which determined Sarah to expel from her family both Hagar and her son. This domestic occurrence is replete with instruction; we propose therefore to make some observations upon,

I. The history itself—

The expulsion of Hagar and her son, who was now about seventeen years of age, was a strong measure. Let us inquire into,

1. The **grounds** and **reasons** of the expulsion of Hagar and her son—

Sarah had seen Ishmael mocking Isaac. From the resolution adopted by Sarah in consequence of it, we apprehend that Ishmael had derided the pretensions of Isaac to inherit his father's substance. No doubt, Isaac was instructed as early as possible to regard God as his God, and to expect both from his earthly and his heavenly Father the accomplishment of all that God had promised him. Ishmael, on the other hand, would but ill brook the idea of being excluded from the birth-right; and therefore would be ready to dispute Isaac's title to it. Possibly too the very name Isaac, which signifies laughter, would afford Ishmael many occasions of profane banter. Had this "mocking" been nothing more than idle jest, attended with a foolish pleasure in teasing her child—we take for granted that Sarah would have deemed it sufficient to reprove the fault, and to point out to Ishmael the impropriety of his conduct. But she saw that it proceeded from profaneness; that it argued a rebellious spirit against God; that it would become his regular practice; and that his mother encouraged him in it, glad to avenge in that way the wrongs that she supposed herself to suffer. On these accounts Sarah despaired of accomplishing her ends by correction, and determined to prevent a recurrence of such offences by an immediate and final expulsion of the offenders.

2. The **manner** in which the expulsion of Hagar and her son was carried into execution—

Sarah, though right in her judgment respecting the means of obtaining domestic peace, seems to have been too precipitate, and too peremptory in her demands for their expulsion; and Abraham demurred about the carrying it into execution. He indeed had different feelings from Sarah. Sarah's regards were fixed exclusively on Isaac; she did not consider Ishmael as a son, but rather as an intruder and a rival. But Abraham, being the father of both, felt a paternal affection towards each of them; nor was he indifferent towards Hagar, whom he had considered, and lived with, as a legitimate wife.

Perhaps he also suspected that Sarah's proposal originated in an irritation of temper, and that less severe measures would in a little time satisfy her mind. He was grieved exceedingly at the thought of proceeding to such extremities; but finding how resolutely she was bent upon it, he committed the matter to God, and sought direction from above. God directed him to acquiesce in Sarah's wishes; and reminded him that her proposal, however grievous it might be to him, accorded exactly with his repeated declarations, that "in Isaac would his seed be blessed," and that all the blessings of the covenant exclusively belonged to Isaac, [Genesis 17:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.19); [Genesis 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.21).

The divine will being thus made known to Abraham, he deferred not to comply with it, but dismissed Hagar and Ishmael early the very next morning. The provision which he gave them for their journey, was not such as might have been expected from a person of his opulence; but we can have no doubt but that he acted in this by the divine direction, and that the mode of their dismissal, as well as their dismissal itself—was intended for their humiliation and punishment, and probably too for the showing unto us, that the natural man has no claim upon God for even the most common blessings of his providence. That Hagar and Ishmael were reduced to straits, was owing to their having "wandered" out of their way in the wilderness of Beersheba; had they prosecuted their journey in the direct path to Egypt, where Hagar's friends were, we take for granted that they would have found their provision adequate to their support.

Hitherto we have seen nothing but a domestic occurrence; we must next contemplate,

II. The mystery contained in it—

Here, as in multitudes of other passages, we are entirely indebted to the New-Testament writers for the insight which we have into the meaning of the Old Testament. Here also we see the advantage that is to be derived from the study of the Old-Testament history; since in very many instances the incidents that are recorded, are not mere memoirs of what has passed, but types and shadows of better and more important things. This family quarrel was designed to instruct the whole world; and to show us,

1. That the children of promise would always be objects of hatred and contempt to the natural man—

We should not have ventured to deduce such a position as this from an altercation that took place between two children so many hundred years ago, if an inspired Apostle had not put this very construction upon it. But the disagreements of Cain and Abel, and of Ishmael and Isaac, are recorded on purpose to show us what is in the heart of man. The principles upon which they acted are common to the whole human race; and will operate in a similar manner whenever circumstances arise to call them forth into action.

On this ground we might have formed a reasonable conjecture, that every one who resembled Ishmael, would be hostile to those who resembled Isaac. But the Scriptures supersede all conjecture about the matter; for they affirm, in reference to this very history, that "as then he who was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29)."

Indeed the very same things are grounds of offence to the carnal man in this day, as were in the days of Ishmael. He cannot endure that any people should be marked by God as his favored and peculiar people. Our blessed Lord says, "Because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)." The very name of "saints" and "elect" is as offensive to the world, as that of Isaac was to Ishmael, because it imports a preference in the Father's estimation of them.

Some indeed will say, that there is no persecution in this day; but Paul expressly calls Ishmael's conduct towards Isaac, "persecution;" and let it be remembered, that to be mocked and despised by our relations and friends is as bitter persecution, and as difficult to bear, as almost any other injury that men can inflict. The Apostle thought so when he numbered "mockings and scourgings with bonds and imprisonment, [Hebrews 11:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.36)."

And if those who profess religion are not imprisoned and put to death for their adherence to Christ, I am sure that they are mocked and derided as much as in any age; and that, in this sense at least, "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution! 2 Timothy 3:12."

2. That the children of promise alone are members of the true church—

Paul explains this whole history as an allegory in [Galatians 3:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.24-28). He tells us that Hagar, the bond-woman, typified the Mosaic covenant entered into at Mount Sinai, which brought forth children in a state of bondage; but Sarah, the free woman, typified the Christian covenant, which brings forth children in a state of liberty. The natural seed of Hagar represents all who are born after the flesh; the spiritual seed of Sarah, that is, the child of promise, represents those who are born after the Spirit.

Hence it appears that we must be children of promise, in order to belong to the church of Christ. We must have embraced the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. We must, "by means of the promises, have been made partakers of a divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" and been led by them to "purify ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, 2 Corinthians 7:1." These things are the inseparable attendants of a spiritual birth; and are therefore necessary to make us real members of the church of Christ.

The mere circumstance of being descended from Christian parents, or having received the seal of the Christian covenant (infant baptism), or making a profession of the Christian faith—will not constitute us Christians. Paul, in reference to this very history, makes this distinction, and leaves no doubt respecting the truth or importance of it, "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring, [Romans 9:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6-8)."

3. That the children of promise alone shall finally possess their Father's inheritance—

Whether there was an undue mixture of anger in Sarah's spirit, or not, we are sure that, as far as respected the words that she uttered, she spoke by a divine impulse; for Paul, quoting her words, says, "What says the Scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son; for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman, [Galatians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.30)." And this he declares to be a general sentence; a sentence of expulsion passed on all who remain under the covenant of works, and an exclusive grant of Heaven and happiness to the children of promise.

It is not the persecuting son only, but the bond-woman herself, the mother, the whole Jewish Church, the collective body of natural and unconverted men, wherever they are—all must be "cast out;" no regard will be shown either to their privileges or professions; if they live and die in their natural state, they can have no part or lot with the children of God! Those alone who in this world rested on the promises as the one ground of their hope and joy, shall experience their accomplishment in the world to come. Doubtless, if we may so speak, it will be grievous to our heavenly Father to disinherit so many of his professed children; for he swears that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live;" but still his decree is gone forth, and cannot be reversed; we must be living members of Christ's church below, before we can inherit his kingdom above.

From this subject we may gather some **hints**:

1. For the regulating of the conduct of earthly parents—

It can scarcely be expected in this state of imperfection, but that disagreements will arise between some individuals of a large family. The imperiousness of a master or mistress, the petulance or idleness of a servant; the severity of a parent, or the forwardness of a child; the lack of brotherly kindness in children towards each other; and especially the jealousies which exist, where either the husband or wife is called to exercise authority over the children of the other by a former marriage; any of these things, I say, may soon produce dissatisfaction, and turn our "laughter" into an occasion of sorrow. Nor is this ever more likely to arise, than when a husband and his wife differ in their judgment respecting the mode of raising their children.

But in all cases, it is desirable to avoid precipitancy and passion. Authority must be maintained by those whose right it is to govern; and when occasion calls for it, correction must be administered. It should always be grievous to us to proceed to extremities; nor should we ever exercise very severe discipline without having first spread the case before God, and implored his direction and blessing.

There is an excessive lenity which is as injurious in its effects as the contrary extreme. We should inquire at all times, "What says the Scripture?" And, when we have once ascertained the will of God, we should neither come short of it through a foolish fondness, nor exceed it through vehement irritation. There is one thing which above all should be checked with a strong hand; I mean, profaneness. Parents in general are too strongly impressed with things which relate to themselves, and too little affected with what relates to God. But a scoffing at religion, or impiety of any kind, ought to be an object of our heaviest displeasure. And though nothing but the most incorrigible impiety can warrant us to proceed to such extremities as those which were enjoined in the instance before us—yet we do not hesitate to say, that an incurable member should rather suffer amputation, than that all the other members should be incessantly tormented, and the life itself endangered, by its union with the body.

Nevertheless we say again, No chastisement should ever be given "for our pleasure," that is, for the gratification of our anger, but solely "for the profit" of the individual chastised, and the benefit of all connected with him.

2. For the perpetuating of the regards of our heavenly Father—

Thanks be to God, we materially differ from Ishmael and Isaac in this, that whereas Ishmael could not become a child of promise, we may. For the Scripture says, "If you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise! [Galatians 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.29)." Moreover, if we are indeed Christ's, then shall we never be disinherited; for "he hates putting away, [Malachi 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.16);" nor will he allow any to "pluck us out of his hands, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)," or to "separate us from his love, [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)." If we offend—then he will chastise with suitable severity; but he will not cast off his people, [Psalm 89:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-35). Whom he loves, he loves to the end, [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1).

Behold then the way of securing to yourselves the heavenly inheritance; lay hold on the promises, especially "the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, [2 Timothy 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.1)." Rely on the promises; plead them at a throne of grace; take them as your portion and your heritage; seek to experience their renovating, cleansing efficacy. Be not satisfied with any outward privileges or professions; but "live the life which you now live in the flesh, entirely by faith in the Son of God, as having loved you, and given himself for you! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)." Thus, though "once you were aliens, and strangers from the covenants of promise, you shall become fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God! [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19)," and shall "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! [Matthew 24:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.34)."

#34

ISAAC, A TYPE OF CHRIST

**[Genesis 22:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.6-10)**

"Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son."

Many and wonderful are the instances of faith and obedience recorded in the Scriptures. But no action whatever (those only of our Lord himself excepted) has at any time surpassed or equaled that related in the text. It justly obtained for him who performed it, the honorable title of The Father of the Faithful, and, The Friend of God, [James 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.21); [James 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.23). We shall find it profitable to consider,

I. The history itself—

Abraham had often enjoyed intimate and immediate communion with God. But now he heard the command which was of a most singular and afflictive nature—

God in some way clearly intimated to Abraham his will; nor left him to doubt one moment, whether it were his voice or not. He commanded Abraham to take his only, his beloved son, Isaac, and to offer him up as a burnt-offering in a place that should afterwards be pointed out. How strange the order! How difficult to be complied with! How well might Abraham have said, "Would God I might die for you, O Isaac, my son, my son!"

Instantly, however, and without reluctance, he arose to execute the will of God—

Had he presumed to reason with God, what specious arguments might he have adduced for declining the way of duty! The certainty of his being reproached by Sarah, "A bloody husband are you to me, [Exodus 4:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.25-26);" the offence that would be taken by all the neighboring nations against him, his religion, and his God; the counteracting and defeating of all the promises which had been made by God himself, and which were to be accomplished solely in and through his son Isaac, [Genesis 17:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.19); all this, with much more, might have been offered in excuse for his backwardness, if indeed he had been backward to accomplish the will of God. But he conferred not with flesh and blood, [Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.16).

Nor was he diverted from his purpose during the whole of his journey—

Having prepared the wood, he proceeded instantly, with Isaac and his servants, towards the place that God had pointed out. Nor did he open his intentions to Sarah, lest she should labor to dissuade him from his purpose. But what must have been his thoughts every time that he looked on Isaac? Yet never for one moment did he relax his determination to execute the divine command. Having come in sight of the mountain, he ordered his servants to abide in their place, lest they should officiously interpose to prevent the intended offering. He put the wood on his son, and carried the fire and the knife in his own hands. Affecting as these preparations must have been to a father's heart, how must their poignancy have been heightened by that pertinent question, which was put to him by his son! His answer, like many other prophetic expressions, conveyed more than he himself probably was aware of at the moment. Without giving a premature disclosure of his intention, he declares the advent of Jesus, that Lamb of God, who in due time would come to take away the sin of the world; [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29). Thus for three successive days did he maintain his resolution firm and unshaken.

Having arrived at the spot determined by God, he with much firmness and composure proceeded to execute his purpose—

He built the altar, and laid the wood upon it in due order. Then with inexpressible tenderness announced to Isaac the command of God. Doubtless he would remind his son of his supernatural birth; and declare to him God's right to take away, in any manner he pleased, the gift he bestowed, [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21). He would exhort him to confide in God as a faithful and unchangeable God; and to rest assured, that he would, in some way or other, be restored, after he was reduced to ashes, and have every promise fulfilled to him.

Having thus gained the consent of his son, he binds him hand and foot, and lays him on the altar; and, with a confidence unshaken, and obedience unparalleled—holds up the knife to slay the victim. Whether shall we more admire the resolution of the father, or the submission of the son? O that there were in all of us a similar determination to sacrifice our dearest interests for God; and a similar readiness to yield up our very lives in obedience to his will!

Nothing but the interposition of God himself prevented the completion of this extraordinary sacrifice—

God had sufficiently tried the faith of his servant. He therefore, by a voice from Heaven, stopped him from giving the fatal blow; ordered him to substitute a ram in the place of Isaac; renewed to him with an oath his former promises; rendered him a pattern to all succeeding generations; and, no doubt, is at this instant rewarding him with a weight of glory, proportioned to his exalted piety.

Almost every circumstance in this narrative deserves to be considered in,

II. Its **typical**reference—

Waving many less important points, we may observe that Isaac was a type of Christ:

1. In his appointment to be a sacrifice—

Isaac was a child of promise, born in a supernatural way, of a disposition eminently pious; yet him did God require for a burnt-offering. It must not be Abraham's cattle, or his son Ishmael, but his beloved Isaac. Thus was Jesus also, the promised seed, named, like Isaac, before he was conceived in the womb; he was born, not after the manner of other men, but of a pure virgin; He was that only, that beloved Son, in whom the Father was well pleased; yet him did God appoint to be a sacrifice. A body was given him for this very purpose, [Hebrews 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4-5). He was ordained from eternity to be an atoning sacrifice for sin [Romans 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25); nor did the Father recede from his purpose for four thousand years. Having set apart his Son for this end, he changed not; and Jesus, at the appointed time, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, [Philippians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.8)."

2. In the manner of being offered—

Isaac bore the wood on which he was afterwards to be lifted up; and voluntarily yielded up his body to be bound, and his life to be destroyed in God's appointed way. Thus did Jesus bear his cross to the place of his crucifixion; and, having been bound, was lifted up upon it. On the very spot where Isaac had been laid upon the altar, was Jesus (most probably) offered in sacrifice to God. Mount Calvary was one of the mountains in that small tract of country called the land of Moriah; and from it can scarcely be doubted, but that it was the very spot pointed out by God. It could not possibly be far from the spot; and therefore, when the place for the sacrifice of Isaac was so accurately marked, it can scarcely he thought to be any other, than the very place where Jesus was offered two thousand years afterwards!

And by whose hand was Isaac to bleed, but by that of his own Father? By whom too did Jesus suffer, but by Jehovah's sword! [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7); [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10). It was not man, who made him so to agonize in the garden; nor was it man, that caused that bitter complaint upon the cross, [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.44); [Mark 15:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.34). Nevertheless it was with the perfect concurrence of his own will that he died upon the cross, "He gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savor, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)."

3. There is one point, however, wherein the resemblance does not appear—

For Isaac was found a substitute; for Jesus none. Neither the cattle on a thousand hills, nor all the angels in Heaven, could have stood in his place. None but Jesus could have made a full atonement for our sins. He therefore saved not himself, because He was determined to save us.

INFERENCES—

1. How marvelous is the love of God to man!

We admire the obedience of Abraham; but God had a right to demand it; and Abraham knew, that he was about to give his son to his best and dearest friend. But what claim had we on God? Yet did he give up his Son for us—for us sinners, rebels, enemies; nor merely to a common death, but to the agonies of crucifixion, and to endure the wrath due to our iniquities! [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6). What stupendous love! Shall any soul be affected with a pathetic story, and remain insensible of the love of God? Let every heart praise him, trust him, serve him; and rest assured, that He, who delivered up his Son for us, will never deny us any other thing that we can ask, [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32).

2. What an admirable grace is faith!

The faith of Abraham certainly had respect to Christ, the promised seed, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19). Behold how it operated! So will it operate in all who have it. It will keep us from staggering at any promise, however dark or improbable; and will lead us to obey every precept, however difficult or self-denying. Let us seek his faith; and, while we are justified by it from the guilt of sin, let us manifest its excellence by a life of holiness.

#35

IMPORTANCE OF EVIDENCES

**[Genesis 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.12)**

"Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me!"

There are in the Holy Scriptures many expressions, which, if taken in the strictest and most literal sense, would convey to us very erroneous conceptions of the Deity. God is often pleased to speak of himself in terms accommodated to our feeble apprehensions, and properly applicable to man only. For instance; in the passage before us, he speaks as if from Abraham's conduct he had acquired a knowledge of something which he did not know before; whereas he is omniscient; there is nothing past, present, or future, which is not open before him, and distinctly viewed by him in all its parts. Strictly speaking, he needed not Abraham's obedience to reveal to him the state of Abraham's mind; he knew that Abraham feared him, before he gave the trial to Abraham; yes, he knew, from all eternity, that Abraham would fear him.

But it was for our sakes that he made the discovery of Abraham's obedience a ground for acknowledging the existence of the hidden principle from which it sprang; for it is in this way that we are to ascertain our own character, and the characters of our fellow-men. And this is the point which it is my intention chiefly to insist upon at this time. I shall not enter upon the circumstances of the history, but confine myself rather to the consideration of two points; namely,

I. The general importance of evidences for ascertaining our state before God—

Many are ready to pour contempt on marks and evidences—as though they were legalistic. They imagine that the direct agency of the Spirit on the souls of men is quite sufficient to satisfy our minds respecting our real state. Now, though we deny not that there is a direct agency of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men, and that "God's Spirit does witness with our spirits, that we are his, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16)," yet is this not of itself sufficient; because it may easily be mistaken, and can never, except by its practical effects, be discovered from the workings of our own imagination. Indeed, the greater our confidence is, when independent of evidences, the more questionable it is; because there is the more reason to suspect that Satan has made the impression in order to deceive us. Evidences in confirmation of this persuasion are necessary:

1. For the satisfaction of our own minds—

The Scriptures suggest innumerable marks whereby to discover our true character. John seems to have written his First Epistle almost for the very purpose of informing us on this head, that he might leave us altogether inexcusable if we erred respecting it, "Hereby we do know that we know God, if we keep his commandments. He who says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly is the love of God perfected. Hereby know we that we are in him." See [1 John 2:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.3-5); [1 John 3:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.6-10); [1 John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14-15); [1 John 3:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-21); [1 John 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.13); [1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.20); [1 John 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.1-4); [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10); [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.18). And Paul particularly exhorts us to consult these marks and evidences, just as we would in the assaying of gold, "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove your own selves."

2. For the satisfaction of others—

What can others know of our state, any farther than it is discoverable in our lives? Our blessed Lord teaches us to bring all, even though they may call themselves prophets, to this test, "You shall know them by their fruits; do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. Therefore by their fruits you shall know them! [Matthew 7:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.15-20)." And to this test must we ourselves be brought, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another, [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.35)."

3. For the honor of our God—

Men will judge of our principles by our practice. Now the Gospel is represented as "a doctrine according to godliness." But how shall men know it to be so? Our mere assertions will carry no conviction with them, if they are not confirmed by manifest and substantial proofs. Men will naturally say to us, "Show me your faith by your works;" and, if our works be unworthy of our profession, "the name of God and his doctrine will be blasphemed, [1 Timothy 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.1)." It is by our works that we are to shine as lights in the world; and we are therefore bidden to let our light shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father who is in Heaven, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)."

From the text we learn,

II. What is that evidence which alone will prove satisfactory to God or our own souls—

Never was there a more glorious act of obedience than that which Abraham performed in offering up his son, his only son, Isaac! But it will be asked, Is anything like that required of us? I answer,

1. A full equivalent to this is required of us—

True, indeed, we are not called to that very act of offering up our own son; but we are expressly commanded to "hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yes, and our own life also, in comparison with Christ, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26);" and our blessed Lord declares, that "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple, [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33)." This may be deemed a hard saying, but so it is; and the declaration is irreversible; and further still, our blessed Lord has decreed, that "he who saves his life shall lose it; and he only who loses his life for his sake, shall find it unto life eternal, [Matthew 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.25)." There is no difference between either people or times; the same is true respecting all his followers, in every age and place. On no lower terms will any human being be acknowledged as a friend of Christ; nor will any man that is unwilling to comply with them, find acceptance with him in the day of judgment.

2. Without a compliance with this, we in vain pretend to have the fear of God—

"The fear of God" is the lowest of all graces; yet must that, no less than the highest, be tried by this test. The truth is, that the new creature, even in its lowest state, is complete in all its parts. A little infant has all the parts of an adult; there is nothing added to him even to his dying hour; the only difference between him in the different periods of his life is, that his parts are more matured by age, and capable of greater exertion when he arrives at manhood than they were in the earlier stages of his existence. The different rays of light may be separated by a prism, and so be brought under distinct and separate consideration; but it is the assemblage of all the rays that constitutes light.

In like manner, we may separate in idea, the graces of a Christian; but where there is one truly operative, there is, and must be, all. One particular grace may shine more bright in one person, and another in another; but when "Christ is formed in us, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19)," not one of his graces can be absent. Hence then I say, that the fear of God, no less than the love of him, must be tried by this test; and by this alone will "God know that you fear him, if you withhold not your son, your only son, from him."

Now, let me ask: What testimony must God bear respecting you?

He knows every one among you, and every secret of your hearts; yet will he not proceed in judgment without adducing the proofs which you had given of your true character. If he says to you, "Come, you who are blessed," or, "Go, you who are cursed"—he will assign his reasons for it, and thereby approve the equity of his sentence before the whole universe, [Matthew 25:34-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-43).

Let me ask, then: What sacrifices have you made for him? and what duties have you performed? Have you "plucked out the right eye, and cut off the right hand, that has offended you?" If not, you know the sad alternative, that "your whole body and soul will be cast into Hell-fire! [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48)." Examine yourselves, then, and inquire, whether God can bear this testimony respecting you?

Must he not rather, with respect to the greater part of you, say, 'I know you, that "you have not the fear of God before your eyes, [Romans 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.18)." You have made no sacrifice for me; nor have you paid any attention to my commands. Abraham consulted not even his own wife, lest she should prove a snare to him; but you have been ready to follow any adviser that would counsel you to disregard me.'

Well, know for sure that the time is shortly coming, when God will call every one of you into judgment, and when he will put an awful difference between his friends and his enemies; between those who feared his name, and those who feared him not, [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18).

#36

JEHOVAH-JIREH, THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

**[Genesis 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.14)**

"And Abraham called the name of that place, Jehovah-jireh. And to this day it is said: On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

The saints of old took special care to remember the mercies of their God. Hence they scarcely ever received any remarkable deliverance from evil, or communication of good from him, but they erected some memorial of it, and gave either to the place or to the memorial itself, some name, that should transmit to posterity a remembrance of the blessing given unto them. Such was "Bethel," where Jacob was favored with a special vision, [Genesis 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.19); and "Peniel," where he wrestled with the angel, [Genesis 32:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.30); and "Ebenezer," the stone erected by Samuel in remembrance of Israel's victory over the Philistines, [1 Samuel 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 7.12).

Frequently the name of Jehovah himself was annexed to some word expressive of the event commemorated. Such as, "Jehovah-nissi, meaning, The Lord is my banner;" a name given to an altar raised by Moses, to commemorate the total discomfiture of the Amalekites, [Exodus 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.15). And "Jehovah-shalom, The Lord send peace;" being the name given to another altar, which Gideon erected in remembrance of a special visit which he had received from the Lord in Ophrah, [Judges 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.24).

Abraham, the Father of the Faithful set an example in this respect. He had been ordered by God to sacrifice his son Isaac; but in the very act of offering him up, God had arrested his uplifted arm, and directed him to offer in the stead of his son, a ram caught in the thicket which was close at hand. This was in fact an accomplishment of what Abraham himself had a little before unwittingly predicted. For, in answer to Isaac's question. "My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" he replied, "My son, God himself will provide a lamb for a burnt-offering." By this answer he merely intended to satisfy his son's mind for the present, until the time should arrive for making known to him the command which he had received from God; in which command that provision was actually made; but through the miraculous intervention of Divine Providence and the substitution of the ram in Isaac's place, it had now been literally verified in a way which he himself had never contemplated. And it was in reference to this expression which he had used, that he called the name of the place, "Jehovah-jireh," which means, "The Lord will provide."

This circumstance, occurring on Mount Moriah at the very instant when Abraham's hand was lifted up to slay his son, passed immediately into a, proverb, and has been handed down as a proverb through all successive generations even to this very day. The proverb is, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" or, as it should rather be translated, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen." To enter fully into this most instructive proverb, it will be proper to show,

I. What it supposes—

Much important truth lies concealed in it.

1. This truth supposes that God is the same in all ages—

It may be thought that this is a truth which no one will deny. I grant that no one will deny it in theory; but practically it is denied every day. The God who is revealed in the Scriptures is evidently a God of infinite condescension and grace; as appears in all his mercies to the children of men. He is also a God of inflexible justice and holiness; as appears by the awful judgments he has executed on account of sin. But, if we now hold him forth in either of these points of view, and inculcate the necessity of our regarding him with hopes and fears suited to these perfections, we are considered as either derogating from his Majesty on the one hand, or from his goodness on the other hand. The notion, that "the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil," though not openly avowed, is yet the secret persuasion of almost every heart. But if there were any foundation for this Epicurean sentiment, what room could there be for this proverb? But know assuredly, that "He changes not." "With Him is no variableness neither shadow of turning." "He is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

2. This truth supposes that the privileges of his people in all ages are the same—

To imagine this, is thought by many to be the height of presumption. But what privilege had Enoch, or Noah, or Abraham, or Moses, or any other of the children of men—which we have not? No one of them enjoyed anything which was not contained in the covenant of grace. And what was the great promise in that covenant? Was it not, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people!" Was there anything that was not comprehended in that? or could anything whatever be added to it? Yet behold, that covenant is as much in force at this day as it was at any period of the world; and those who lay hold on that covenant are as much entitled to its blessings, as any ever were from the foundation of the world.

Were this not so, we would have been injured, rather than benefitted, by the coming of Christ. But our interest in it is not only as great as theirs was in the days of old, but, I had almost said, greater; for in the mention of this part of the covenant in the New Testament there is this remarkable difference; in the Old Testament God says, "I will be their God;" but in the New Testament he says, "I will be a God unto them, [Hebrews 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10)." This seems to convey a stronger and more determinate idea to the mind. We all know what it is to be a friend or a father to any person; but oh! what is it to be a God unto him? This none but God can tell, but the least it means is this: that whatever situation a believer may be in, all that infinite wisdom, unbounded love, and almighty power can effect, shall be effected for him. Of the believer therefore now, no less than in former days, it may be said, "All things are yours! Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's, 1 Corinthians 3:21-23."

3. This truth supposes that whatever God at any time has done for the most favored of his saints, may be expected by us now, as far as our necessities call for it—

Of all the circumstances related in the Old Testament, scarcely any one was so particular and so exclusive as this which we are considering. Who besides Abraham was ever called to sacrifice his own son? Who besides Abraham was ever stopped by a voice from Heaven in the execution of such a command, and directed to another offering which God himself had provided? Yet behold, this very event was made the foundation of the proverb before us; and from this, particular and exclusive as it was—all believers are taught to expect that God will interpose for them in like manner, in the hour of necessity! If then we may expect such an interposition as this, what may we not expect?

But let us take some other events, to which nothing parallel exists. The passage of Israel through the Red Sea; the striking of the rock, in order to supply them with water in the wilderness; and the feeding of them with daily supplies of manna for forty years. Can we expect any interpositions like these? Yes, and an express reference is made to these in the Holy Scriptures in order to raise our expectations to the highest, and to assure us that we shall receive from God everything that our necessities may require.

Were "the depths of the sea made a way for the ransomed to pass over?" With similar triumph may all the "redeemed of the Lord hope to return and come to Zion, [Isaiah 51:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.9-11)." What was done in the ancient days, in the generations of old, is there made the very pattern of what shall be done for all the Lord's people.

A similar assurance is given in reference to the water that issued from the rock; and we are told "not even to remember or consider the former things," since God will repeat them again and again, doing them "anew," so that "everyone shall know" and observe it, "I will give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen ones, [Isaiah 43:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.18-20)."

As for the manna, you all are taught by our blessed Lord to pray, "Give us day by day our daily bread [Luke 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.3)." The matter then is plain; for, if such things as these are to be realized in our experience, then there is nothing which was ever done for mortal man, which we are not authorized to expect, as far as our necessities require it.

Miracles indeed we are not to expect; but what was formerly done by visible exercises of a miraculous power—shall now, in effect, be done by the invisible agency of God's providential care. The mode of effecting our deliverance shall be varied; but the deliverance itself shall be secured.

Now we come to,

II. What this truth affirms—

The proverb is express, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen;" that is,

1. He will interpose for his people in the hour of necessity—

This is its plain import; and to the same effect it is elsewhere promised, "The LORD will interpose for his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone, [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36)." If it be asked, 'In what way will he interpose?' I answer, 'This must be left to him; he is not limited to any particular means; he can work by means, or without them, as he sees fit. The whole creation is at his command; the wind shall divide the sea; and the sea shall stand up as a wall on either hand, when he is pleased to make a way through it for his people; and the waters shall resume their usual state, when he gives them a commission to overwhelm his enemies; and both the one and the other shall be done at the precise moment of Israel's necessity! [Exodus 14:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.10-14).

If confederate armies come against his people, his enemies shall defeat their own bloody purpose, and be the executioners of God's vengeance on each other, [2 Chronicles 20:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.1); [2 Chronicles 20:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.10-13); 2 Chronicles 20:16-17; [2 Chronicles 20:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.22-24).

Is the destruction of a faithful servant menaced and expected by blood-thirsty persecutors? An angel becomes the willing agent of Jehovah for his deliverance, [Acts 12:4-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.4-10). Sometimes he will defeat the enterprises of his enemies by the very means which they use to carry them into effect. This was the case with respect to Joseph, whose exaltation sprang from the very means used by various instruments for his destruction, [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20). As for means, we may safely leave them to God. Two things we certainly know: namely, that he will interpose seasonably; and that he will interpose effectually; for he is, and ever will be, "a very present help in times of trouble, [Psalm 46:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1)."

2. We may confidently trust in Him in seasons of the greatest darkness and distress—

God may not come to our help at the moment that our impatient minds may desire. On the contrary, he may tarry, until we are ready to cry, like the Church of old, "The Lord has forsaken us, and our God has forgotten us! [Isaiah 49:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14)." But he has wise and gracious purposes to answer by such delays. He makes use of these delays:

to stir us up to more earnest importunity in prayer, [Matthew 15:22-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.22-27);

to render us more simple and humble in our dependence upon him, [2 Corinthians 1:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.8-10);

to display more gloriously before our eyes, the riches of his power and grace, [John 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.6); [John 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.15); [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40),

and to teach both us and others to wait his time, [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3); [Luke 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1).

Sometimes he allows the enemy so far to prevail as that to all human appearance our case shall be irremediable; while yet those very enemies are instruments in his hands to accomplish unwittingly the very ends which they are laboring to defeat; disappointing thus the devices of the crafty, and taking the wise in their own craftiness, [Acts 23:12-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.12-17). The history of Joseph will of necessity occur to every mind in illustration of this point, [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20). But what does all this say to us? Its language is precisely that of the prophet, "This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)."

Address,

1. Those who have never yet been brought into deep waters—

Do not imagine that because you have hitherto experienced but little trouble, your path shall always be smooth and easy. No, it is a thorny wilderness that you have to pass through, and a troubled ocean that you have to navigate, before you can reach the desired haven. The mariner when scarcely launched upon the deep, does not expect that the breeze shall be alike gentle to the end of his voyage; he prepares for storms, that he may be ready to meet them when they come. In like manner you also will do well to prepare for seasons of adversity and trial. The seaman takes with him his compass and his chart; and makes his daily observations, that he may know where he is, and not be driven from his course. So likewise, take with you this proverb; which will ever be of use to you in the most trying hour, and enable you to steer your course with safety to the haven of rest!

2. Those who are presently under any great and heavy calamity—

The Lord's people are no more exempt from trouble than others. When most in the path of duty—storms and tempests may overtake you, and jeopardize your very existence; yes, and in the midst of all, your Lord and Savior may seem regardless of your trouble. But remember that, embarked as you are with him, you can never perish. In the fittest moment, he will arise and rebuke the storm; and both winds and waves shall obey him, [Mark 4:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.37-39). Go forward, as Abraham did, in the path of duty, and leave outcomes to God. Do not be impatient because God does not appear for you as soon as you could wish. Perhaps you have not yet gone one day's journey in the path assigned you; if so, you have many days yet to go. Possibly you may have been long tried, and are got to the very mount; but you are not yet got to the top of that mount; much less have you bound your Isaac, and lifted up your hand to slay him. If not, the time for the Lord's interposition has not yet come.

See how it was with David. He fled from Saul, but the Ziphites came and informed Said of the place where David was hidden. Saul blessed them for the information they had brought him, and set out immediately and encompassed with his army the very spot where David was.

Alas! David, your God has forsaken you! No! Not so! In that critical moment, "a messenger comes to Saul, saying, Hasten and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land." And thus was the snare broken, and the persecuted saint delivered, [1 Samuel 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.19); [1 Samuel 23:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.21); [1 Samuel 23:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.26-27).

Thus also shall it be with you. Only wait until the critical moment has arrived, and you shall find the proverb true, "In the mount the Lord shall be found."

Whatever you may imagine, the Lord is not an inattentive observer of your state. He may suffer you to be cast into the tempestuous ocean, and to be swallowed up by a whale, and yet bring you up again from the very depths of the sea, and advance his own glory the more in proportion to the greatness of your deliverance, [Jonah 2:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.1-9). Trust then in the Lord, and let your mind be stayed on him.

This is the direction which he himself gives you, "Who is among you that walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10)." And if the time for your deliverance seems to be utterly passed, go with the Hebrew youths into the fiery furnace, taking God's express promise with you, [Isaiah 43:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2-3), and say with Job, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him! [Job 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.15). (See the whole subject illustrated in [Psalm 30:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.1-12).")

#37

ABRAHAM'S PROMISED SEED

**[Genesis 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.18)**

"In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed!"

There is nothing in man which can merit the divine favor; the promises of God to us are altogether free, resulting wholly from his sovereign grace; yet does God frequently manifest his love towards us in consequence of something done by us. Abraham was an idolater, when God first made himself known to him in his native land; and then did the Almighty promise, that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed.

But in the passage before us, Abraham is recorded to have performed the most extraordinary act of obedience that ever was known from the foundation of the world; and God takes occasion from that to renew his promise, and, for Abraham's more abundant consolation, to confirm it with an oath. To ascertain the full import of this glorious prophecy, it will be proper to inquire,

I. Who is the **seed**here spoken of—

It is not to all the natural descendants, or to that part of them that composed the Jewish nation, or even to the spiritual seed of Abraham, that these words refer; they speak of one particular individual, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. To Jesus, all the types direct our attention—

The temple with all its utensils, the priests with all their habits and services, the sacrifices and oblations of every kind—all shadowed forth Jesus' work and offices.

The principal events in the Jewish history, together with the great people engaged in them—their lawgiver, their commanders, judges, kings, and prophets, prefigured Jesus in different points of view, and, as so many lines, meet in him as their common center.

On this account we have reason to think that the prophecy before us relates to him.

2. In Jesus, all the prophecies receive their accomplishment—

However some of the prophecies might be partially fulfilled in Solomon or others, it is certain that all of them together were never accomplished in anyone but Jesus. They were intended to designate him, that, when he would arrive, there might be no doubt of his being the very person foreordained by God to be the the world's Savior. The minute description of the promised Messiah, together with the marvelous combination of circumstances that marked Jesus as the person foretold, lead us further to believe that the text had particular respect to him.

3. To Jesus exclusively, the text is applied by God himself—

Paul tells us that the blessing of Abraham was to come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, [Galatians 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.14); and that the words of the text related, not to others, but to Christ alone, [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16).

This point being ascertained, let us inquire,

II. In what respect all nations are blessed in Jesus—

The full accomplishment of the text will not take place until that glorious period when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea. Yet, in a limited sense, all nations have experienced the truth of this prophecy already.

1. All believers are reconciled to God through Christ—

Christ died not for one nation only; he was an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Many of all nations have already believed in his name, and rejoiced in his salvation; and in every place those who believe in him shall find acceptance with their God, [Colossians 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20-22).

2. All believers are united in one body in Christ—

He has broken down the middle wall of partition that divided the Jewish and Gentile world, and, having reconciled both unto God in one body by the cross, he has slain the enmity thereby, [Ephesians 2:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.14-16). All believers are now brought into one family, and are taught to regard each other as brethren; and in proportion as the religion of Jesus gains the ascendant over our hearts, we are united in love to every member of his mystical body.

3. All believers are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ—

There is not anything that can conduce to our present or future happiness which Jesus will not bestow on his believing people. Adoption into his family, peace in our consciences, holiness in our hearts, and an eternity of glory in the Father's presence—are the certain portion of all his faithful followers. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile; all are admitted to the same privileges, and all shall participate in the same enjoyments.

Inferences:

1. The antiquity of the Gospel—

The sum and substance of the Gospel is that Christ is the only source of all spiritual and eternal blessings. Wherever this truth is strongly urged, men are ready to cry out against it as a new doctrine. But we can trace it, not only to the Reformers of our church, but to the Apostles, yes to Abraham also; for Paul declares, that when God spoke the words to Abraham, he "preached the Gospel to him" even that very Gospel whereby he and all the nations of the earth must be saved, [Galatians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.8). Let this truth then no longer be reviled as novel, but be received as the one ground of all our hopes.

2. The importance of faith—

Abraham's faith in this Gospel was imputed to him for righteousness, [Galatians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.6); and by believing the same divine record we also must be justified, [Galatians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.7); [Galatians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.9). No doctrine whatever is more explicitly declared in Scripture than this. Let us then acknowledge the necessity of faith in order to be saved, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ as that promised seed, through whom alone the blessings of Abraham can flow down upon us.

3. The connection between faith and works—

Faith was that principle which produced in Abraham such exemplary obedience, [Hebrews 11:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17); and the same root will bear similar fruits wherever it exists, [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9). Indeed the pardon of past sins would be utterly insufficient to make us happy, if it were not accompanied with the renovation of our natures. To this effect Peter expounded, as it were, the very words of the text, declaring to the Jews, that conversion from sin was one of the first blessings which the Lord Jesus was sent to bestow, [Acts 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.25-26). Let us then not consider faith and works as opposed to each other, but as possessing distinct offices, the one to justify our souls; the other to honor God, and to manifest the sincerity of our faith.

#38

ABRAHAM PURCHASING A BURYING-PLACE IN CANAAN

**[Genesis 23:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 23.17-18)**

"So Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city."

There is something in a holy life which wonderfully conciliates the minds of men. At first indeed, like a strong influx of light, it offends their eyes; and the beholders, unable to bear the effulgence of its beams—turn away from it, or perhaps desire its utter extinction. But when it has shone for a long time before them, and they have had sufficient opportunity to contemplate its worth, they are constrained to acknowledge, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor;" and they begin to venerate the character, whose virtues at first were occasions of offence. We have a striking instance of this in the chapter before us.

The children of Heth were not acquainted with Abraham's principles; but they had seen his exemplary deportment for many years; and when the death of his wife necessitated him to ask a favor at their hands, they were as glad to confer it, as he could possibly be to receive it. The purchase of a burying-place does not indeed appear at first sight to be an incident worthy of notice; but in the present instance there is much that deserves attention. We would make some remarks upon,

I. The manner in which the agreement was made—

No records, human or divine, afford us a more admirable pattern for transacting the common business of life than the history before us. All parties seemed to be penetrated with the same spirit; they vied with each other in all that was amiable and praiseworthy. We may notice in particular,

1. Their courteousness—

Abraham, in his address to the chief people of the city, testified all the respect due to their character, "standing up before them, and bowing to them;" and they, on the other hand, addressed him as "a mighty prince," whom they were forward and happy to oblige.

It were well if, in all our fellowship with mankind, we were careful to maintain a similar deportment. But there are many Christians who seem almost to forget that God has said unto them, "Be courteous, 1 Peter 3:8." They are arrogant and assuming towards their superiors; they are haughty and imperious towards their inferiors; they are ready to claim as their right what they ought to ask as a favor. And, if they grant a favor, they confer it in so ungracious a way, as to destroy all sense of obligation in him who receives it.

Some allowance indeed must be made for natural disposition, and for defects of education; yet, after all, the Christian ought to be the most polite of men, because he ought to feel in his heart all that others express in their conduct; he should "esteem others better than himself, [Philippians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3)," and "prefer them in honor before himself, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10)," and make himself the servant of all for his Master's sake, [1 Corinthians 9:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.19). He should have in subjection all that pride and selfishness, that stimulates to contention, [Ephesians 4:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.31-32); and maintain in exercise that divine philanthropy, which is the foundation and cement of all civilized society, [Colossians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12-14). "Whatever is lovely and of good report," he should revolve it in his thoughts, and manifest it in his actions! [Philippians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.8).

2. Their equity—

Gladly would Ephron have given to Abraham both the sepulcher which he desired, and the field in which it was contained; but Abraham entreated that he might be permitted to pay for it according to its value. Accordingly the price was fixed on the one part with perfect equity, and paid, on the other, with perfect cheerfulness. Would to God that all men would adopt this mode of dealing, and buy and sell according to this pattern! Would to God that even professed Christians would copy after this example! How much falsehood, how much imposition, would then be avoided!

Solomon has drawn to the life the characters of many, who depreciate everything which they wish to buy, and then go away boasting of the advantageous bargains they have made, "It's no good, it's no good!" says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase! [Proverbs 20:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.14)." But this is beneath the character of a godly man. We should not wish to obtain more, or to pay less, for a thing, than it is worth. We should not advance the price on account of the purchaser's necessity, or refuse what is right on account of the necessity of the seller; but, whether we buy or sell, we should act towards our neighbor as we in a change of circumstances would have him do to us.

3. Their prudence—

To Abraham especially it was of importance that the purchase should be known and ratified. Had he accepted the sepulcher as a present, or bought it in a private way, his title to it might at some future period have been disputed, and his descendants been deprived of that which he was desirous of securing to them. But all fears of this kind were effectually prevented by the publicity of the transaction. The chief people of the city were not only witnesses of it, but agents, by whose mediation Ephron was induced to conclude the bargain. Moreover, all who went in or out of the gate of the city, were witnesses; so that, after possession was once taken, no doubt could ever arise respecting the transfer of the property, or the title of Abraham's descendants to possess it.

How unlike to Abraham are many who call themselves his children! They embark in business and enter into contracts, without due consideration; they transact their affairs without order, and leave them in confusion; and thus by their indiscreet conduct they involve their names in disgrace, and their families in ruin. Let us learn from him; let us act with caution; let not even affliction itself render us inattentive to the welfare of our posterity; let us conduct ourselves conformably to that sage advice of Solomon, "Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house, [Proverbs 24:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.27)." In other words, Let deliberation and foresight so regulate our conduct, that those who succeed us may applaud our wisdom, and reap the benefit of our care.

If the manner of forming this agreement is profitable, much more shall we find it profitable to consider,

II. The ends for which it was made—

There was much more in the mind of Abraham than was known to the people among whom he sojourned. Besides the immediate and ostensible reason of making that purchase, he had others that were no less important. We shall mention them in their order.

1. He bought the field to bury his wife—

Sarah had lived with him to a good old age. But the dearest relatives, however long their union may continue, must part at last. This idea is judiciously put into the mouths of both the parties at the time they betroth themselves to each other at the altar, "Until death do us part." And when the time of separation is come, the most beloved object ceases to please. The soul having taken its flight, the body hastens to putrefaction; and we are as glad to have it removed out of our sight, as ever we were to enjoy communion with it. To give it a decent interment, and drop a tear over it at the grave, is the last office of love which we are able to show to our dearest friend; and he who lives the longest, has only to perform this painful office the more frequently, until he sees himself, as it were, forsaken by all, and left desolate, unknowing, and unknown.

O that we could all bear this in mind! We are born to die; the moment we drew our first breath, we had one breath less to draw. Every hour we live, we approach nearer and nearer to our grave. If we continue our course, like the sun, from its rise to the meridian, and from its meridian to the close of day, still every moment shortens our duration; and while we are speaking to you now, we are hastening to the chambers of death! Let husbands and wives, parents and children, and friends who are to each other as their own soul, remember this. Let them sit loose to each other; and let the time that they enjoy the society of their friends, be regarded by them as the interval allotted to prepare for their interment.

2. He bought the field to express his confidence in the divine promise—

God had promised to him and to his seed the land wherein he sojourned. But Abraham had continued there above sixty years without gaining in it so much as one foot of land, [Acts 7:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.5). But was the promise therefore to be doubted? No. It was not possible that that could fail. Abraham was as much assured that the promise would be fulfilled, as if he had seen its actual accomplishment. Under this conviction, he purchased the field as a pledge of his future inheritance.

In the prophecies of Jeremiah we have a similar compact made with precisely the same view. The prophet had foretold the speedy desolation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the restoration of the Jews to their own land after a captivity of seventy years. His uncle's son, alarmed, as it should seem, by the approach of the Chaldean army, determined to sell his estate; and offered it to Jeremiah first, because the right of redemption belonged to him. By Gods command Jeremiah bought the inheritance; and had the transfer signed and sealed in a public manner; and buried the writings in an earthen vessel; that, being preserved to the expiration of the Babylonish captivity, they might be an evidence of his title to the estate. This was done, not that the prophet, or his heirs, might be enriched by the purchase, but that his conviction of the truth of his own prophecies might be made manifest, [Jeremiah 32:6-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.6-16); [Jeremiah 32:42-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.42-44).

3. He bought the field that he might perpetuate among his posterity the expectation of the promised land—

It was to be four hundred years before Abraham's seed were to possess the land of Canaan. In that length of time it was probable that the promise itself would be forgotten; and more especially during their Egyptian bondage. But their having a burying-place in Canaan, where their bones were to be laid with the bones of their father Abraham, was the most likely means of keeping alive in every succeeding generation the hope of ultimately possessing the whole land. Accordingly we find, it did produce this very effect; for as Abraham and Sarah were buried in that cave, so Isaac and Rebekah were, and Jacob and Leah, notwithstanding that Jacob died in Egypt, [Genesis 25:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 25.9-10); [Genesis 45:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.28); [Genesis 49:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.30-32); [Genesis 50:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.13). And Joseph also, though buried in Egypt, gave commandment, that when the Israelites should depart out of Egypt to possess the land of Canaan, they should carry up his bones with them, and bury them in the sepulcher of his progenitors, [Genesis 50:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.24-25) with [Hebrews 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.22).

ADDRESS—

1. Let us seek a union that shall never be dissolved—

All earthly connections must sooner or later be dissolved; and when once they are broken by death, they are terminated forever.

But a union formed with the Lord Jesus Christ shall never cease. If we are grafted into him as the living vine, we shall never be broken off; if we are made living members of his body, he will allow nothing to separate us from him. Death, so far from destroying that union, shall confirm it, and bring us into a more intimate enjoyment of it. Let us then seek that union which is effected by faith in the Lord Jesus. If we consider only the present happiness arising from it, it infinitely transcends all others; but if we regard its continuance, the longest and dearest connections upon earth are not worthy of a thought in comparison with it.

2. Let us look forward to the possession of the heavenly Canaan—

There is "a promise left us of entering into rest," even into "that rest which remains for the people of God." But we may experience many difficulties and trials in our way there. Nevertheless "the promise is sure to all the seed;" and "our Forerunner has already entered" into Heaven, to take possession of it for us. Nay more, he has given us his "Holy Spirit to he a pledge of our inheritance." Let us then be contented to live as pilgrims and sojourners in this world; and make it our chief labor to keep our title to that inheritance clear. Let us be anticipating the time when the promise shall bring forth, and all the seed of Abraham rejoice together in its full accomplishment!

3. Let all our interactions with men be worthy of our professions and expectations—

If we have indeed been chosen of God to an eternal inheritance, we should show a deadness to the things of this world, and an amiableness in the whole of our deportment. It is a shame to be outdone by heathens in anything. We should excel in courteousness and generosity, in prudence and equity, as well as in heavenly-mindedness and devotion. In short, we should endeavor in all things to "walk worthy of our high calling," and to "show forth the virtues, as well as the praises, of him who has called us to his kingdom and glory." Such behavior will go far towards conciliating our enemies. It will "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;" and "make those ashamed, who falsely accuse our good conduct in Christ;" and, our light shining thus with uniform and engaging splendor, will constrain many to "glorify our Father who is in Heaven."

#39

MARRIAGE OF ISAAC

**[Genesis 24:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 24.1-4)**

"Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

The great events which take place in the world, such as the rise and overthrow of kingdoms, are disregarded by God as unworthy of notice; while the most trivial things that appertain to his people, are recorded with the minutest exactness.

The whole chapter from whence our text is taken relates to the marriage of Isaac. We are introduced into the most private scenes, and made acquainted with the whole rise, progress, and consummation of a matter—which might as well, to all appearance, have been narrated in a few words. But nothing is unimportant in God's eyes, that can illustrate the operations of his grace, or tend to the edification of his church. In discoursing on this part of sacred history, we shall notice,

I. Its peculiar incidents—

Abraham commissioned his servant to go and seek a wife for his son Isaac—

That holy man could not endure the thought of his son forming a connection with the Canaanites, who would be likely to draw him aside from the worship of the true God. He therefore ordered his old and faithful servant, Eliezer, to go to the country where his father's relations lived, and where, though idolatry prevailed in part, Jehovah was still known and worshiped, to bring for his son a wife from thence.

As Isaac was forty years of age, it might have seemed more proper for him to go himself; but Abraham had been called out from thence, and would on no account either go back there himself, or allow his son to go, lest he should appear weary of his pilgrimage, or countenance his descendants in going back to the world from whence they have been brought forth. On this account, when his servant asked whether, in the event of the woman, whom he should fix upon, being unwilling to accompany him, he should take Isaac there to see her—Abraham in the most peremptory manner imaginable forbade any such step; and declared his confidence, that while he was thus jealous for the honor of his God—God would overrule the mind of any person who should be selected as a partner for his son. But not contented with charging him in this manner, he imposed an oath upon him, and bound him by the most solemn obligations to execute his commission with fidelity and care. The more customary mode of swearing was by lifting up the hand to Heaven ([Genesis 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.22).); but here it was by putting his hand under Abraham's thigh; which was afterwards required by Jacob for the same purpose of his son Joseph, [Genesis 47:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 47.29).

How admirable a pattern is this for parents, in reference to the forming of matrimonial connections for their children! The generality are influenced chiefly by the family and fortune of those with whom they seek to be married; and even professors of godliness are too often swayed by considerations like these, without adverting sufficiently to the interest of their immortal souls. But surely the religious character of a person ought to operate upon our minds beyond any other consideration whatever. To what purpose has God told us, that the believer can have no communion with an unbeliever, any more than light with darkness, or Christ with Belial, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15. To what purpose has he enjoined us to marry "only in the Lord, [1 Corinthians 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.39)," if we are still at liberty to follow our carnal inclinations and our worldly interests, without any regard to our eternal welfare? Let the example of Abraham and of Isaac have its due weight on all, whether parents or children; and let a concern for God's honor regulate our conduct, as well in choosing connections for ourselves, as in sanctioning the choice of others.

The servant executed his commission with fidelity and promptness—

Never was there a brighter pattern of a servant than that which this history sets before us. In every step that Abraham's servant took, he showed how worthy he was to be entrusted with so important a mission. In his first setting-out he acted with great prudence; for, if he had gone alone without any evidences of his master's wealth, he could not expect that he should obtain credit for his assertions. Therefore, without any specific directions from his master, he took ten camels richly laden, and, with them, a proper number of attendants; who, while they evinced the opulence of his master, would be witnesses also of his own conduct. His dependence indeed was upon God, and not on any devices of his own; nevertheless he rightly judged that a dependence upon God was not to supersede the exercise of wisdom and discretion.

Having reached the place of his destination, he earnestly implored direction and blessing from God; and in order that he might ascertain the will of God, he entreated that the woman designed for him, might of her own accord offer to water all his camels. A better sign he could not well have asked; because such an offer, freely made to a stranger, would indicate a most amiable disposition; it would demonstrate at once the humility, the industry, the affability, the extreme kindness of the girl; and would be a pledge, that she who could be so courteous and obliging to a stranger, would certainly conduct herself well in the relation of a wife.

Scarcely had he presented his silent prayers to God, when Rebekah came, according to the custom of those times, to draw water; and, on being requested to favor him with a draught of water, made the very reply which he had just specified as the sign that was to mark the divine appointment. And no sooner had she made the offer, than she set herself (though it was no inconsiderable labor) to perform it.

Amazed at the merciful interposition of his God, he stood wondering, and adoring God for the mercy given unto him; nor did he allow any of the inferior servants to assist her; that, by leaving her to complete the work alone, he might see more clearly the hand of God ordering and overruling the whole matter. When she had finished, he inquired her name and family; and finding that they were his master's nearest relations, he made her a present of some valuable ornaments; and proposed, if her father could accommodate him to spend the night at his house. She went home immediately to inform her friends, who came to the well, and invited him to return with them. Having brought him to their house, and shown him the greatest hospitality, he refused to partake of any refreshment until he had made known to them the design of his coming. He then began to relate the wish of Abraham his master, the oath that he had imposed upon him, the prayer which he himself had silently offered to God, and the miraculous answer he had received to it; informing them at the same time of the opulence of Abraham; and that Isaac, on whose behalf he was come, was to be his sole heir. Immediately they all agreed, that the matter proceeded from the Lord; and they testified their willingness to accede to the proposal. They wished however for a few days delay; but the servant, having succeeded in the object of his mission, was impatient to be gone, and to deliver his master from the suspense in which he must of necessity have been kept. And Rebekah declaring her readiness to proceed with him, he took her and her nurse (after having given presents to all her relations, and thereby increased their esteem for his master), and brought her in safety to Isaac; who gladly received her as a present from the Lord, and was thenceforth united to her with the most affectionate regard.

In all this transaction we cannot but admire, on the one hand, the wisdom, the zeal, and the piety of the servant; and, on the other hand, the condescension and goodness of Jehovah. And though we are not warranted by this history to expect precisely the same interposition in our behalf—yet we are warranted to confide in God, and to expect his direction and blessing in all the things which we humbly commit to him.

As a mere history, this is replete with instruction; but it is still more so, if considered in,

II. Its emblematic import—

As fearful as we would be, exceeding fearful, of imposing any sense upon the Holy Scriptures, which God himself has not plainly sanctioned, we will not take upon ourselves absolutely to affirm that the marriage of Isaac was allegorical; but when we consider that some of the most striking parts of Isaac's history are explained by the inspired writers as emblematical of some mystery; that as the promised seed, born in a supernatural way, he was certainly a type of Christ; and that, as being the heir in opposition to Ishmael, he shadowed forth that spiritual seed who should inherit the promises; when we consider too the marvelous circumstances attending his marriage; we cannot reasonably doubt, but that it was a figure or emblem of some mysterious truth. If this ground of interpretation is admitted, we do not then hesitate to say, what that point is which it was intended to prefigure; it was certainly the marriage of God's only dear Son to his bride, the church.

1. God, like Abraham, sends forth his servants to obtain a bride for his Son—

The object nearest to the heart of our heavenly Father is to bring souls into connection with his dear Son. This connection is often represented under the idea of a marriage. Not to mention the innumerable places in the Old Testament where this image is used, we would only observe, that Jesus Christ is expressly called "the Bridegroom;" that his servants are called "the friends of the bridegroom, who hear his voice, and rejoice" in his prosperity, [John 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.29); and that the redeemed are called "the Lamb's wife, [Revelation 21:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.9)." Ministers are sent forth to prevail on people to unite themselves to him by faith, so as to become one flesh and one spirit, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30); [1 Corinthians 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.15); [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17), with him. And when they are successful in any instances, "they espouse their converts to one husband, that they may present them as a chaste virgin to Christ, 2 Corinthians 11:2.

Who that weighs these words, can doubt the propriety of interpreting Isaac's marriage as emblematic of Christ's union with the Church? To this office they are sworn in the most solemn manner; they are warned, that they shall be called to an account for their discharge of it; that if any through their neglect remain unimpressed with his overtures of mercy, their souls shall be required at the hands of him who neglected them. At the same time they are informed, that if their lack of success is not owing to their own negligence, but to the obstinacy of the people to whom they are sent, it shall not be imputed to them; but "they shall receive a recompense according to their own labor, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8)," and "be glorious in God's eyes though Israel be not gathered, [Isaiah 49:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.5)."

2. His servants execute their commission in the very way that Abraham's servant did—

They look unto God for his direction and blessing; knowing assuredly, that, though "Paul should plant and Apollos water, God alone can give the increase." They endeavor to render the leadings of his providence subservient to their great end. They watch carefully for any signs which may appear of God's intention to render their message effectual; and they are forward to set forth the unsearchable riches of Christ, together with his suitableness and sufficiency for his church's happiness.

They declare that He is "appointed heir of all things;" and that out of His fullness all the wants of his people shall be abundantly supplied. They exhibit in their own persons somewhat of that "salvation with which he will beautify the meek;" and to every soul that expresses a willingness to be united to him, they are desirous to impart pledges of his future love. And if in any instance God blesses their endeavors, they labor to accelerate that perfect union which is the consummation of all their wishes. To anything that would divert their attention or retard their progress, they say, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord has prospered my way!"

3. Their labors are crowned with similar success—

No faithful servant labors altogether in vain, [Jeremiah 23:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.22). Some doubtless are far more successful than others; but all who endeavor earnestly to "win souls to Christ," have the happiness of seeing some who obey the call, and cheerfully "forsake all to follow him." These are to them now their richest recompense; and in the last day will also be "their joy and crown of rejoicing;" for "when the marriage of the Lamb hs come, and his wife has made herself ready," then shall they also be "called to the marriage supper of the Lamb," and be eternally blessed in his presence. "These are the true sayings of God! [Revelation 19:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.7-9)."

To make a suitable **improvement** of this history,

1. Let us have respect to God in all our temporal concerns—

We have seen how simply and entirely God was regarded by all the parties concerned in this affair; by Abraham who gave the commission, by Isaac who acquiesced in it, by the servant who executed it, by Rebekah's friends who submitted to the proposal as proceeding from God, and by Rebekah herself, who willingly accompanied the servant to his master's house. Happy would it be if all Christian masters, children, servants, families, were actuated by such a spirit! We need not limit our thoughts to the idea of marriage; for we are told that "in all our ways we should acknowledge God, and that he will direct our paths." There is not a concern, whether personal or domestic, which we ought not to commit to him. And if all our "works were begun, continued, and ended in him," we would find that God would "prosper the work of our hands upon us;" "being in his way, he would most assuredly lead us" to a happy and successful outcome.

2. Let us execute with fidelity, every trust reposed in us—

It is the privilege both of masters and servants to know, that "they have a Master in Heaven;" who accepts at their hands the most common offices of life, provided his authority is acknowledged, his honor consulted, and his will obeyed, in the execution of them. This is God's own direction to them, "Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And you masters, do the same things unto them, [Ephesians 6:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.5-9)."

Whatever is our particular calling, it is that to which God himself has called us, and which ought to be exercised with a view to him, and as in his immediate sight. O that when we come into the presence of our Lord in the last day, we may be able to give as good an account of ourselves to him, as this servant did to his master Abraham!

3. Let us accept the offers which are sent to us in Jesus' name—

The great concern typified in the history before us, is that in which we are this moment engaged. We are the servants of the most high God; and you are the people to whom we are sent. We are ambassadors from him; and we beseech you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to him, and to accept his overtures of love and mercy. We declare to you, that now he will adorn you with a robe of righteousness and the graces of his Spirit, which were but faintly shadowed forth by the clothing and the jewels that were given to Rebekah. You shall be "all glorious within, and your clothing of wrought gold, [Psalm 45:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.13)."

O let us not go away ashamed; let us not return and say, that those whom we have solicited, "refuse to come with us." This is the message which he has sent to every one of you, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own people and your father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in your beauty! [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)." May God of his mercy incline you to accept his invitation, and make you willing in the day of his power!

#40

JACOB PREFERRED BEFORE ESAU

**[Genesis 25:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 25.23)**

The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

The common gifts of Providence are bestowed in such a regular and ordinary way, that the hand of God is scarcely seen or acknowledged in them. They are considered as resulting from a settled order of things, and are placed to the account of an imaginary cause, called Nature.

But it pleases God sometimes to mark his dispensations in so plain a manner, that his agency cannot be overlooked. He withheld from Abraham the promised seed, until there was not the most remote hope of a child being born to him by his wife, Sarah, according to the common course of nature; and thus evinced, beyond a possibility of doubt, that the child was a special and miraculous gift from him.

In the same manner God also kept Isaac childless for twenty years; and then at last condescended to his repeated supplications, and granted him the desire of his heart. On that occasion God further manifested, that, as "children are a fruit and heritage that comes of the Lord," so all that relates to them, even to the remotest period of time, is ordered by him. Rebekah, who had been twenty years barren, at last found in herself signs of a very extraordinary kind; and being unable to account for them, consulted the Lord. God answered her, that twins were in her womb; that they should be fathers of two distinct nations; that their characters, as also that of their descendants, should be extremely different; that they should contend with each other for the superiority; that the younger should be victorious; and that "the elder should serve the younger."

This was not fulfilled in the children themselves; for Esau was stronger than Jacob; being at the head of a warlike band, [Genesis 36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 36), while Jacob was only a poor shepherd. And Esau having many generations of great and powerful men, while Jacob's posterity were oppressed with the sorest bondage.

But in the time of David the prophecy began to be accomplished, [2 Samuel 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 8.14). We may indeed consider Jacob's obtaining of the birthright as a partial fulfillment of it, and in after ages it was fulfilled in its utmost extent; Edom being made a desolation, while the kingdom of Judah was yet strong and flourishing, [Obadiah 1:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Obad 1.6-10); [Obadiah 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Obad 1.17-18); [Ezekiel 25:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 25.12-14).

We must not however imagine that this is all that is contained in the words of our text. This prophecy is referred to by the inspired writers both of the Old and New Testament; and that too in such a way, as to show that it is of singular importance. The prophet Malachi adduces it in proof of God's partiality towards the Jewish nation, [Malachi 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.2-3). Paul quotes it, to confirm the idea he has suggested of God's determination to reject the Jews, who were the elder part of his family; and to receive the Gentiles, who were the younger, [Romans 9:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.10-13). The whole train of the Apostle's argumentation in that chapter shows, that he had even an ulterior view, which was to vindicate the sovereignty of God in the disposal of his favors, whether temporal or spiritual; and to make every one sensible that he was altogether indebted to the free grace of God for his hopes of mercy and salvation.

To confirm the words in this view, we may observe:

I. God has a **right** to dispense his blessings according to his own sovereign will—

God, as the **Creator** of all things, has an unlimited right over all—

It was of his own good pleasure that he created the world at all; there was nothing that had any claim upon him to call it into existence. When he had formed the chaos, no part of matter had any claim above the rest;

that which was left inert, had no reason to complain that it was not endued with vegetative power;

nor vegetables, that they were not enriched with animal life;

nor animals, that they were not possessed of reason;

nor our first parents, that they were created inferior to angels.

Nothing had any claim upon its Maker. He had the same right over all as "the potter has over the clay, to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor;" nor could any presume to say, "Why have you made me thus, [Romans 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.20-21)." If this then be true, then what claim can man have upon his Maker now? If he had no claim when innocent, has he acquired any by his fall? Does a loyal subject acquire new rights by rising in rebellion against his prince?

As the Lord and **Governor** of all things too, God may dispose of them as he sees fit—

An earthly monarch does not consider himself accountable to his subjects for disposing of that which is properly, and in all respects, his own. He obliges those who are the objects of his favor, but does no injury to those who participate in his bounty only in a less degree. Indeed every individual thinks himself at liberty to bestow or withhold his gifts, according as his inclination or judgment may dictate. And shall we deny to God what we concede to men? Shall we bind Him by a law from which we ourselves are free? If anyone were to blame us for using our own discretion in conferring gifts, we should ask without hesitation, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? [Matthew 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.15)." Shall we then presume to negative that question when put to us by the Governor of the Universe?

Let this idea be well fixed in our minds, that God has a right to bestow his blessing on whomever he will. This will root out that arrogance which is the characteristic of fallen man. This will bring us to the footstool of the Deity, and constrain us to say, "He is the LORD. He will do what He thinks is good! [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)." "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this! [Psalm 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.9)." We cannot doubt but that God possesses this right, since it is clear,

II. God actually exercises his right to dispense his blessings according to his own sovereign will—

We may daily see this:

1. In the dealings of his **providence**—

He consulted none of his creatures about how long a space of time he should occupy in completing the work of creation; or how many orders of creatures he should form. He could as easily have perfected the whole at once, as in six days. He could as easily have endued everything with a rational or angelic nature, as he could diversify their endowments in the marvelous way that he has done. But he acted in all things "according to the good pleasure of his own will."

When it pleased him to destroy the works of his hands on account of their multiplied iniquities—why did he preserve a wicked Ham, when millions no worse than he were overwhelmed in the mighty waters?

But to speak of things that have passed since the deluge:

Who has ordered the rise and fall of nations?

Who has raised or depressed the families of men?

Who has given to individuals their measure of bodily or intellectual strength?

Who has ordered the number of men's days on earth?

Is not this the Lord?

Who is it that gives us fruitful seasons, or causes drought and pestilence and famine to oppress the world? "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things!" [Isaiah 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.7).

If it be thought that these different events are regulated according to the moral state of mankind, and that therefore they exemplify rather the equity than the sovereignty of God; we would ask: What was the foundation of the distinction put between Esau and Jacob, together with their respective families? Paul particularly notices, that, when the prophecy in our text was delivered, "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated! [Romans 9:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.11-13)."

It is clear therefore and indisputable that "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done? [Daniel 4:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.35)."

2. In the dispensations of his **grace**—

In the call of Abraham, and the separation of his seed for a peculiar people;  
in distinguishing between his immediate sons, Ishmael and Isaac; as also between Isaac's sons, Esau and Jacob;  
in giving to their posterity the revelation of his will, while the whole world was left to walk in their own ways;  
in making yet further distinctions at this present moment, sending the light of his Gospel to a few of the Gentile nations, while all the rest are permitted to sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

In all this, I say, has not God clearly shown, that "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and that whom he will he hardens, or gives over to the blindness and obduracy of their own hearts! [Romans 9:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18)."

But, as among Abraham's seed "all were not Israel who were of Israel," so it is now in the Christian world. There is a great and visible distinction made between the different hearers of the Gospel: some have "their hearts opened," like Lydia's of old, to receive and embrace the truth. Or, like Saul, they are arrested in their mad career of sin, and made monuments of God's sovereign grace; while thousands around them find "the word, not a savor of life unto life, but of death unto death."

"Who is it that makes these people to differ? 1 Corinthians 4:7."

To whom is it owing that "the deaf hear, the blind see, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised?" We answer: It is all of God! "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God that shows mercy [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16)." The favored objects "are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God! [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13). "

The existence of God's sovereign right to do as he pleases being thus incontrovertibly manifest, we observe,

III. That all in whose favor it is exercised, are bound to acknowledge it with most ardent gratitude—

Impious indeed would it be to arrogate the glory to ourselves—

We have not of ourselves a sufficiency for the smallest thing, even for the forming of a good thought! What folly then is it to suppose that we can create ourselves anew, and renovate our souls after the divine image! This is the work of God alone! If then we have any reason to hope that God has wrought this great work within us, what base ingratitude is it to rob him of his glory! Is it for this end that he has shown to us such unmerited regard? Or is it such an use that we ought to make of his distinguishing mercy? Surely, what he has done, he has done "for the praise of the glory of his own grace! [Ephesians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.6);" and if we have been made partakers of his grace, we should strive to the uttermost to answer the ends for which he has bestowed it.

Those who have been the most highly favored by God, have always been most forward to acknowledge their obligations to him—

Ask of Paul, to whom he owed his eminent attainments? And he will answer, "By the grace of God I am what I am! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)."

Ask him, to whom all Christians are indebted for every grace they possess? He will answer, "It is God who has made us for this very purpose,[2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5)." Ascend to the highest heavens, and inquire of the saints in glory; you will find them all casting their crowns at their Redeemer's feet, and singing, "Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever!" To imitate them is both our duty and happiness. Our daily song therefore should be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us—but unto Your name be the praise!" "Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever!"

To guard this deep subject against the abuses to which it is liable, and to render it conducive to its proper and legitimate ends, we shall add a word,

1. Of caution—

If, as the Apostle says, "there is a remnant according to the election of grace, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5)," we are ready to suppose that those who are not of that number are not accountable for their sins, and that their final ruin is to be imputed rather to God's decrees, than to their own fault. But this is a perversion of the doctrine. It is a consequence which our proud reason is prone to draw from the decrees of God; but it is a consequence which the inspired volume totally disavows. There is not in all of the sacred writings one single word that fairly admits of such a construction.

The glory of man's salvation is invariably ascribed to the free, the sovereign, the efficacious grace of God! But the condemnation of men is invariably charged upon their own willful sins and obstinate impenitence. If, because we know not how to reconcile these things, men will controvert and deny them, we shall content ourselves with the answer which Paul himself made to all such cavilers and objectors, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? [Romans 9:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18-21)"

And if neither the truth nor the authority of God will awe them into submission, we can only say with the fore-mentioned apostle, "If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant, [1 Corinthians 14:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.38)." As for those, if such are to be found, who acknowledge the sovereignty of God, and take occasion from it to live in sin, we would warn them with all possible earnestness to cease from their fatal delusions! What excellence can he have, who "turns the very grace of God into a license to sin," and "continues in sin that grace may abound?" Any man that can justify such a procedure, is beyond the reach of argument; we must leave him, as Paul does, with that solemn warning, "His damnation is just! [Romans 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.8)."

2. Of encouragement—

To one who feels his utter unworthiness of mercy, we know not any richer source of encouragement than the sovereignty of God. For, if he may dispense his blessings to whoever he will, then the very chief of sinners has no need to despair. The person who is most remote from having in himself any ground to expect the birthright, may be made a monument of God's grace; while the person who by nature seems to have had fairer prospects, may be left, like the rich young ruler, to perish in his iniquities! The obstacles which appear to stand in the way of his acceptance may even be turned into grounds of hope; because the more unworthy he feels himself to be, the more he may hope that God will glorify the riches of his grace in showing mercy towards him. We do not mean that any person should rush into wickedness in order to increase his prospects of salvation; for, abstractedly considered, the more sinful any man is, the greater prospect there is of his perishing forever. We only mean to say, that, in the view of God's sovereignty, that which would otherwise have been a ground of despondency, may be turned into a ground of hope!

Let the subject then be thus improved; and while some dispute against it, and others abuse it, let us take occasion from it to make our supplication to God, saying with David, "Be merciful unto my sin, for it is great!"

#41

THE BIRTHRIGHT TYPICAL OF THE CHRISTIAN'S PORTION

**[Genesis 25:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 25.32)**

"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

It may be considered as a general rule, that no man abstains from anything which he has purposed to do, for lack of some excuse of expedience or necessity to justify it. A melancholy instance of infatuation we have in the history before us; an instance singular indeed as to the immediate act, but common, and almost universal, as to the spirit manifested in it.

Esau, having come home from hunting, unusually oppressed with fatigue and hunger, set his heart upon his brother's stew; and not only agreed to sell his birthright for it, but confirmed with an oath the alienation of that inheritance, to which, by the right of the firstborn, he was entitled. To justify his conduct he offered this vain and false apology, "Look, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?" But the fact is, as the historian informs us, he "despised his birthright."

Let us then consider,

I. Esau's contempt of his birthright—

There were many important privileges attached to **the first born**among the Jews—

The first-born was by God's appointment to have dominion over his brethren, [Genesis 27:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.29); [Genesis 27:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.37); [Genesis 49:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.3), and to enjoy a double portion of his father's inheritance. This was not optional with the parent in any case, [Deuteronomy 21:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.15); [Deuteronomy 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.17). But besides these civil, there were also some sacred privileges, which he possessed.

The Messiah, of whom he was to be a type, and who, in reference to the ordinances of birthright, is called "the first-born among many brethren, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)," was to spring from his loins. In one instance this privilege was separated from the foregoing one; and both were alienated from the first-born; the former being given to Joseph, and the latter to Judah, as a punishment of Reuben's iniquity in lying with his father's concubine, [1 Chronicles 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 5.1-2).

Yes, in some sense, the firstborn had a better prospect even of Heaven itself, than the rest of his brethren; because the expectation of the Messiah, who was to descend from him, would naturally cause him to look forward to that great event, and to inquire into the office and character which the promised seed should sustain.

But these privileges Esau despised—

He accounted them of no more value than a bowl of stew; nor did he speedily repent of his folly and wickedness. If he had seen the evil of his conduct, he would surely have endeavored to get the agreement cancelled; and if his brother Jacob had refused to reverse it, he should have entreated the mediation of his father, so that he might be reinstated in his natural rights. But we read not of any such endeavors; on the contrary, we are told, "He ate and drink, and rose up, and went his way;" so little did he value, or rather, so utterly did he "despise, his birthright." On this account is he stigmatized by the Apostle, as a profane person, [Hebrews 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.16). Had he disregarded only temporal benefits, he had been guilty of folly; but his contempt of spiritual blessings argued profaneness.

Jacob's conduct indeed in this matter was exceedingly base; but Esau's conduct was inexpressibly vile. Yet will he be found to have many followers, if we examine,

II. The analogy between his conduct and our own—

The birthright was typical of the Christian's portion. The true Christian has not indeed any temporal advantages similar to those enjoyed by right of the first born; but he is made an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. He has a distinguished interest in the Savior, and an indisputable title to the inheritance of Heaven. And hence those who have attained the full possession of their inheritance are called, "The general assembly and Church of the first-born, [Hebrews 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.23)."

But the generality are like Esau, having,

1. The same indifference about spiritual blessings—

Some excuse may be offered for Esau, because he knew not what a Savior, or what an inheritance, he despised. But we have had the Savior fully revealed to us; and know what a glorious place the heavenly Canaan is. Yet too many of us think as lightly of Christ and of Heaven, as if neither he nor it were worth our attention. Yes, we are ready at any time to barter them away for the most trifling gratification; and what is this, but to imitate the profaneness of Esau?

2. The same insatiable thirst after earthly and sensual indulgence—

Though Esau pretended that he was about to die, it was only an excuse for his profane conduct; for it cannot be conceived, but that, in the house of an opulent man like Isaac, there either was, or might easily be procured, something to satisfy the cravings of his appetite. But he was bent upon having his brother's stew, whatever it might cost His extreme eagerness may be seen in his words, "Give me some of that red strew." Being captivated with the color, he determined to get it, whatever it might be, and whatever it might cost; and from thence the name Edom, which signifies red, was given to him.

And is it not so with those who yield to impurity, intemperance, or any base passion? Do they not sacrifice their health, their reputation, yes, their very souls, for a momentary indulgence? Do they not say, in fact: "Give me the indulgence of my lust; I must and will have it, whatever be the consequence. If I cannot have it without the loss of my birthright, be it so. Let my hope in Christ be destroyed. Let my prospects of Heaven be forever darkened. Let my soul perish! Welcome Hell! Welcome damnation! Only give me the indulgence which my soul longs after!"

This sounds harsh in words; but is it not realized in the lives and actions of the generality of people? Yes; as the wild donkey, when seeking her mate, defies all endeavors to catch and detain her, so these persist in spite of all the means that may be used to stop their course. No persuasions, no promises, no threatenings, no consequences, temporal or eternal, can divert them from their purpose, [Jeremiah 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.23-24).

3. The same lack of remorse for having sold their birthright for a thing of no value—

Never did Esau reveal any remorse for what he had done; for though, when the birthright was actually given to Jacob, he "cried with an exceeding bitter cry, Bless me, even me also, O my father! [Genesis 27:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.34)." Yet he never humbled himself for his iniquity, never prayed to God for mercy, nor endured patiently the consequences of his profaneness. On the contrary, he comforted himself with the thought, that he would murder his brother, as soon as ever his father should be dead, [Genesis 27:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.41-42).

Is it not thus also with the generality of people? Instead of confessing and bewailing their guilt and folly, they extenuate to the utmost, or perhaps even presume to justify, their impieties! Instead of crying day and night to God for mercy, they never bow their knee before him, or do it only in a cold and formal manner. And, instead of submitting to the rebukes of Providence, and kissing the rod, they are rather like a wild bull in a net, determining to add sin to sin! Even Judas himself had greater penitence than they. Alas! alas! what a resemblance does almost everyone around us bear to this worthless wretch, this monster of profaneness!

Address,

1. Those who are still despising their birthright—

Reflect a moment on your folly and your danger! Place yourselves a moment on a death-bed, and say, 'I am at the point of death; and what profit do my past lusts and pleasures now do for me?' Will you then justify yourselves as you now do, or compliment yourselves on having so often gratified your wicked inclinations?

Suppose on the other hand that you were dying, like Isaac, in faith in the promised Messiah; would you then say, "What profit shall my birthright do to me?" Would it then appear a trifling matter to have a saving interest in the Savior, and a title to Heaven?

Consider further, how probable it is that you may one day, like Esau, seek earnestly the inheritance you have sold, and yet find no place of repentance in your Father's bosom! We mean not to say that any true penitent will be rejected; but the Apostle intimates what daily experience proves true, that, as Esau could not obtain a revocation of his father's word, though he sought it carefully with tears, so we may cry with great bitterness and anguish on account of the loss we have sustained, and yet never so repent as to regain our forfeited inheritance, [Hebrews 12:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.17).

At all events, if we obtain not a title to Heaven while we are here, we may come to the door and knock, like the foolish virgins, and be dismissed with scorn and contempt. Having "sown the wind, we shall reap the whirlwind." Let us then, "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near."

2. Those who value their birthright above everything else—

Amidst the multitudes who pour contempt on spiritual blessings, there are some who know their value and taste their sweetness. But how often will temptations arise, that divert our attention from these great concerns, and impel us, with almost irresistible energy, to the commission of sin! And how may we do in one moment, what we shall have occasion to bewail to all eternity! Let us then watch and pray that we enter not into temptation; and, however firm we may imagine our title to Heaven, let us beware lest our subtle adversary deprive us of it. Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into the heavenly rest, any of us should seem to come short of it! [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1).

#42

JACOB OBTAINING THE BLESSING

**[Genesis 27:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.34-35)**

"When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me—me too, my father!"

But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing."

It is not within the reach of our limited capacity to conceive how many and how great events depend upon causes apparently unimportant. We can have no doubt but that parents so pious as Isaac and Rebekah, and who excelled all the patriarchs in the conjugal relation, endeavored to discharge their duty towards their children in a befitting manner. But each of them felt a partiality for one of their children in preference to the other. Esau, the first-born, who was "a skillful huntsman," and supplied his father with venison, was Isaac's favorite. Jacob, on the other hand, who was of a more domestic turn, and had from the womb been designated by God himself as the inheritor of the birthright, was the favorite of Rebekah. To this circumstance, as it should seem, we must refer all the most important events of Jacob's life.

Isaac, in his partiality for Esau, had either misconstrued the intimations which God had given him respecting the birthright, or perhaps had forgotten them. He therefore, when he apprehended himself to be near death, told Esau to go out and bring him some venison, and to receive from his hands the blessings of the first born. Rebekah, alive to the interests of Jacob, and afraid that her wishes, as well as the counsels of God, would be thwarted, suggested an expedient to Jacob, which, though adopted with reluctance, was conducted with artifice, and crowned with the desired success. She bade him fetch her two young goats, which she dressed so that they might appear like venison. She moreover clothed him in an odoriferous garment belonging to his elder brother, and put the skins of the goats upon his hands and neck, in order that he might as nearly as possible resemble Esau. And then she sent him in to deceive his aged father, and, by impersonating Esau, to obtain the blessing.

Jacob acted his part with more skill and confidence than could have been expected from a person unaccustomed to deceit; he hesitated not to accumulate falsehoods in support of his claim, and even to represent God himself as having interposed to expedite his wishes. His greatest difficulty was to imitate the voice of Esau. Isaac was blind; and therefore no discovery was dreaded from the difference which there must have been in their appearance. The taste of Isaac, as well as his sight, was easily deceived. His ear however was more capable of discernment, and excited strong suspicions, that the person who addressed him was not the person he professed to be, but Jacob in disguise.

To satisfy his mind, he determined to call in the evidence of his other senses; and by these, as well as by the firmness of Jacob's asseverations, he was deceived. He smelled the rich odors of Esau's garment (which probably was preserved in the family as the distinguishing property of the eldest son), and he felt, as he thought, the roughness of Esau's hands and neck; and therefore imputing his suspicions to his own infirmities, he proceeded without further hesitation to bestow his blessing, together with all the privileges of the birthright, on this treacherous impostor.

When Esau, who had been thus defrauded, came to him, the unhappy father realized the treachery that had been practiced upon him, and announced to his bereaved son the melancholy tidings, "Your brother came with subtlety, and has taken away your blessing."

Much is to be learned from this extraordinary portion of Holy Writ. Let us consider,

I. The event referred to—

The circumstances being so universally known, we need not go particularly into them. The fraud practiced in order to obtain the birthright is that which more immediately calls for our attention—

1. In reference to the outcome, the fraud was unnecessary—

It is certainly true, that God had, while Esau and Jacob were yet in the womb, promised the birthright to Jacob the younger son; and no doubt, the birthright was a blessing greatly to be desired. It was also true that Isaac, either through forgetfulness or partiality for his favorite son, was about to bestow the birthright upon Esau. But were there no other means to be used in order to the accomplishment of the divine counsels?

Why could they not have reminded Isaac of the promise which God had made, which, as it had been made seventy-six years before, might now well be supposed to have been forgotten by him, especially in his present infirm and dying state? Isaac was a pious man, and would not have dared knowingly and intentionally to thwart the revealed purposes of his God. But supposing, what indeed cannot be reasonably supposed, that this holy man could have so far declined from God as to set himself in deliberate and determined opposition to his will—was not God able to overrule his actions, and to constrain him, as he afterwards did Jacob himself, to cross his hands, and, even against his will, to transfer the blessing to him for whom it was designed, [Genesis 48:8-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 48.8-20). At all events, if they could see no means of preventing the dreaded outcome, was God unable to effect it? and might not he be safely left with the execution of his own purposes? Was it necessary for them to resort to fraud and lying, in order to prevent God's decrees from being superseded and defeated?

2. As means, the fraud was most unjustifiable and base—

We are perfectly astonished when we see a person of Rebekah's exemplary character devising such a plot, and a plain man like Jacob executing it in such a determined way; a plot to deceive a holy and aged man, a husband, a parent, in the very hour of his expected decease, and in reference to a point of such importance. We know from the whole of their lives that this was not their ordinary mode of acting; but from the address they showed throughout the whole of it, we would have thought them the greatest proficients in the arts of dissimulation and fraud. Every difficulty seems to have been foreseen and guarded against with consummate skill; and where Rebekah's experience had not suggested a precaution, the subtlety of Jacob supplied a ready remedy. Lies, when once begun, were multiplied without fear or shame; and because they were not sufficient, God himself was called in as aiding the deception.

It was in vain to think that the circumstance of God's having made known his will respecting the birthright, could sanction any such means as these; or that they were at liberty to do evil in order that good might come. The whole transaction was vile and hateful in the extreme; and, as long as fraud, and lying, and hypocrisy before God, and uncharitableness and undutifulness to man, are odious—so long must this action merit the execration and abhorrence of all mankind.

But that we may have a more complete view of this event, let us consider,

II. The reflections it suggests—

Truly profitable is it to the contemplative mind. Methinks, the most superficial observer cannot but remark from hence,

1. How mysterious are the ways by which God accomplishes his own purposes!

God had determined that Jacob would have the blessing; but who could have thought that he should ever confer it in such a way? Who would have thought that he should employ all this treachery and deceit and falsehood in the bestowment of it? Let not anyone however imagine, that the divine conduct is vitiated by overruling thus the wickedness of men; or that Jacob's conduct was justified by accomplishing thus the purposes of God. Evil ceases not to be evil because God overrules it for good; for, if it did, then would the crucifiers and murderers of the Lord of glory be innocent, because by their instrumentality God accomplished the redemption of the world. But as it was "with wicked hands that the Jews crucified and slew Jesus, notwithstanding he was delivered into their hands by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23)," so were Jacob and Rebekah most criminal—while God, who wrought by them, was holy, and just, and good. We must say respecting all the ways of men, of whatever kind they are, they shall eventually "praise God;" and, however contrary to his commands, shall assuredly both accomplish his will and glorify his name! [Psalm 76:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.10).

2. How weak are the best of men when they come into temptation!

It is not to be supposed that either Jacob or Rebekah would have acted thus on any common occasion; but the importance of the occasion seemed to them to justify the expedients they used. Thus are even good men sometimes betrayed into the commission of evil. They are not aware how much they may be biased by self-interest or passion. They have an object to attain; that object is in itself desirable and good; how to attain it in a direct way, they know not. Therefore they incline to an indirect way, conceiving that the end will justify the means.

It was thus that Peter brought upon him the rebuke of Paul. He doubtlessly wished to soften the prejudices of his Jewish brethren; and he thought that a little sacrifice of liberty on the part of the Gentiles might well be made for so good an end. Hence he required the Gentiles to make the sacrifice; and so plausible were his reasonings on the occasion, that even Barnabas was drawn away by his dissimulation. What wonder then if even good men are sometimes deceived by the specious reasonings of others, or of their own minds, especially when there is some great interest to serve, and when our tempters are those on whose judgment we rely?

Let every man then stand on his guard, and beware how he is drawn by any authority whatever to the commission of evil. It will be of little avail to say, My adviser was my father or my mother; there is a plain path, from which no authority under Heaven should induce us to deviate. We must walk always as in the immediate presence of God. We must not for a moment allow ourselves in deceit of any kind. Little do we know where we may be drawn, if once we depart from the path of truth and honesty. Who would have thought that Jacob would have been drawn from dissimulation and falsehood to the most horrid blasphemy, even that of making God himself his confederate in sin; and that Rebekah should go farther still, even to the very braving of the curse and wrath of God!

Beware then of evil in its very first approaches. Pray to God that you may not be led into temptation of any kind. "Cease from man;" and learn not to follow him, any further than he follows Christ. If Satan can assume the form of "an angel of light," and "his ministers appear as ministers of righteousness," so may our relations and friends appear. Not that this consideration should induce us to disregard good advice; but it should lead us to try all counsels by the word and testimony of God; for "if men speak not according to the written word, there is no light in them."

3. How vain is it to hope for happiness, in the ways of sin!

Jacob was successful in his impious device. But what fruit had he of his success? "He sowed the wind, and he reaped the whirlwind." Soon was he forced to flee from his brother's wrath; and years of trouble followed his departure from his father's house. Similar measure too was meted out to him both by Laban and his own children. Say, Jacob, what did you not suffer from the thought that your beloved Joseph was devoured by wild beasts; yet was that only a deception of your own sons for the purpose of gaining your favor to themselves. Nearly did they bring your grey hair with sorrow to the grave; and you deserve it all, for your treachery to your father, and your cruelty to your brother. Let all know, that the sin which they roll as a sweet morsel under their tongue, shall prove gall in their stomach.

You did succeed, Gehazi; and thought yourself exceeding rich when you had deposited your ill-gotten wealth in the house. But what was your gain at last? Who envies you your newly-acquired wealth? So it will be with all who seek their happiness in the ways of sin. They behold, and covet, the bait; but before long they shall feel the hook!

Jacob for the space of twenty years was still under alarm and terror for the consequences of his deceit. In the first instance he was forced to flee in haste, and to go, unprovided, and unprotected, a journey of four hundred miles; and, when he got there, was doomed to experience evils to which in his father's house he was an utter stranger. But where will your evils end, if you live and die impenitent and unrenewed? Consider this, Brethren, before it is too late; and beg of God to keep your feet in the ways of holiness and peace.

Address,

1. Those who despise their birthright—

Esau had despised his birthright, and sold it for a bowl of stew; and now "he could not recover it, though he sought it carefully with tears, [Hebrews 12:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.16-17)." Nor was it any mitigation of his grief that he had been defrauded of it. So neither will it be any comfort to sinners, that Satan has beguiled them, or that they have been brought to ruin by the fraudulence of others. Dear brethren, what will it avail you to say, My mother, and my brother, were the instruments of my destruction? The loss is still your own, and must be your own to all eternity. If you duly value your birthright, God will watch over you, and will preserve both it for you, and you for it, [1 Peter 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4-5). But, if you make light of God's promised blessings, whatever may be the immediate means of your privation, you shall never enjoy them, nor ever so much as taste the banquet which your Lord and Savior has prepared, [Luke 14:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.18); [Luke 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.24).

2. Those who desire the birthright—

Seek it in a humble simple dependence upon God. In this both Jacob and Rebekah failed; they would not leave God to accomplish his promises in his own time and way. Hence they resorted to such unworthy expedients. But as Abraham felt assured, that, though the promised seed should be slain and reduced to ashes—the promises should yet be verified in him; so should we expect assuredly the fulfillment of God's promises to us. Happy had it been for Jacob if he had thus believed; he might have enjoyed the birthright without any of the subsequent afflictions.

Let us then guard against an unbelieving and impatient spirit. Let us commit our every concern to God, and expect, that in the mount of difficulty his interposition shall be seen. This is our wisdom and our happiness; for "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his will," even though earth and Hell should be confederate against him. Let us comply with that important precept, "He who believes shall not make haste, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16)," and we shall secure beyond the possibility of failure the blessing we seek after; for "he who believes in God shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end!"

#43

JACOB'S VISION, A TYPE OF THE MINISTRATION OF ANGELS TO CHRIST

**[Genesis 28:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.12-13)**

"Jacob had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying."

Now that God has given to the world a complete revelation of his mind and will—we are no longer to expect any extraordinary and personal communications with him; but, in former days, he frequently instructed his more favored servants by dreams and visions. The particular vision recorded in the passage before us is almost universally considered as typical, though few, if any, have given any satisfactory account wherein the type consists. We shall endeavor therefore to put the subject in a just point of view; and for that purpose shall consider,

I. The immediate end of the vision—

When so remarkable a revelation is given to man, we may conclude that some end, worthy of the divine interposition, is to be answered by it. The intent of the vision here given to Jacob, seems to be,

1. To dispel his fears of merited evils—

Jacob could not but be conscious that he had acted a base and treacherous part; and that therefore he had incurred the divine displeasure, at the same time that he had excited a murderous rancor in the bosom of his injured brother. He was now fleeing to avoid the effects of his brother's wrath, and had but too much reason to dread some righteous judgment from the hand of God. But God, who is altogether sovereign in the distribution of his favors, and frequently bestows them at seasons, when, according to our conceptions, they could be the least expected, appeared to him, with expressions of love and mercy. He assured the unhappy fugitive, that he was reconciled towards him, and would give his angels charge over him to keep him in all his way, to protect him from all danger, and to supply his every need. Thus were all his apprehensions at once removed, and his mind restored to perfect peace.

2. To confirm his hope of promised blessings—

He had received a promise of the birthright, while yet he lay in his mother's womb; and doubtless he had expected its accomplishment. But when he saw his father dying, and knew that the rights of the first born were about to be confirmed to his elder brother, his faith failed him; and, instead of waiting like David for the throne of Saul, he yielded to the solicitations of his mother, and sought to obtain by craft, what, if he had waited God's time, he would have received in a fair and honorable way. And now he had good reason to doubt, whether he had not forfeited his interest in God's promise, and entailed a curse upon himself instead of a blessing.

But God, on this occasion, renewed his promise to him, almost in the very terms, in which, but a few hours before, it had been declared by his father. (compare verses 3, 14 with verse 4) and thus assured to him, not only a numerous seed, and the inheritance of Canaan, but (which was infinitely the dearest right of the first born) the descent of Christ from his loins. From henceforth therefore we behold him walking steadfastly in the faith of Abraham, looking forward with joy to the day of Christ, and maintaining a conduct suitable to his profession.

While the vision was replete with personal benefit to Jacob, it conveyed instruction also to the Church, by,

II. Its typical reference—

Instead of supposing, with all writers upon this subject, that the ladder was a type of Christ in his divine and human nature mediating between Heaven and earth (which is fanciful, and without any warrant from Scripture), we rather think that the vision itself was the type (if it was indeed a type), and that it prefigured,

1. The testimony which angels were to give to Christ—

Our Lord himself has cast the true light on this passage. In his conversation with Nathanael, he tells the young convert, that he should one day see that realized in him, which had been shadowed forth in Jacob's vision, [John 1:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.51). Accordingly we find that as, from the first conception of Christ in the womb to that very hour, the angels had deeply interested themselves in everything that related to him, so they continued on all occasions to wait upon him, to soothe his sorrows, to animate his courage, to fulfill his will, and to bear testimony on his behalf, [Matthew 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.11); [Luke 22:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.43); [Luke 24:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.4-7); [Luke 24:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.23).

More than twelve legions of angels would have come to his support if he had desired their aid, [Matthew 26:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.53).

Here then is a correspondence between the type and antitype; Jesus was a man of sorrows, and cast out by his brethren, who said, "This is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours! [Luke 20:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.14)." But God would not leave his beloved Son without witness, or without support; and therefore opened a communication between Heaven and earth, that the angels might have continual access to him, while "he himself stood, as it were, at the top of the ladder" to direct their operations.

2. The confirmation which his people's faith was to receive from that testimony—

The circumstances of Nathanael and his other disciples, to whom this visual demonstration was to be given, were not unlike to those of Jacob, to whom the vision was given. They had believed in Jesus; but their faith was to be sorely tried, so that they should be reduced almost to despair. There was however a seasonable support to be afforded them by the intervention and agency of angels. It was the repeated testimony of angels that first inspired them with hope, [John 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.12), and that, afterwards, at the time of Christ's ascension into Heaven, filled them all with a pleasing expectation, that they would one day see him come again in power and great glory, [Acts 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.11). In consequence of their declarations, no less than of the declarations of Christ himself, "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy," and waited for the promised effusion of the Holy Spirit, "knowing in whom they had believed, and assured, that he would keep that which they had committed to him." Thus in this respect also did the type receive a suitable accomplishment.

For our further improvement of this history, we may observe,

1. There is no person so guilty, but God is willing and desirous to show mercy to him—

We cannot but admire the extent and freeness of that mercy with which God revealed himself to this guilty fugitive. We have a similar instance in the mercy shown to Saul, at the very instant he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ, [Acts 9:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1-6)." And, has not the Apostle told us, that he was intended by God to be in this respect a monument of God's long-suffering, and a pattern to those who should hereafter believe on him, [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.16)." Let none then despair; but, whatever evils they have brought upon themselves by their iniquities, and whatever reason they may have to dread the wrath, either of God or man—let them call to mind the example before us; and turn unto him, who has promised "that he will never cast them out."

2. There is no distress so great, but God is able and willing to deliver us from it—

God has thousands of angels at his command, and has appointed them to "minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation, [Hebrews 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.14)." These he orders to "encamp round about his people, and deliver them, [Psalm 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.7)." Let us then suppose ourselves as destitute as Jacob himself, having only the earth for our bed, a stone for our pillow, and no other canopy than the heavens. Still, a vision of God, with the ministry of his angels, shall render our situation both comfortable and happy; yes, shall make it appear to us as "the very house of God, the gate of Heaven." And such a confirmation will these "visions of the Almighty" give to our faith and hope, that we shall be fitted for all future trials, and be enabled to testify on God's behalf, that "he will never leave his people, until he has fulfilled to them his promises in their utmost extent!"

#44

THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD DISPENSES HIS FAVORS

**[Genesis 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.15)**

"Behold, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

The study of profane history is exceeding profitable, inasmuch as it brings us into an acquaintance with human nature in all its diversified forms, and thereby qualifies us to discharge all our own duties with more wisdom and propriety.

But sacred history, besides that it sets before us incomparably brighter examples of virtue, has this peculiar advantage, that it brings God himself to our view, and exhibits him to us in all the dispensations of his providence and grace. The account which is here given us of his fellowship with Jacob, will serve to show us, in a very striking point of view, in what manner he disperses his favors.

I. He bestows his favors **sovereignly**—

Jacob had grievously sinned both against God and man, in impersonating his brother, in imposing on his father, in blasphemously ascribing to God what was the fruit of his own device, and in fraudulently obtaining his brother's birthright. Having incensed his injured brother, he was now fleeing, to avoid the effects of his indignation.

In what manner should we suppose that God would meet him, if indeed he should deign to notice such a miscreant? Would he not say to him, as he afterwards did to the fugitive prophet, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Or rather, instead of noticing him at all, may we not suppose that he would send a lion to destroy him, [1 Kings 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 13.24). But behold, for the displaying of the riches of his own grace, he revealed himself to him in a most instructive vision; he confirmed to him all the promises that had been made to Abraham and to Isaac; and even extended beyond all former bounds the manifestations of his favor.

A similar instance we have in the Apostle Paul; whom, at the very instant that he was laboring to extirpate the followers of Christ, God was pleased to stop, not, as might have been expected, with some signal judgment, but with singular expressions of his regard, conferring on him the highest honors, and communicating to him the richest blessings.

And may not we also admire the sovereignty of God in the exercise of his mercy towards ourselves? Why is it that we are favored with the light of his Gospel, when so many myriads of our fellow-sinners are left in darkness and the shadow of death? If we have experienced in our souls the efficacy of divine grace, may we not look back with wonder to the period of our conversion, when we were either drinking iniquity with greediness, or proudly establishing our own righteousness in opposition to the righteousness of Christ? Let us deliberately consider our state when God first caused a ray of light to shine into our minds, and implanted his grace in our hearts—and we shall esteem ourselves no less indebted to the electing love of God, than Jacob, or Saul, or any other whom he has ever chosen! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9).

II. He times his favors **seasonably**—

The fugitive patriarch was now in a very desolate and forlorn condition, wearied in body and distressed in mind. Probably his conscience now smote him, and he was saying with himself, as Joseph's brethren afterwards did, "I am truly guilty concerning my brother! [Genesis 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.21)." How welcome then must the tokens of God's regard be to him at that season! What a support under his present trials! What an antidote against any future calamities!

Thus it is that God interposes on the behalf of his people, and "The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36)." When the contrite soul is bowed down under a sense of guilt, and ready to say: There is no hope; then does God speak peace unto it, saying: "Be of good cheer, I am your salvation." Just as, in Hagar's extremity, God sent his angel to point out to her a spring, whereby the life of her child was unexpectedly preserved; so in ten thousand instances he appears for us, when we are ready to despair of help; and though his interpositions on our behalf are less visible than these—yet every one of us has reason to acknowledge the truth of that proverb, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen, [Genesis 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.14)."

Let us but review our lives, and call to mind the aids of his Spirit under temptations, trials, difficulties; let us see how marvelously we have been upheld when conflicting with sin and Satan, and we shall confess indeed, that "he is a very present help in times of trouble."

III. He imparts his favors **suitably**—

It is probable that Jacob's reply to the advice of his mother was now, in his apprehension, about to be verified; and that he expected a curse rather than a blessing. His evil conscience now might well suggest to him such thoughts as these: "God has forsaken me, and some great evil will come upon me. I can never hope to return again to my father's house in peace, or to enjoy the blessing which I have so treacherously gained."

To remove these apprehensions, God given to him exactly such tokens of his regard, as were best calculated to allay his fears. In the vision, God showed to him both his providential care, and his redeeming love; for doubtless, while he discovered to him the ministry of angels who were commissioned to protect him, he also showed him that promised Seed, who was in due time to spring from him, and whom at that very instant he typically represented. (This is more fully opened in the preceding Discourse.) In the promise, he assured him:  
that his presence would follow him;  
that his power would preserve him;  
that he would bring him back again to that very land;  
and that not one of all the promises that had been ever made to him, would fail of accomplishment.

In this respect also we may trace the tender mercies of our God towards all his people. His manifestations of himself to them, and his application of promises to their souls, are wonderfully suited to their several necessities. We cannot indeed justify those, who open the sacred records, and expect that the portion of Scripture, on which they cast their eye, shall be a kind of literal direction to them; (a most unwarranted and delusive method of ascertaining the mind of God!) but this we must affirm, that, whatever we need, whether wisdom, or strength, or grace of any kind—it shall be given us, if we ask in faith. And the experience of all the saints attests the truth of that promise, "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you."

IV. He continues his favors **faithfully**—

God had given promises, not to Abraham only and to Isaac, but to Jacob also, while he was yet in his mother's womb. But instead of fulfilling them to him after this flagrant instance of misconduct, he might well have said to him, as he did to his unbelieving posterity, "You will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have Me against you, [Numbers 14:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.34)." "Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: 'I promised that your house and your father's house would minister before me forever.' But now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained, [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.30)."

But he had spoken, and would not go back; for his word's sake he would not cast off his offending child, or even allow one jot or tittle of his promises to fail.

Thus to his descendants in future ages did God manifest his fidelity; insomuch that Joshua, after eighty years' experience, could appeal to the whole nation, saying, "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

To us also will he approve himself faithful. "He will not cast off his people, because it has pleased him to make us his people, 1 Samuel 12:22." He has said: I will never leave you, I will never, never forsake you! [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5). "He may indeed hide his face from us for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on us; the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but the covenant of my peace," says he, "shall not be removed; for like as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more cover the earth—so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you! [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10)."

Improvement—

1. For **caution**—

We have seen that Jacob inherited the blessing which he had gained by treachery; and that, where sin had abounded, grace did much more abound. But shall we do evil that good may come; or commit sin that grace may abound? God forbid. We must never expect the blessing of God but in the way of duty.

2. For **encouragement**—

If through temptation we have fallen into sin, let us not flee from God, like Adam, but go to him in humble hope that he will magnify his mercy towards the chief of sinners.

#45

JACOB'S PILLAR AT BETHEL

**[Genesis 28:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.16-19)**

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz."

[Preached at consecration of the chapel erected in Stansted Park]

On whatever side we look, we see abundant evidence that "God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." With us, there are laws of equity prescribed for the regulation of our conduct in the whole of our interaction with men; and on our strict observance of them the welfare of society depends.

But God is not restrained by any such rules in his government of the world; men having no claims whatever upon him, he has a right to dispose of them, and of all that pertains unto them, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. This right too he exercises in a way, which, though inexplicable to us, is manifest to all.

In the conversion of Paul we see this in as striking a point of view as it can possibly be placed. Paul, even to the very moment of his conversion, was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of our Lord, having voluntarily enlisted himself in the service of the high-priest to execute against them his cruel decrees. He was, as he himself tells us, "a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor;" nor had he so much as one penitential pang, until he was arrested by the grace of God, and favored with a sight of that very Jesus, whose interests he was laboring to destroy!

Somewhat of a similar display of God's grace may be seen in the history before us. Jacob had been guilty of base deceit in relation to his brother's birthright. He had even represented God himself as confederate with him in that wicked act, and as facilitating by an extraordinary exercise of divine power the attainment of his object. By this treacherous conduct he had greatly incensed his brother against him, and rendered any longer continuance under his father's roof unsafe. Rebekah, who had instigated him to this wickedness, recommended him to flee; and, to reconcile Isaac to his departure, proposed that he should go to his uncle Laban, and take a wife from among his own relatives, and not connect himself with any of the daughters of Canaan, as his brother Esau had done. This however was a mere pretext; the true reason of his departure was, that he feared the wrath of Esau, and fled to avoid the effects of his merited indignation.

Thus circumstanced, it could not fail but that he must at this time be in a state of much disquietude, not only as being driven from his family at the very time that his pious and aged father was supposed to be dying, but as having brought this evil on himself by his own base and treacherous conduct, and as having provoked God to anger, as well as man, by his impiety. Wearied with fatigue of body and anxiety of mind, he laid himself down to rest under the open canopy of Heaven, with nothing but the bare ground for his bed, and a stone for his pillow. If it be asked, why he did not go into the adjacent city to seek a more comfortable lodging there; I answer, that it was altogether owing to the state of his mind; and his conduct in this respect was perfectly natural; the pain of a guilty conscience uniformly indisposing men, not only for society, but often for any physical necessities.

Who would have thought that under such circumstances he would so speedily be honored with one of the most wonderful manifestations of God's love that ever were given to mortal man? Yet on this very night did God draw near to him as a reconciled God, and pour into his bosom all the consolations which his soul could desire.

Well might Jacob express surprise at this marvelous display of God's love and mercy; and I pray God that somewhat of the same holy feelings may be engendered in us, while we consider:

I. His unexpected discovery—

There were two things with which Jacob was favored on this occasion; a vision, and a voice.

In the vision, he saw a ladder reaching from earth to Heaven, and angels ascending and descending upon it, while God himself stood above it to regulate their motions. This imported, that, however destitute Jacob at this time was, there was a God who ordered everything both in Heaven and earth, and who by means of ministering angels would effect in behalf of his believing people whatever their diversified necessities might require.

By the voice, he was informed, that all which had been promised to Abraham and to Isaac, respecting the possession of Canaan by their posterity, and the salvation of the world by the promised Seed, would be fulfilled, partially in his own person, and completely in his posterity.

Thus did God exhibit himself to him on this occasion as a God of providence and of grace, and, under both characters, as his God forever and ever. Such a revelation, at such a time, and such a place, a place where the grossest idolatry prevailed to the utter exclusion of the only true God, astonished him beyond measure, and constrained him to exclaim, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not!" He now saw that God was not confined to any place or country; and that wherever he should reveal himself to man, there was "the house of God, and there the gate of Heaven," through which the vilest sinner in the universe might gain access to him.

To prosecute this subject further in reference to Jacob is unnecessary. It is of more importance to consider its bearing on ourselves. Know then, that, though the vision and the voice had a special respect to Jacob, and the circumstances in which he was more immediately interested, they are eminently instructive to us also, and that, not merely as prophecies that have been fulfilled, but as illustrations of the way in which God will yet magnify the riches of his grace towards his believing people.

How wonderful on many occasions have been the dispensations of his providence! Circumstances as much unlooked for as Jacob's possession of the land of Canaan, have frequently occurred; and, though perhaps small in themselves, have led to results, which have been of the utmost importance through our whole lives. Had we been more observant of the leadings of providence, and marked with more precision the time and the manner in which the different events of our lives have occurred, we would be no less struck with wonder and amazement than Jacob himself.

How extraordinary have been the communications of his grace! Perhaps when we have been surrounded on every side by men immersed in the cares and vanities of this world, ourselves also destitute of all holy principles, and under the guilt of all our past sins—we have been brought to hear the Word of God, and to feel its power, yes and to taste its sweetness also, through the manifestations of the Savior's love to our souls.

Possibly, even the enormity of some particular sin has, as in the case of Onesimus, been the very means which God has made use of for bringing us to repentance, and for converting our souls to him.

It may be that, like Zacchaeus, we have gone to some place, where we contemplated nothing but the gratification of our curiosity; and have been penetrated beyond all expectation by a voice from Heaven, saying, "Come down, Zaccheus; for this day is salvation come to your soul"

Perhaps some heavy affliction has been made the means of awakening us to a sense of our lost estate; and through a manifestation of Christ to our souls we have found a Heaven, where we anticipated nothing but accumulated and augmented sorrow. Yes truly, there are witnesses without number, at this present day, that God still acts in a sovereign way in dispensing blessings to mankind; and that those words are yet verified as much as ever, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me! [Romans 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.20)."

And now let me ask: Whether the effect of such manifestations are not the same as ever? Have we not on such occasions been ready to exclaim, "This is the house of God! this is the gate of Heaven?" Yes; it is not in the power of outward circumstances, however calamitous, to counter-balance such joys as these. Even the terrors of a guilty conscience are dissipated in a moment; and peace flows in upon the soul like a river.

The practical effects upon the life which will result from this experience may be seen in,

II. The grateful acknowledgments which it drew from Jacob.

"Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz." He determined to erect a memorial of the stupendous mercy that had been given to him, and to serve his God in that very place which had been so commended to him by the providence and grace of God. Accordingly he took the stone on which he had reclined his head, and erected it for a pillar, and poured oil upon it, in order to consecrate it to the special service of his God. We have no account of any express command from God that oil should be applied to this purpose by him; but in after-ages it was particularly enjoined to Moses to be used in consecrating the tabernacle, together with all the holy vessels and instruments that were employed in God's service, [Numbers 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 7.1); as also to be used in all the peace-offerings that were presented to the Lord, "These are the regulations for the fellowship offering a person may present to the LORD: "'If he offers it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering he is to offer cakes of bread made without yeast and mixed with oil, wafers made without yeast and spread with oil, and cakes of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil, [Leviticus 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.11-12)."

Thus not only under the law, but long before the law, we behold the solemn rite of consecration performed by one of God's most highly-favored servants; and a place that was common before, rendered holy to the Lord by the administration of this ordinance. How acceptable to God this service was, may be judged from hence, that, twenty years afterwards, God again appeared to Jacob, and reminded him of this very circumstance, saying, "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar, and where you vowed unto me, [Genesis 31:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 31.13)." "Arise, and go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and there make an altar unto God, that appeared unto you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother, [Genesis 35:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 35.1)." And in obedience to this command, we are told, "Jacob came to Luz, that is, Bethel, and built an altar there, and called the place El-Bethel, because God there appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother, [Genesis 35:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 35.6-7)."

Do we not then see in this record how we also should mark the interpositions of God in our behalf? Does it not befit us to remember them, and to perpetuate the remembrance of them for the instruction and encouragement of others? Should not the honor of God be dear to us; and, if the place which God has signalized in so remarkable a way, have hitherto been distinguished by the name of Luz (a place of almonds, and of carnal delights), should we not labor to convert it to a Bethel, and to render it to all future generations a house of God, and, if possible, the very gate of Heaven? Let the idea be derided as it may by those who know not God, this is an action worthy of a child of Abraham, a service acceptable and well-pleasing unto God.

In the verses following my text we have the vow of Jacob respecting this place recorded, "This stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you shall give me, I will surely give the tenth unto you." Thus, while he consecrated here an altar to the Lord, he provided for the service of that altar by an actual endowment. What might be his circumstances, or the circumstances of his family, in future life—he knew not; yet he bound himself by this solemn and irrevocable vow.

What any ignorant and ungodly man might think of this, it is easy to imagine; but I find not in all the inspired volume one single word that discountenances such a conduct. I find, on the contrary, the whole people of Israel contributing according to their power towards the erection of the tabernacle, and stripping themselves of their ornaments in order to furnish it with vessels for the service of their God. I find David, the man after God's own heart, even when not permitted to build the temple himself, devoting not less than eighteen million of money to the preparing of materials for it. I find similar exertions made by others, at a subsequent period, for the rebuilding of the temple. I find a poor widow, who had but one farthing in the world, commended for casting it into the treasury, to be expended for the Lord.

In whatever light then the lovers of this world may view such an appropriation of wealth, I have no hesitation in saying, that it will never be condemned by our God. What if, by means of it, God's salvation is made known, and his name be glorified? What if many who have immortal souls, now sunk in ignorance and sin, "are turned by means of it from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" What if, by the erection of an altar here, there is in this place something effected towards the accomplishment of that promise, "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord; and it shall be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord in the land of Egypt; for they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a Savior, and a Great One, and he shall deliver them! [Isaiah 19:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 19.19-20)." Should God so honor this place, and so testify his acceptance of the sacrifices that shall here be offered, how will they bless him, who have been born to God in this place! and how will they bless him, who have been his honored instruments of erecting an altar here, and of consecrating it to his service!

What now remains, but that I endeavor to IMPROVE this joyful occasion for the benefit of those who hear me

Are there any here who are bowed down under a sense of sin? Perhaps, though you may have come here only to witness a novelty, God has brought you here to speak peace unto your souls, and to anoint you to the possession of a kingdom, when you have no more contemplated such an event than Saul did, when he was in the pursuit of his father's donkeys. Know of a truth, that God is in this place, though you may not be aware of it. Know, that he is a God of love and mercy, as much as ever he was in the days of old. Know that he has still the same right to dispense his blessings to whoever he will, even to the very chief of sinners! Know that he has not only the same communication with men as ever through the instrumentality of angels, but that he has access to the souls of men by his Holy Spirit, who is ready to impart unto you all the blessings of grace and glory. Know that the Seed promised to Jacob has come into the world, even the Lord Jesus Christ; and that he has fulfilled all that is necessary for our salvation. He has expiated our guilt by his own blood upon the cross; and has made reconciliation for us with our offended God; so that through Him all manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men, and "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things."

O Beloved, only look unto Him, and whatever were the load of guilt under which you groaned, you should find rest and peace unto your souls, "Where sin had abounded, His grace should much more abound;" and "though your sins were as scarlet, they should be as wool; though they were red like crimson, they should be white as snow."

It may be that someone may have come here, who, though not particularly bowed down with a sense of guilt, is oppressed with a weight of personal or domestic troubles. Who can tell? God may have brought such a one here this day, in order to fill his soul with heavenly consolations. O that, if such a one be here, God may now appear unto him as a reconciled God, and "say unto him, I am your salvation!" O that by the word now spoken in God's name, there may this day be "given unto him beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that he may become a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, and that God may be glorified!"

You have done well that you have come here; for it is in the house of prayer that God pours out more abundantly upon men the blessings of grace and peace, "He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Thousands and millions of afflicted souls have found in God's house such discoveries of his love, and such communications of his grace, as they before had no conception of; and you at this hour, if you will lift up your soul to God in earnest prayer, and cast all your burdens upon him, shall say before you go hence, "This is the house of God; this is the gate of Heaven!"

Know of a truth, that one ray of the Sun of Righteousness is sufficient to dispel all the gloom and darkness of the most afflicted soul; and, if only you will direct your eyes to Him, however your afflictions may have abounded, your consolations shall much more abound.

I trust there are not wanting here some who can bear testimony to the truth of these things by their own experience; and who, from the discoveries which they have received of the Savior's love, "are filled with peace and joy in believing." To such then will I say, Bless and magnify your God with all the powers of your souls, "let the children of Zion be joyful in their King;" let them "rejoice in the Lord always;" let them "rejoice in Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory." At the same time, even while they are, as it were, "at the very gate of Heaven," let me particularly caution them against that kind of joy which is tumultuous, and that kind of confidence which borders on presumption.

There is a holy fear, which is rather increased than dissipated by heavenly joy; and a solemn awe, that always accompanies the manifestations of God to the soul. Observe the state of Jacob's mind on this occasion, "He was afraid; and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God; this is the gate of Heaven." Thus blended in its nature, thus tempered in its exercise, thus chastised in all its actings, should our joy be.

It is of great importance that we should all remember this; for there is among the professors of religion much joy that is spurious, much confidence that is unhallowed. We may have great enlargement of heart; but we must "fear and be enlarged;" we may possess much joy; but we must "rejoice with trembling." Even in Heaven itself the glorified saints, yes, and the angels too, though they have never sinned—fall upon their faces before the throne, while they sing praises to God and to the Lamb. Let such then be your joy, and such your sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.

But let not all your gratitude evaporate in unsubstantial, though acceptable, emotions. Think with yourselves what you can do for Him, who has done so much for you. Say with yourselves, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" Think how you may improve your mercies for the good of your fellow-creatures, and the honor of your God.

Of Jacob it is said, "He rose up early in the morning, and took the stone and raised it for a pillar." Let it be thus with you also; lose no time in honoring your God to the utmost of your power. Account all you have, whether of wealth or influence, as given to you for that end. Determine that those who are around you shall have before them the evidences of true piety, and such memorials as shall, if possible, lead them to the knowledge of the true God.

Jacob had it not in his power at that time to do all that his heart desired; but he did what he could; and twenty years afterwards, when his means of honoring God were enlarged, he executed all his projects, and performed the vows which he had made. Thus let your desires be expanded to the uttermost; and then fulfill them according to your ability. So shall you have within yourselves an evidence that God is with you in truth; and having been faithful in a few things, you shall be rulers over many things in the kingdom of your God!

#46

JACOB'S VOW

**[Genesis 28:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.20-22)**

"Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

It is thought by many, that it is wrong to make any kind of vows. But the propriety of making them depends on the manner in which they are made. If, for instance, we make them in our own strength; or hope that by them we can induce God to do for us what he is otherwise unwilling to perform; or imagine that the services which we stipulate to render unto God will be any compensation to him for the mercies he gives to us; we are guilty of very great presumption and folly. Vows are not intended to have the force of a bargain or compact, so as to involve the Deity in obligations of any kind; but merely to bind ourselves to the performance of something which was before indifferent, or to impress our minds more strongly with the necessity of executing some acknowledged duty.

Of the former kind was Hannah's vow, that if God would graciously give unto her a son, she would dedicate him entirely, and forever, to his immediate service, [1 Samuel 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.11). Independently of her vow, there was no necessity that she should consecrate him to the service of the tabernacle; but she greatly desired to bear a son; and determined, that if God heard her prayer, she would testify her gratitude to him in that way.

Of the latter kind was the vow which Israel made to destroy both the Canaanites and their cities, if God would but deliver them into their hands, [Numbers 21:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.2). God had before enjoined them to do this; and therefore it was their bounden duty to do it; and their vow was only a solemn engagement to execute that command; which however they could not execute, unless he should be pleased to prosper their endeavors.

That such vows were not displeasing to God, we are sure; because God himself gave special directions relative to the making of them, and the rites to be observed in carrying them into execution, [Numbers 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.2); [Numbers 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.21). Even under the New Testament dispensation we find Aquila vowing a vow in Cenchrea, [Acts 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.18); and Paul himself uniting with others in the services, which the law prescribed to those who had the vows of Nazariteship upon them, [Acts 21:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.23-24).

The first vow of which we read, is that contained in our text; and extremely instructive it is. It shows us,

I. Our legitimate desires—

Man, as compounded of soul and body, has wants and necessities that are proper to both; and whatever is necessary for them both, he may reasonably and lawfully desire.

1. We may desire the presence and protection of God—

The Israelites in their journeys from Egypt to the promised land passed through a "great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water, [Deuteronomy 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.15)."

Just so is this world wherein we sojourn. Dangers encompass us all around; and, if left to ourselves, we never can reach in safety the land to which we go. Well therefore may we adopt the language of Moses, when Jehovah threatened to withdraw from Israel his own immediate guardianship, and to commit them to the superintendence of an angel, "If you do not go up with us, then carry us not up hence, [Exodus 33:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.1-3); [Exodus 33:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.12-15)." "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps, [Jeremiah 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.23);" nor will any created aid suffice for him, "his help is, and must be, in God alone."

If God does not guide us, we must err.

If He does not uphold us, we must fall.

If He does not keep us, we must perish.

We may therefore desire God's presence with us, and so desire it, as never to rest satisfied one moment without it. "As the deer pants after the water-brooks," says David, "so does my soul pants after You, O God. My my soul thirst for God, for the living God! [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2)." And, when he had reason to doubt whether God was with him or not, his anguish was extreme, "I will say unto God my rock, Why have you forgotten me? As with a sword in my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they daily say unto me, Where is your God? [Psalm 42:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.9-10)." This was the language of the man after God's own heart; and it should be the language also of our souls.

2. We may desire competent measure of earthly comforts—

These also are necessary in this valley of tears. Food we must have to nourish our bodies, and clothing to cover us from the inclemencies of the weather; these therefore we may ask of God; beyond these we should have no desire, "Having food and clothing we should be content, 1 Timothy 6:8." To wish for more than these is neither wise, [Proverbs 30:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.8-9), nor lawful [Jeremiah 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 45.5). Nor even for these should we be over-anxious. We should rather, like the birds of the air, exist on the providence of God, and leave it to Him to supply our needs in the way and measure that he shall see fit, [Matthew 6:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.25-26). Yet it is proper that we make it a part of our daily supplications, "Give us this day our daily bread."

3. We may desire the final possession of the heavenly Canaan—

Canaan was desired by Jacob not merely as an earthly inheritance, but chiefly as a pledge of that better land which it shadowed forth. None of the patriarchs regarded it as their home, "they dwelt in it as sojourners, and looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God! [Hebrews 11:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.9-10); [Hebrews 11:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-16)." There is for us also "a rest" which that land typified, [Hebrews 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.8-9), and to which we should look as the end of all our labors Hebrews, 11:26, and the consummation of all our hopes, [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8). It is "the inheritance to which we are begotten, [1 Peter 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-4)," and "the grace which shall surely be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.13)." To be waiting for it with an assured confidence, and an eager desire, [1 Corinthians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.8); [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23), is the attainment to which we should continually aspire; yes, we should be "looking for it and hastening to it" with a kind of holy impatience, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12), "groaning within ourselves for it, and travailing as it were in pain," until the period for our complete possession of it shall arrive, [Romans 8:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.22-23).

All these things God had previously promised to Jacob; and he could not err, while making God's promises the rule and measure of his desires. The engagement which he entered into, and to which he bound himself in this vow, shows us further,

II. Our bounden duties—

Though the particular engagement then made by Jacob is not binding upon us—yet the spirit of it is of universal obligation:

1. We must acknowledge God as our God—

"Other lords have had dominion over us;" but they are all to be cast down as usurpers; and God alone is to be seated on the throne of our hearts! [Isaiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.13). No rival is to be allowed to remain within us; idols, of whatever kind they are, are to be "cast to the moles and to the bats." We must avow the Lord to be our only, our rightful, Sovereign—whom we are to love and serve with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength. Nor is it sufficient to submit to him merely as a Being whom we are unable to oppose; we must claim him with holy triumph as our God and portion, saying with David, "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you! [Psalm 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1)."

It is remarkable that this very state of mind, which was yet more conspicuous in Jacob in his dying hour, is represented as characterizing the people of God under the Christian dispensation, "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation! [Isaiah 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.9) with [Genesis 49:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.18)."

2. We must glorify him as God—

The two particulars which Jacob mentions, namely, the building of an altar to the Lord on that very spot where God had visited him, and the consecrating to his especial service a tenth of all that God in his providence should give unto him, were optional, until he by this vow had made them his bounden duty. With those particulars we have nothing to do; but there are duties of a similar nature incumbent on us all.

We must maintain in our families, and promote to the utmost in the world, the worship of God; and must regard our property as his, and, after we have "labored with all our might" to serve him with it, must say, "All things come from You, and of Your own have we given to you, 1 Chronicles 29:2; [1 Chronicles 29:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.14)."

There must be one question ever uppermost in the mind: What can I do for God; and "what can I render to him for all the benefits that he has done unto me?" Can I call the attention of others to him, so as to make him better known in the world? If I can, it shall be no obstacle to me that I am surrounded with heathens; nor will I be intimidated because I stand almost alone in the world; I will confess him openly before men; I will "follow my Lord and Savior outside the camp, bearing his reproach;" I will "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt!" Whether called to forsake all for him, or to give all to him, I will do it with alacrity, assured, that his presence in time, and his glory in eternity, will be an ample recompense for all that I can ever do or suffer for his sake. He has bought me with the inestimable price of his own blood; and therefore, God helping me, I will henceforth "glorify him with my body and my spirit, which are his! [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20)."

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are just entering upon the world—

Be moderate in your desires after earthly things. You can at present have no conception how little they will contribute to your real happiness. Beyond food and clothing, you can have nothing that is worth a thought. Solomon, who possessed more than any other man ever did, has pronounced it all to be vanity; and not vanity only, but vexation of spirit also. And, while it is so incapable of adding anything to your happiness:

it subjects you to innumerable temptations, [1 Timothy 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.9);  
it impedes in a very great degree your progress heavenward, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6);  
and it greatly endangers your everlasting welfare, [Matthew 19:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.23-24).  
  
"Love not the world then, nor anything that is in it! 1 [John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.15-16);" but "set your affections altogether on things above." In your attachment to spiritual realities, there can be no excess. In your desire after God, you cannot be too ardent; for "in his presence is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life itself." Set before you the prize of your high calling, and keep it ever in view; and be assured that, when you have attained it, you will never regret any trials you sustained, or any efforts you put forth, in the pursuit of it. One hour spent in "your Father's house" will richly repay them all.

2. To those who have been delivered from trouble—

It is common with people in the season of deep affliction to make vows unto the Lord, and especially when drawing near to the borders of the grave. Now you perhaps in the hour of worldly trouble or of spiritual distress regretted that you had wasted so many precious hours in the pursuit of earthly cares and pleasures, and determined, if God should accomplish for you the wished-for deliverance, you would devote yourselves henceforth entirely to his service. But, when delivered from your sorrows, you have, like metal taken from the furnace, returned to your usual hardness, and forgotten all the vows which were upon you. Even "Hezekiah rendered not to God according to the benefits conferred upon him," and by his ingratitude brought on his whole kingdom the heaviest judgments, which would have fallen upon himself also, had he not deeply "humbled himself for the pride of his heart, [2 Chronicles 32:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.25)."

Brethren, beware of trifling with Almighty God in matters of such infinite concern, "it were better never to vow, than to vow and not pay! [Ecclesiastes 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.4-5)." God does not forget your vows, whether you remember them or not. At the distance of twenty years he reminded Jacob of his vows; and then accepted him in the performance of them, [Genesis 35:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 35.1); [Genesis 35:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 35.3); [Genesis 35:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 35.6-7); [Genesis 35:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 35.9-12). O beg of him to bring yours also to your remembrance! and then "defer not to pay them," in a total surrender of yourselves to him, and a willing consecration of all that you possess to his service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1); [1 Corinthians 8:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.3-5).

3. To those whom God has prospered—

In how many is that saying verified, "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked." But, Beloved, let it not be so with you. It were far better that you were robbed of everything that you possess, and driven an exile into a foreign land—than that you should "forget God who has done so great things for you," and rest in any portion short of that which God has prepared for them that love him.

Who can tell? Your prosperity may be only fattening you as sheep for the slaughter; and at the very moment you are saying, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry;" God may be saying," You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you!"

Be assured that everything which you have, is a talent to be improved for your God. Have you wealth, or power, or influence of any kind? Then employ it for the honor of your God, and for the enlargement and establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom. Then shall you be honored with the approbation of your God; even with the sweetest manifestations of his love in this world, and the everlasting enjoyment of his glory in the world to come!

#47

JACOB PLEADING WITH GOD

**[Genesis 32:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-26)**

"So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Some have thought that the circumstances here recorded were a mere vision; and others a reality; but they seem to have been neither the one nor the other; but a real transaction under a figurative representation. The "wrestling" was not a corporeal trial of strength between two men, but a spiritual exercise of Jacob with his God under the form of an angel or a man. That it was not a mere man who withstood Jacob, is clear, from his being expressly called "God," and from his taking upon him offices which none but God could perform. And that it was a spiritual, and not a corporeal, exercise on the part of Jacob, is evident, from what the prophet Hosea says respecting it, "By his strength Jacob had power with God; yes, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him, [Hosea 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.3-4)."

Such manifestations of God under the angelic or human form were not uncommon in the earlier parts of the Jewish history; and it is generally thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was the person who assumed these appearances; and that he did so in order to prepare his people for his actual assumption of our nature at the time appointed of the Father. His appearance to Jacob at this time was for the purpose of comforting him under the distressing apprehensions which he felt on account of his brother Esau, who was "coming with four hundred men" to destroy him, [Genesis 32:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.7). Jacob used the best means he could devise to pacify his brother, and to preserve as many as he could of his family, in case a part of them should be slain. But he was not satisfied with any expedients which he could use. He well knew, that none but God could afford him any effectual support; he therefore "remained alone" all the night, that he might spread his needs and fears before God, and implore help from him.

On this occasion God appeared to him in the shape and form of a man, and apparently withstood him until the break of day. Then the person would have departed from him; but Jacob would not allow him; but held him fast, as it were, saying, "I will not let you go, except you bless me."

From these words I shall take occasion to show,

I. The constituents of acceptable prayer—

These are beautifully displayed in the prayer of Jacob:

1. A renunciation of all dependence on ourselves—

With this acknowledgment Jacob began his prayer, "O God of my father Abraham, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which you have showed unto your servant, [Genesis 32:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.10)." And such is the feeling that must influence our hearts whenever we attempt to draw near to God. If we think ourselves deserving of the divine favor, not one word can we utter with befitting humility; nor have we the smallest prospect of acceptance with God, "The hungry he will fill with good things; but the rich he will send away empty, [Luke 1:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.53)." It is "he who humbles himself, and he alone, who shall ever be exalted."

In this respect the returning prodigal is a pattern for us all. He takes nothing but shame to himself, and casts himself wholly on the mercy of his father. O that there were in us also such a heart! for not the Pharisee who commends himself, but the Publican who smites on his bosom and cries for mercy, shall obtain the blessings of grace and glory.

2. A simple reliance on the promises of God—

Jacob puts God in remembrance of the promise which had been made to him twenty years before, "You said, I will surely do you good." And this is the true ground on which alone we can venture to ask anything of God. He has "given us exceeding great and precious promises, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)," which he has also "confirmed with an oath, on purpose that we may have consolation" in our souls, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18), and be encouraged to spread before him all our needs. Behold how David laid hold of the promises, and pleaded them before God in prayer, "O Lord God, you have promised this goodness to your servant; do as you have spoken; do as you have said, 2 Samuel 7:25-29."

Again, and again, and again does he in this passage remind God of the promises he had made; and declares, that on them all his prayers, and all his hopes, were founded.

In this manner then are we also are to come before him. Are we anxious to obtain the forgiveness of our sins? We should take with us such promises as these, "Whoever comes unto me I will never cast out!" "Though your sins be as crimson, they shall be as white as snow."

Do we need deliverance from some grievous temptation? we should remind the Lord, Have you not said, "There shall be no temptation without a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it?" So, whatever our needs are, we should take a promise suited to it, (for what trial is there that is not provided for among the promises of God?) and plead it, and rest upon it, and expect the accomplishment of it to our souls.

3. A determination to persevere until we have obtained the desired blessing—

This is the particular point mentioned in our text. And it is that without which we never can prevail. Jacob, though lamed by his antagonist, still held him fast. And thus must we do also; we must "pray, and not faint." A parable was delivered by our blessed Lord for the express purpose of teaching us this invaluable lesson, [Luke 18:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1-8). It should be a settled point in our minds, that "God cannot lie," and "will not deny himself." He has said, "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He has not determined anything indeed with respect to the time or manner of answering our petitions; but answer them he will, in the best manner and the fittest time. He may not grant the particular thing which we ask for, because he may see that the continuance of the trial will answer a more valuable end than the removal of it; but in that case he will give us, as he did to Paul, what is far better! [2 Corinthians 12:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-9)."

In the confidence of this we should wait for him. "If the vision tarries, still we must wait for it, assured that it will come at last, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)." And if at any time our soul feels discouraged by the delay, we must chide it, as David did, "Why are you cast down, O my soul; and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God, [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)." In a word, we must hold fast our blessed Lord, though under the greatest discouragements, [Song of Solomon 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 3.4), and must say, "I will never let you go, except you bless me!"

Where such prayer is offered up before God, no tongue can tell:

II. The blessings it will bring down into the soul—

1. It will ensure to us the effectual care of God's **providence**—

The danger to which Jacob was exposed was imminent; but his prayer averted it, so that the brother whom he feared as an enemy, was turned into a friend.

And what interpositions will not persevering prayer, when offered with humility and faith, obtain? It matters not what situation we are in, if God is our God. We may have seas of difficulty in our way; but they shall open before us. We may be destitute of food; but the clouds shall send us bread, and the rocks gush out with water for our use. Even though we were at the bottom of the sea, from thence should our prayers ascend, and there should they bring to us effectual help. We read of such things in the days of old; but we are ready to think that no such things are to be expected now. But has God ceased to govern the earth? Or is he changed in any respect, having "his hand shortened, that he cannot save, or his ear closed, that he cannot hear?"

What if God does not repeat his former miracles now—has he no other way of accomplishing his will, and of fulfilling his gracious promises? If our hairs are all numbered, and not so much as a sparrow falls to the ground without him—then shall it be in vain for us to call upon him? No; he is still "a God that hears prayer;" and "whatever we shall ask of him, believing, he will do;" yes, "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us."

2. It will ensure to us the yet richer blessings of his **grace**—

The new name which God gave to Jacob was a standing memorial of God's love, [Hosea 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.5), and a pledge of all that should be necessary for his spiritual welfare. And what will he withhold from us, if we seek him with our whole hearts? Recount all the necessities of your soul; express in words all your needs; and when you have exhausted all the powers of language, stretch out your thoughts to grasp in all the ineffable blessings of his grace; all that the promises of God have engaged; all that the covenant itself contains; and all that an almighty and all-gracious God is able to bestow. And when you have done this, we will not only assure it all to you, but declare that "he will do for you, not this only, but exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)." However "wide you open your mouth, he will fill it." Make what attainments you will, you shall still find, that "he gives more grace!" And, whatever difficulties you may have to encounter, you shall find his "grace sufficient for you." Only "continue instant in prayer," and God will give you, not a new name only (for that also will he give, even a name better than of sons and of daughters, [Isaiah 62:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.2); [Isaiah 62:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.12); [Isaiah 56:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.5),) but a new nature also, like unto his own! [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4), that shall progressively transform you into his perfect image "in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24); [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). "

3. It will ensure to us the full possession of his **glory**—

The answer which God gave to Jacob's prayer is more fully recorded in a subsequent chapter. There, after declaring plainly who he was, "I am God Almighty," he promises, "The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to you will I give it, and to your seed after you, [Genesis 35:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 35.11-12)." This was typical of that better inheritance, to which all the Lord's Israel are begotten, and for which they are reserved, [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16); [1 Peter 1:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-5). And there shall the prayer of faith carry us; for "God will never leave us, until he has done all for us that he has spoken to us of! [Genesis 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.15)," and brought us to "his presence, where there is fullness of joy, and to his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore! [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11)."

Hear the dying thief offering his petitions, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom!" And now hear the Savior's answer, "Today shall you be with me in Paradise! [Luke 23:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.42-43)." Thus he speaks also to all who seek him in humility and faith.

It is curious to observe how often, without any apparent necessity, he repeats this promise to us. After saying, "He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes on me shall never thirst," he repeats no less than four times, "I will raise him up at the last day;" and repeatedly also adds, "He shall have everlasting life; he shall not die; he shall live forever! [John 6:35-58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.35-58)." And why is all this but to assure us, that, "Whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive, [Matthew 21:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.22);" yes, that he will "give us, not to the half, but to the whole, of his kingdom! [Mark 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.23)."

Let me add in conclusion:

1. A word of **inquiry**—

What resemblance do we bear to Jacob in this particular? I ask not whether we have ever spent a whole night in prayer, but whether we have ever wrestled with God at all; and whether, on the contrary, our prayers have not for the most part been cold, formal, hypocritical; and whether we have not by the very mode of offering our prayers rather mocked and insulted God, than presented to him any acceptable sacrifice? Say whether there be not too much reason for that complaint, "There is none that calls upon Your name, that stirs up himself to lay hold of You, [Isaiah 64:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.7)."

Dear brethren, I know nothing which so strongly marks our departure from God as this. To an earthly friend we can go, and tell our complaints, until we have even wearied him with them; and in the prosecution of earthly things we can put forth all the energy of our minds. But when we go to God in prayer, we are straitened, and have scarcely a word to say; and our thoughts rove to the very ends of the earth. The prophet Hosea well describes this, "They have not cried unto me with their heart. They return, but not to the Most High; they are like a deceitful bow, [Hosea 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.14); [Hosea 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.16)," which, when it promises to send the arrow to the mark, causes it to fall at our very feet.

O let us not imagine that we are of the true Israel, while we so little resemble Him whose name we bear. The character of the true Israel ever has been, and ever will continue to be, that they are "a people near unto their God! [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14)."

2. A word of **caution**—

On two points we are very liable to err:  
first, in relation to the fervor that we exercise in prayer;  
next, in relation to the confidence that we maintain.

Many, because they are ardent in mind, and fluent in expression, imagine that they are offering to God a spiritual service; when, in fact, their devotion is little else than a bodily exercise. Whoever has made his observations on the way in which both social and public worship is often performed, will have seen abundant cause for this caution. In like manner, the confidence of many savors far more of bold presumption, than of humble affiance.

But let it never be forgotten, that tenderness of spirit is absolutely inseparable from a spiritual frame. When our blessed Lord prayed, it was "with strong crying and tears, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7);" and when Jacob wrestled, "he wept, and made supplication." This then is the state of mind which we must aspire after. Our fervor must be a humble fervor; and our confidence must be a humble confidence.

And while we look to God to accomplish all things for us, we must at the same time use all proper means for the attainment of them. Jacob, though he relied on God to deliver him from his brother s wrath, did not omit to use all prudent precautions, and the most sagacious efforts for the attainment of that end. So likewise must we "labor for the food which the Son of man will give us, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27)," and "keep ourselves in the love of God, [Jude 21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jude 21)," in order to our being "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)."

3. A word of **encouragement**—

It is said of Jacob, that "God blessed him there," even in the very place where he lamed him. Thus shall you also find that your greatest discouragements are only a prelude to your most complete deliverance. To his people of old he said, "You shall go even to Babylon; there shall you be delivered; there shall the Lord redeem you from the hand of your enemies, [Micah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.10); [Jeremiah 30:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.7)." Go on, therefore, fully expecting that God will interpose in due season, and that your darkest hours shall be only a prelude to the brighter day, [Isaiah 54:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-8); [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5).

#48

RECONCILIATION OF ESAU AND JACOB

**[Genesis 33:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 33.4)**

"But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept."

Such are the dispositions of men in general, that they cannot pass any considerable time without feeling in themselves, and exciting in others, some malignant tempers. The more nearly men come in contact with each other, the more do they disagree. Nations are most inveterate against those who are most in their vicinity. Societies are for the most part distracted by opposing interests. Families are rarely to be found, where the demon of discord has not raised his throne; yes, even the dearest friends and relatives are too often filled with animosity against each other. Happy would it be, if disagreements were found only among the ungodly; but they frequently enter into the very church of God, and kindle even in good men a most unhallowed fire.

Paul and Barnabas were a lamentable instance of human weakness in this respect. But on the present occasion we are called to consider, not a quarrel, but a reconciliation. The quarrel indeed had been rancorous in the extreme; but the reconciliation, as described in the text, was most cordial and most affecting.

We would call your attention to a few observations arising from the circumstances before us—

I. The resentments of brethren are usually exceedingly deep—

If a stranger injures us in any respect, the irritation produced by the offence is, for the most part, of very short duration. But if a brother, or a friend, and more especially a person with whom we have been united in the bonds of the Spirit, provokes us to anger, the wound is more severe, and the impression more lasting. In many cases the difficulty of effecting a reconciliation is so great, as almost to preclude a hope of restoring the former amity.

One who was thoroughly conversant with human nature, has told us, that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city!" We should be ready to imagine that in proportion as the previous union was close and affectionate, the restoration of that union would be easy; and that the spirits which had suffered a momentary separation, would, like the flesh which has been lacerated, join together again readily, and, as it were, of their own accord.

But the reverse of this is true; nor is it difficult to be accounted for. The disappointment of the two parties is greater. From strangers we expect nothing; and if we find rudeness or selfishness or any other evil quality, though we may be offended at it, we are not disappointed. But from friends, and especially religious friends, we expect all that is kind and amiable; and therefore we are the more keenly affected when anything of a contrary aspect occurs.

Moreover the aggravating circumstances are more numerous. Between friends there are a thousand little circumstances taken into the account, which could find no place among strangers, and which in fact, often operate more forcibly on the mind than the more immediate subject in dispute. Above all, the foundations of their regard are overthrown. Each thinks himself in the right. Each thought highly of the honor, the integrity, the friendship, or perhaps the piety of the other; and behold, each imagines that the other's conduct towards him has violated all these principles, and given him reason to fear that he was deceived in his judgment of the other; or at least, that he was not deserving of that high opinion which he had entertained of him.

From some such considerations as these, the alienation of the parties from each other, if not more fierce and violent—is usually more fixed and settled, in proportion to their previous intimacy and connection.

But,

II. However deep the resentment of anyone may be, we may hope by proper means to overcome it—

We cannot have a better pattern in this respect than that which Jacob set before us. The means we should use are,

1. Prayer to God—

God has access to the hearts of men, and "can turn them wherever he will." The instances wherein he has exerted his influence upon them, to induce them either to relieve his friends, or to punish his enemies, are innumerable. By prayer his aid is obtained. It was by prayer that Jacob prevailed. He had experienced the seasonable and effectual interposition of the Deity when Laban pursued him with such wrath and bitterness; he therefore again applied to the same almighty Friend, and again found him "ready to save." Prayer, if fervent and believing, shall be as effectual as ever; there is nothing for the obtaining of which it shall not prevail. To this then we should have recourse in the first instance. Nothing should be undertaken without this. We should not neglect other means; but our chief dependence should be placed on this; because nothing but the blessing of God can give success to any means we use.

2. A conciliatory conduct to man—

Nothing could be more conciliatory, nothing more ingenious, than the device of Jacob, in sending so many presents to his brother, in so many distinct and separate parts, and with the same information so humbly and so continually repeated in his ears. Vehement as Esau's anger was, it could not withstand all this kindness, humility, and gentleness. The submission of his brother perfectly disarmed him; and "the gift in his bosom pacified his strong wrath, [Proverbs 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.14)."

Thus we may hope to "overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)." As stones are melted by being subjected to the action of intense heat, so are the hardest of men melted by love; it "heaps coals of fire upon their head, [Romans 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.20)," and turns their rancorous hostilities into self-condemning accusations, [1 Samuel 24:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.16-17).

We say not indeed that the victory shall be certain and uniform in all cases; for even the Savior's meekness did not prevail to assuage the malice of his enemies; but, as a means, we may reasonably expect it to conduce to that end. As a proud, distant, and vindictive carriage serves to confirm the hatred of an adversary—so, on the other hand, a kind, gentle, and submissive deportment has a direct tendency to effect a reconciliation with him.

Not that a short and transient care will suffice; on the contrary,

III. When once a reconciliation is effected, extreme caution is necessary to preserve and maintain it—

A wound that has been lately closed, may easily be torn open again; and friendship that has been dissolved by any means, does not speedily regain its former stability. To cement affection, much attention is required. We must aim at it,

1. By mutual kindnesses and endearments—

Exceeding tender was the interview between the brothers, after their long absence, and alienation from each other. Nor should we deem it beneath us to yield thus to the emotions of love, or to express our regards by kindnesses and tears. These may possibly be counterfeited by a consummate hypocrite; but, in general, they are the involuntary effusions of a loving heart. And as denoting cordiality, they have the strongest tendency to unite discordant minds, and to efface from the memory all painful recollections.

2. By abstaining from all mention of past grievances—

The revival of things which have been matters in dispute, generally revive the feelings which the dispute occasioned. And, as few are ever found to acknowledge that the fault or error has been wholly on their own side, recriminations will arise from accusations, and the breach perhaps be made wider than ever. To bury matters in oblivion is the readiest way to the maintenance of peace. In this respect the reconciled brothers acted wisely; explanations would only have led to evil consequences; and therefore they avoided them altogether. And we in similar circumstances shall do well to follow their example.

3. By guarding against that kind or degree of interaction that may rekindle animosities—

There are some whose dispositions are so opposite, that they cannot long move in harmony with each other, "not being agreed, they cannot walk comfortably together." It is thus particularly with those whose spiritual views are different; for, "what communion has light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?"

It was prudent in Jacob to decline the offered civilities of Esau, when he saw the mutual sacrifices that would be necessary in order to carry them into effect; it was prudent that Esau with his four hundred armed men should prosecute their journey without needless incumbrances and delays; and that Jacob should be left at liberty to consult the comfort of his children, and the benefit of his flocks. Had the two endeavored to make concessions, and to accommodate themselves to each other, neither would have been happy; and their renewed amity would have been endangered. Thus, where the dispositions and habits are so dissimilar as to bid defiance, as it were, to mutual concessions, the best way to preserve peace is to interfere with each other as little as possible.

APPLICATION—

Are there any who are involved in disputes and quarrels? Follow after peace; and be forbearing and forgiving to others, if ever you would that God should be so to you, [Matthew 18:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.35). Are there any who desire reconciliation with an offended friend? Be willing rather to make, than to exact, submission; and let generosity and kindness be exercised to the uttermost, to soften the resentments which have been harbored against you.

And lastly, are there any who have an opportunity of promoting peace? Embrace it gladly, and exert yourselves with impartiality. And instead of widening a breach, endeavor to heal it by all possible offices of love. Let the quarrels of brethren be regarded as a fire, which it is every one's duty and desire to extinguish. Thus shall you yourselves have the blessing promised to peace-makers, and be numbered among the children of God, [Matthew 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.9).

#49

SLAUGHTER OF THE SHECHEMITES

**[Genesis 34:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 34.31)**

"And they said: Should he have treated our sister as a harlot?"

The life of man is continually exposed to trouble; and often waves follow waves with little intermission. It was thus in Jacob's case, who, from the time that he fled from the face of Esau, met with a continued series of difficulties and distresses. Having terminated his hard service under Laban, and miraculously escaped the vindictive assaults both of Laban and of Esau, he seemed to have obtained a respite.

But his peace was of very short duration; for his own children, to whom he looked for comfort in his declining years, became to him a source of the most poignant sorrows. It appears indeed, from various circumstances in this short history, that he did not maintain sufficient authority over his own house. Had he taken the direction of matters into his own hands, instead of waiting to consult his young, inexperienced, and headstrong sons, he would have prevented those horrible crimes which they perpetrated without fear, and vindicated without remorse.

In considering the petulant answer which they made to his reproofs, we shall be led to notice,

I. The provocation they had received—

We apprehend that Leah herself was in part accessory to the evils that befell her daughter—

Dinah, like other young people, wished to see, and be seen; and on some festive occasion went to visit the daughters of the land of Canaan. She would probably have been displeased, if her mother had imposed restraints upon her. But it was her parent's duty to consult, not so much her inclination, as her safety; and it was highly blamable in Leah to allow her daughter, scarcely fifteen years of age, to go into scenes of gaiety and dissipation unprotected and unwatched.

Perhaps by this calamity Leah herself was punished for the prostitution of herself (for what else can it be called?) in compliance with her father's wishes. Impersonating her sister Rachel, she had yielded to what might be justly termed, an incestuous relationship; and now she lives to see the humiliation and defilement of her only daughter.

But, whatever degree of blame attached either to Dinah or her mother, the provocation given by Shechem was doubtless exceedingly great—

To take advantage of a thoughtless unprotected female was exceedingly base; and the distress brought by it upon her whole family was most deplorable.

Ah! little do the mirthful and dissipated think, what sacrifices they require for the gratification of their lusts! Here was the happiness, not of an individual only, but of a whole family, destroyed. That her seducer endeavored afterwards to repair the injury, is true; and in this he differed from the generality, who, as soon as they have accomplished their vile purposes, have their love turned into indifference or aversion; but the injury was absolutely irreparable; and therefore we do not wonder that it excited a deep resentment in the bosoms of her dishonored relatives.

But though her brothers were justly indignant at the treatment she had received, they were by no means justified in,

II. The manner in which they resented it—

Shechem, though a prince among the Hivites, instantly made application to Dinah's father to give her to him in marriage. Though he had humbled her, he did not wish to perpetuate her disgrace, but sought as much as possible, to obliterate it forever. The terms he proposed were dictated not only by a sense of honor, but by the most tender affection.

Happy would it have been if Jacob's sons had been actuated by principles equally honorable and praiseworthy! But they, alas! intent only on revenge, contrived a plot as wicked and diabolical as ever entered into the heart of man. They formed a design to murder, not only the person who had given them the offence, but all the men of his city together with him. In the execution of their purpose they employed,

1. Hypocrisy—

They pretended to have scruples of conscience about connecting themselves with people who were uncircumcised. We may admit for a moment, that this did really operate on their minds as an objection to the projected union; and that this objection was sufficient to weigh down every other consideration; still what regard had they for conscience when they could deliberately contrive a plan for murdering the whole city? This was indeed to "strain at a gnat, and to swallow a camel."

2. Profaneness—

They knew that both the prince and his people were altogether ignorant of Jehovah, and destitute of the smallest wish to be savingly interested in the Covenant which God had made with Abraham; and yet they proposed that all the males should receive the seal of God's covenant in circumcision; and that too, not in order to obtain any spiritual benefit, but solely with a view to carnal gratification. What a profanation was this of God's holy ordinance! and what impiety was there in recommending to them such a method of attaining their ends!

3. Cruelty—

One would scarcely have conceived that such cruelty could have existed in the human heart. That a spirit of revenge should excite in the minds of these men the thought of murdering the person who was more immediately implicated in the offence, was possible enough; but that it should prompt them to involve a multitude of innocent people in the same ruin; and at a time when those people were making very great sacrifices in order to conciliate their favor; and that it should induce them to make use of religion as a cloak for the more easy accomplishment of their execrable purpose—this almost exceeds belief. Yet such was their inhuman plot, which too successfully they carried into effect. And though their brethren did not join them in destroying the lives of any—yet they so far participated in the crime, as to take captive the defenseless women, and to seize upon all the cattle and property for a prey.

There is nothing so iniquitous, but the perpetrators of it will justify it. This appears from,

III. Their vindication of their conduct—

In their answer to their father's reproof we behold nothing but,

1. Offended pride—

They would not have felt any displeasure against Shechem, if he had dealt with any other female, or any number of them, as harlots. But that he should offer such an indignity to "their sister" this was the offence, an offence that could not be expiated by anything less than the blood of all that were even in the most distant way connected with Shechem. We are surprised and shocked at the relation of this event; and yet is it very similar to what occurs continually before our eyes.

Is an injury done, or an affront offered to us? We feel ourselves called upon by a regard for our own honor to seek the life of the offender. Is a slight encroachment made on the rights of a nation? It is deemed a just cause of war; and the lives of thousands are sacrificed in order to avenge it. But Jacob formed a just estimate of his children's conduct, when he said, "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel."

2. Invincible obduracy—

We might well expect that, after a moment's reflection, these bloody murderers would relent and be filled with remorse. But all sense of guilt, yes, and all regard for their own and their father's safety, seemed to be totally banished from their minds. Instead of regretting that they had acted so treacherous and cruel a part, they vindicate themselves without hesitation, and even tacitly condemn their father, as manifesting less concern for his daughter than they had shown for their sister. We can scarcely conceive a more awful instance than this, of the power of sin to blind the understanding and to harden the heart. But daily experience shows, that, when once the conscience is seared, there is no evil which we will not palliate, no iniquity which we will not justify.

Inferences:

1. How astonishingly may the judgment of men be warped by partiality and self-love!

These men could see evil in the conduct of Shechem, and yet justify their own evil; though theirs was beyond all comparison more vile and horrible than his.

And is it not thus with us? If the world beholds anything amiss in the conduct of a person professing religion, with what severity will they condemn it, even though they themselves are living in the unrestrained commission of ten thousand sins! And even professors of religion too are apt to be officious in pulling out a mote from their brother's eye, while they are inattentive to the beam that is in their own eye. But let us learn rather to exercise forbearance towards the faults of others, and severity towards our own faults.

2. How certainly will there be a day of future retribution!

Here we behold a whole city of innocent men put to death, and their murderers going away unpunished. But let us not on this account arraign the dispensations of Providence. In the last day all these apparent inequalities will be rectified. It will then infallibly go well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked. The excuses which men now make, will be of no avail; but every motive and deed shall appear in its proper colors; and every man receive according to what he has done in the body, whether it be good or evil.

#50

JOSEPH ENVIED BY HIS BRETHREN

**[Genesis 37:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.4)**

"When his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him."

We are not expressly told in Scripture that the events of Joseph's life were intended to prefigure those which would afterwards be accomplished in the Messiah; but the humiliation and exaltation of each, together with the means whereby both the one and the other were effected, are so much alike, that we can scarcely view them in any other light than as a typical prophecy fulfilled in the Antitype.

It is not however our intention to prosecute the history of Joseph in this view; we shall rather notice some of the most striking particulars as tending to elucidate the passions by which mankind in general are actuated, and the changes to which they are exposed. The words of our text describe the dispositions of his brethren towards him, and will lead us to consider,

I. The occasions of his brethren's hatred—

Joseph was pre-eminently marked as the object of his father's love—

That his father should love him above all his brethren is not to be wondered at; Joseph was born to him of his beloved Rachel; and in him, Rachel, though dead, might be said to live. He was also imbued with early piety, while his brethren were addicted to all manner of evil; insomuch that he himself was forced to report their wickedness to his father, in order that they might be corrected and restrained by his parental authority. It is probable also that he stayed at home to minister to his aged father, while they were occupied in their pastoral cares; and that he won the affections of his parent by his dutiful and incessant assiduities.

As a general principle, we highly disapprove of partiality in parents towards their children; though we think it justified, when it is founded on a great and manifest difference in their moral character; inasmuch as it is a parent's duty to mark his approbation of religion and morals. But in no case ought that partiality to be shown by such vain distinctions as Jacob adopted. Joseph's "coat of many colors" was calculated to generate nothing but vanity in the possessor, and envy in those who thought themselves equally entitled to their parent's favor; and indeed this very distinction proved a source of all the calamities which afterwards befell him.

God himself also was pleased to point Joseph out as destined to far higher honors—

God revealed to him in dreams, that all his family should one day make obeisance to him. The dreams were doubled, as Pharaoh's afterwards were, [Genesis 41:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 41.32), to show that his exaltation above all his family, and their humblest submission to him, would surely come to pass. These dreams being divulged by Joseph, he became more than ever an object of most inveterate hatred to his brethren. They could not endure that even God himself should exercise his sovereign will towards him. They considered every favor shown to him (whether by God or man) as an injury done to themselves; and the more he was honored, the more were they offended at him.

They did not consider, that he was not to be blamed for his father's partiality, nor to be condemned for those destinies which he could neither procure nor prevent. Blinded by envy, they could see nothing in him that was good and commendable, but made everything which he either said or did, an occasion of blame.

To set his brethren's conduct in its true light, we will endeavor to show:

II. The evil of that envy by which they were actuated—

Envy is one of the most hateful passions in the human heart!

1. Envy is most unreasonable in itself—

It is called forth by the honor or advantages which another enjoys above ourselves. Now if those advantages are merited, why should we grudge the person the possession of them? If they are not acquired by merit, still they are given to him by the unerring providence of God, who "has a right to do what he will with his own. Is our eye then to be evil because he is good? [Matthew 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.15)."

Besides, the things which we envy a person the possession of, are often snares, which we should rather fear than covet; and, at best, they are only talents, of which he must soon give a solemn account to God. If therefore we are sensible how little improvement we have made of the talents already committed to us, we shall see at once how little reason we have to envy others their increased responsibility.

2. Envy is extremely injurious both to ourselves and others—

Nothing can be more destructive of a person's own happiness than to yield to this hateful passion. It causes him to derive pain from those things which ought to afford him pleasure; and to have his enmity augmented by those very qualities which ought rather to conciliate his regard. Envy is justly declared to be "the rottenness of the bones, [Proverbs 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.30)." It corrodes our inmost souls, so that we can enjoy no comfort whatever, while we are under its malignant influence. And there is nothing so spiteful, nothing so murderous, which we shall not both devise and execute, when we are subject to envy's power! [James 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.16).

Behold Cain, when envying Abel the testimonies of God's approbation; behold Saul, when he heard David celebrated as a greater warrior than himself; how downcast their looks! what wrathful and vindictive purposes did they form! how were they changed into incarnate fiends!

Thus it was also with Joseph's brethren, who could be satisfied with nothing but the utter destruction of the envied object.

3. Envy renders us as unlike to God as possible—

See how our God and Savior acted towards us in our fallen state; instead of rejoicing in our misery, he sought to redeem us from it, and sacrificed his own happiness and glory to re-establish us in the state from which we had fallen.

What a contrast to this, does the envious person exhibit!

He repines at the happiness of others, while God is grieved at their misery.

He seeks the destruction of others, while God labors for their welfare.

He breaks through every restraint to effect their ruin, though with the loss of his own soul; while God takes upon him all the pains of Hell, in order to exalt as to the blessedness of Heaven.

He is thus hostile to those who have never injured him, while God loads with his benefits those who have lived in a constant scene of rebellion against him.

What can set the passion of envy in a more hateful light than this?

4. Envy transforms us into the very image of the devil—

Satan was once an angel of light, as happy as any that are now before the throne; but he kept not his first estate. He sinned, and thereby brought upon himself the wrath of Almighty God.

It pleased God afterwards to form another order of beings, who were designed to fill up, as it were, the seats from which the fallen spirits had been driven. But this envious spirit Satan, strove to turn them from their allegiance. He knew well enough that he could not thereby mitigate his own misery; but he could not endure to see others happy, while he himself was miserable; yes, he was willing even to augment his own guilt and misery, provided he might destroy the happiness of man.

With the same view Satan afterwards strove to set God against his servant Job, in order that he might deprive that holy man of his integrity and bliss.

In this mirror, let the envious man behold himself, and he will discern every lineament of his own hateful image. Well did Jesus say of such people, "You are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)."

By way of improving the subject, let us inquire,

1. Why is it that people are so unconscious of the envy within them?

It is not surely, because they have not this principle in their hearts; for, "Has the Scripture said in vain: The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy, [James 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.5)." All are more or less actuated by envy, until it has been conquered by divine grace. But it is confessedly a depraved principle, and therefore men are averse to acknowledge its existence in them.

Envy is also a principle easily concealed by specious coverings. Its effects are ascribed to just indignation against sin; and the most eminent virtues of a person are blackened by the most opprobrious names, in order to justify the resentment which it excites in the bosom. Other strong passions, such as lust and anger, are more determinate in their actings, and therefore less capable of being hidden from our own view. But envy, like avarice, is of so doubtful a character, and admits of so many plausible excuses, that those who are most subject to it are unconscious of its existence and operation within them.

2. How may envy be discerned?

Envy is not excited, except where the advancement or happiness of another appears within our own reach. To discern its workings therefore, we must watch the actings of our mind towards people whose situation and circumstances nearly accord with our own. The principle is then most strongly operative, when there is a degree of rivalry or competition existing. People do not like to be excelled in that line wherein they themselves desire distinction.

The one who courts admiration,  
the tradesman who values himself upon the superiority of his goods,  
the scholar who is a candidate for fame,  
the statesman who is ambitious of honor,  
must consider how he feels, when he sees himself outstripped in his course; whether he would not be glad to hear that his successful competitor had failed in his expectations; whether his ear is not open to anything that may reduce his rival to a level with himself; whether, in short, the fine coat and promised elevation of Joseph do not grieve him?

Let people be attentive to the motions of their hearts on such occasions as these, and they will find that this accursed principle is exceeding strong within them; and that they need to watch and pray against it continually, if they would gain the mastery over it in any measure.

3. How may envy be subdued?

Doubtless many things might be prescribed which would conduce to this end. We content ourselves however with specifying only two.

**First**, Let us endeavor to get a knowledge of our own vileness. When we have thoroughly learned that we deserve God's wrath and indignation, we shall account it a mercy that we are out of Hell! We shall not then be grieved at any preference shown to others. We shall see that we have already far more than we deserve; and we shall be willing that others should enjoy what God has given them, when we see how mercifully he has dealt with us.

**Next**, Let us get our hearts filled with love to our fellow-creatures. We do not envy those whom we love; the more we love any person, the more we rejoice in his advancement. The Apostle justly says, "Love does not envy." Let us beg of God then to implant this better principle in our hearts. Then shall our selfish passions be mortified and subdued; and we shall be made like unto him, whose name is love! [1 John 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.8).

#51

THE NEED OF FLEEING FROM SIN WITH ABHORRENCE

**[Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9)**

"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

The grace of God is equally necessary for us in every situation of life.

In adversity, God's grace is necessary to support us.

In prosperity, God's grace is necessary to preserve us.

We would have been ready indeed to congratulate Joseph on his advancement in the house of Potiphar, as though his trials had been ended; but we see that, if his former path was strewed with thorns, his present station was slippery, and replete with danger!

His history is well known, and need not be reviewed here; suffice it to say, that when tempted by his mistress, and importuned from day to day to commit sin with her—he resisted her solicitations with unshaken constancy, and rejected her proposals with indignation and abhorrence. The reply, which through the grace of God he was enabled to make, leads us to observe that,

I. Sin is no slight evil—

The unconverted in general imagine sin to be of very little consequence—

Sin universally prevails, and, except where it greatly interferes with the welfare of society, is countenanced and approved. The customs of the world sanction the practice of it to a certain extent in every one, whether male or female; though the greater latitude of indulgence is allowed to men. The very education that is given both to our sons and daughters, tends only to foster in them:  
pride and vanity,  
wantonness and sensuality,  
worldliness and profaneness.

But let but these dispositions assume the names of ease, elegance, and gaiety—and they instantly lose all their malignant qualities; and, instead of exciting our abhorrence, endear to us the people by whom they are indulged. Too many indeed will not submit to any restraints, but will even justify the grossest immoralities. They impose upon their excesses some specious appellation; they call drunkenness, conviviality; and whoredom, youthful indiscretion. Thus they commit sin without fear, persist in it without remorse, and even glory in their shame—when, through age and infirmity, they can no longer follow their former courses.

But, if viewed aright, sin will appear a dreadful evil—

Can that be light or venial which cast myriads of angels from their height of glory, into the bottomless abyss of Hell? Is that of trifling importance which in one moment ruined the whole race of man, and subjected them to an everlasting curse?

But if these effects are not sufficient to convince us, let us behold the Savior in the garden of Gethsemane, or on the hill of Calvary; let us behold the Lord of glory bathed in blood, and expiring under the curse which our sins have merited; and we shall instantly confess with Solomon, that they are "fools, who make a mock of sin!"

Not however to insist on this general view of sin, we observe that,

II. Considered as an offence against God, sin's enormity is exceedingly great—

This is the particular light in which sin struck the mind of Joseph. Though the iniquity to which he was tempted, would have been a defiling of his own body, and an irreparable injury to Potiphar his master—yet every other consideration seemed to be swallowed up in that of the offence it would give to God. David viewed his sin in this light, [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4). Sin is leveled more immediately against God himself:

1. Sin is a defiance of God's authority—

God commands us to keep his law; and enforces his commands with the most solemn and encouraging sanctions. But sin says, like Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should regard him? I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice! [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2). See also [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4) and [Jeremiah 44:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16)." Is it a light matter for:  
a servant thus to insult his master,  
a child to insult his parent,  
a creature to insult his Creator?

2. Sin is a denial of God's justice—

God threatens, "Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished! [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21)."

But what does sin reply? It says like them of old, "The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad! [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)." And shall it be thought a trifling matter to rob the Deity thus of his most essential perfections?

3. Sin is an abuse of God's goodness—

It is altogether owing to the goodness of God that we are even capable of sinning against him. It is from him that we receive the bounties which we abuse to sin, and the strength whereby we provoke the eyes of his glory. And can anything be conceived more vile than to make his goodness to us the very means and occasion of insulting him to his face?

4. Sin is a rejection of God's mercy—

God is continually calling us to accept of mercy through the Son of his love. But sin "tramples under foot the Son of God;" it even "crucifies him afresh, and puts him to an open shame." Sin proclaims aloud that the gratification of our lusts is to be preferred to the glory of Heaven; and that it is better to perish in Hell by self-indulgence, than to obtain salvation in the exercise of self-denial. What terms then can sufficiently express the enormity of sin, which so blinds and infatuates its wretched votaries?

It is not possible to behold sin in this light, without acknowledging that,

III. We ought to flee from it with indignation and abhorrence—

Instead of tampering with sin, we should **flee**from it—

Sin is of so fascinating a nature that it soon bewitches us, and leads us astray. As "a man cannot take fire into his bosom without being burnt," so neither can he harbor sin in his heart without being vitiated and corrupted by it. Had Achan fled from the wedge of gold as soon as ever he found a desire after it springing up in his heart; and had David turned away his eyes the very instant he saw Bathsheba—then how much shame and misery would they have escaped! But the breach, which might easily have been stopped at the first, presently defied the efforts of an accusing conscience; and a flood of iniquity soon carried them away with irresistible impetuosity! Thus also it will be with us. If we parley with the tempter, he will surely overcome us! We must resist sin at it's first uprising, if we would oppose it with success!

Instead of loving sin, we should utterly **abhor**it—

The grace of God enabled Joseph to reject with abhorrence the offers proposed to him; and to prefer a dungeon with a good conscience, before the indulgence of a criminal passion, or the favor of a seducing mistress. Thus should we turn with indignation from the allurements of sin! We should "make a covenant with our eyes," yes, with our very hearts, that we may close, as much as possible, every avenue of evil.

Instead of mitigating sin, we should new it in all its aggravations; and especially as an offence against a just and holy, a merciful and gracious God. Nor should we ever forget, that, though it be "rolled as a sweet morsel under the tongue, it will prove gall in the stomach;" and though it flatters us with its innocence, "it will bite as a serpent, and sting like an adder!"

Address,

1. To those who think lightly of sin—

We well know that the generality of men have much to say in mitigating of their guilt; and, if they had been in the situation of Joseph, would have accounted the greatness of the temptation a sufficient excuse for their compliance with it. But to what purpose shall we mitigate our guilt, unless we can prevail on the Judge of the living and dead to view it with our eyes? We may indeed weaken our present convictions, but we shall only secure thereby, and enhance, our eternal condemnation! Let us remember that "fleshly lusts war against the soul, [1 Peter 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.11);" and that either we must mortify and subdue them—or they will enslave and destroy us! [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13). For, even though the whole universe would combine to justify the commission of sin, not one who yields to its solicitations, shall ever pass unpunished!

2. To those who are beginning to see the evil of sin.

It is an unspeakable mercy to have a view of the malignity of sin. To see how much we have deserved the wrath and indignation of God, is the very first step towards repentance and salvation. Let not any then turn away from this sight too hastily, or think they have discovered the evil of sin in its full extent. This is a lesson we are to be learning all our days; and it is only in proportion as we advance in this humiliating knowledge, that we shall be qualified to receive and enjoy the Savior.

It is necessary indeed that, while we look at sin, we look also at Him who made atonement for it; for otherwise, we shall be led to despair of mercy. But, if we keep our eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and see the infinite extent of his merits, we need never be afraid of entertaining too bitter a remembrance of sin.

The more we loath ourselves for past iniquities—the more shall we be fortified against temptations to commit them in the future, and the more will God himself be ready to preserve and bless us.

3. To those who, like Joseph, are enabled to withstand sin.

Blessed be God, there are many living witnesses to prove, that the grace of God is as sufficient at this day, as ever it was, to purify the heart and to "keep the feet of his saints". Let those then who are enabled to hold fast their integrity, give glory to him, by whom they are strengthened and upheld. But let them remember, that they are never beyond the reach of temptation, nor ever so likely to fall, as when they are saying, "My mountain stands strong; I shall not be moved".

Let us then continue to watch against the renewed assaults of our great adversary. Never let him find us off our guard, or draw us to parley with him. Let us suspect him, and he shall not deceive us. Let us resist him, and he shall flee from us; and the very assaults that he shall make upon us, shall terminate in our honor, and his own confusion!

#52

INGRATITUDE OF PHARAOH'S CHIEF CUPBEARER

**[Genesis 40:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 40.23)**

"The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him."

It was a wise and prudent choice which David made, "Let me fall into the hands of God, and not into the hands of man." Man, when intent on evil, knows no bounds, except those which are prescribed by his ability to execute his wishes. He is easily incensed, but with difficulty appeased. The ties of blood and relationship are not sufficient to bind people in amity with each other, when once any ground of discord arises between them. It might have been hoped that in such a family as Jacob's, love and harmony would prevail; but to such a degree had envy inflamed his whole family against their younger brother, that they conspired against his life, and only adopted the milder alternative of selling him for a slave, through a horror which they felt at the thought of shedding his blood.

Nor will the most amiable conduct always ensure regard, or protect a person from the most cruel injuries. The holy, chaste, and conscientious deportment of Joseph should have exalted his character in the eyes of his mistress; but when she failed in her attempts to ensnare his virtue, her passionate desire after him was converted into rage; and she procured the imprisonment of him whom she had just before solicited to be her paramour.

During his confinement, he had opportunities of showing kindness to his fellow-prisoners. To two of them he interpreted their dreams, which proved to be prophetic intimations of their respective fates. Of Pharaoh's chief cupbearer, whose speedy restoration he foretold, he made a most reasonable request; he told him, that he had been stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and that there existed no just cause for his imprisonment; and he entreated, that he would make known his case to Pharaoh, and intercede for his deliverance. In making this request, he never once incriminated either his brethren who had sold him, or his mistress who had falsely accused him; he cast a veil of love over their faults, and sought for nothing but the liberty of which he had been unjustly deprived. Who would conceive that so reasonable a request, presented to one who had such opportunities of knowing his excellent character, to one too on whom he had conferred such great obligations, should fail?

Lord, what is man? how base, how selfish, how ungrateful! Let us fix our attention upon this incident in the history of Joseph, and make some suitable reflections upon it.

We observe then:

I. Gratitude is but a feeble principle in the human mind.

Corrupt and sinful principles are, alas! too strong in the heart of man; but those which are more worthy of cultivation, are weak indeed. To what a degree are men actuated by pride, ambition, covetousness, envy, wrath, revenge! To what exertions will they not be stimulated by hope or fear! But the motions of gratitude are exceedingly faint; in the general, they are scarcely perceptible; and though on some extraordinary occasions, like that of Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea, the heart may glow with a sense of the mercies given unto us, we soon forget them, even as the Israelites did, and return to our former coldness and indifference.

II. The operations of gratitude are rather weakened than promoted by prosperity.

Pharaoh's cupbearer, when restored to his master's service, thought no more of the friend whom he had left in prison. This is the general effect of prosperity, which steels the heart against the wants and miseries of others, and indisposes it for the exercise of sympathy and compassion. It is usually found too, that the more we abound in temporal blessings, the more unmindful we are of Him who gave them. That is a true description of us all, "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked."

On the other hand, adversity tends to bring us to consideration; when we have suffered bereavements of any kind, we begin to feel the value of the things we have lost; and to regret that we were not more thankful for them while they were continued to us. The loss of a part of our blessings often renders us more thankful for those that remain; and it is no uncommon sight to behold a sick person more thankful for an hour's sleep, or a small intermission of pain, or the services of his attendants—than he ever was for all the ease and sleep that he enjoyed, or the services that were rendered him, in the days of his health.

We have a very striking instance of the different effects of prosperity and adversity in the history of Hezekiah. In his sickness he exclaimed, "The living, the living, he shall praise you, as I do this day;" but when restored to health, he forgot his Benefactor, and "rendered not again according to the benefits that had been done unto him." In this, I say, he is an example of the ingratitude which prevails in the world at large; for we are told, that "God left him to try him, and that he might know all that was in his heart."

III. The lack of gratitude is hateful in proportion to the obligations conferred upon us.

We suppose that no man ever read attentively the words of our text without exclaiming (in thought at least, if not in words), What base ingratitude was this! Whether we consider his obligations to Joseph, who had been to him a messenger of such glad tidings, or his obligations to God, who had overruled the heart of Pharaoh to restore him to his place, he surely was bound to render that small service to his fellow-prisoner, and to interpose in behalf of oppressed innocence.

We cannot but feel a detestation of his character on account of his unfeeling and ungrateful conduct. Indeed it is thus that we are invariably affected towards all people; and more especially those who have received favors at our hands. If we receive an injury or an insult, or are treated with neglect by people whom we have greatly benefitted—we fix immediately on their ingratitude, as the most aggravating circumstance of their guilt; it is that which pains us, and which makes them appear most odious in our eyes. Though this sentiment may be easily carried to excess—yet, if kept within due bounds, it forms a just criterion of the enormity of any offence that is committed against us.

It was this which in God's estimation so greatly aggravated the guilt of the Jewish nation, "They forgot God who had done such great things for them! [Psalm 106:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.7); [Psalm 106:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.13); [Psalm 106:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.21)." And we shall do well to bear it in mind, as the means of awakening in our own minds a just sense of our condition before God; for ingratitude, above all things, subjects us to his displeasure! [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21); [2 Timothy 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.2); [Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.3); [Deuteronomy 28:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.45); [Deuteronomy 28:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.47).

This subject may be fitly improved.

1. Our ingratitude should fill us with shame and confusion before God.

If we think of our temporal mercies only, they call for incessant songs of praise and thanksgiving. But what do we owe to God for the gift of his dear Son, and of his Holy Spirit, and of a preached Gospel? What do we owe to God if he has rendered his word in any measure effectual for the enlightening of our minds, and the quickening of our souls? "What kind of people then ought we to be?" How should our hearts glow with love, and our mouths be filled with his praise! Let us prosecute these thoughts, and we shall soon blush and be confounded before God, and lie low before him in dust and ashes!

2. This topic should keep us from putting our trust in man.

Many years had Joseph been confined in prison, and now he thought he would have an advocate at court, who would speedily liberate him from his confinement. But God would not let him owe his deliverance to an arm of flesh; yes, he left him two years longer in prison, that he might learn to put his trust in God alone; and then he wrought his deliverance by his own arm. "Until his time was come, the word of the Lord tried him." At last, God gave to Pharaoh dreams which no magicians could expound; and thus brought to the cupbearer's recollection the oppressed youth who had interpreted his dreams, and who was the only person that could render similar service to the affrighted monarch.

Now we also, like Joseph, are but too apt to lean on an arm of flesh, instead of looking simply to the Lord our God; but we shall always find in the outcome, that the creature is only a broken reed, which will pierce the hand that leans upon it; and that none but God can render us any effectual assistance. Let us then trust in God alone, and with all our heart, and then we shall never be confounded.

3. This topic should make us admire and adore the Lord Jesus.

That blessed Savior is not less mindful of us in his exalted state, than he was in the days of his flesh. Yes, though not at all indebted to us, though, on the contrary, he has all possible reason to abandon us forever—yet he is mindful of us day and night; he makes intercession for us continually at the right hand of God; he considers this as the very end of his exaltation; and he improves every moment in protecting, comforting, and strengthening those who depend upon him. We challenge anyone to say, When did the blessed Savior forget him? We may have been ready to say indeed, "He has forsaken and forgotten us;" but "He can no more forget us than a woman can forget her nursing child." Let us then bless his name, and magnify it with thanksgiving. And let us from time to time offer to Him the petition of the dying thief, "Lord, remember me when you are in your kingdom;" and not all the glory and felicity of Heaven shall divert his attention from us for a single moment!

#53

JOSEPH'S ADVANCEMENT

**[Genesis 41:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 41.41)**

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

In the eventful life of Joseph we are particularly struck with the suddenness and greatness of the changes he experienced. One day he was his father's favorite; the next he was threatened with death and sold as a slave. One day he was at the head of Potiphar's household; the next he was immured in a prison and laden with fetters of iron. From that state also he was called in a moment by the singular providence of God, and exalted to the government of the first nation upon earth. Of this we are informed in the text; from whence we take occasion to observe,

I. We can be in no state, however desperate, from whence God cannot speedily deliver us.

The state of Joseph, though considerably ameliorated by the indulgence of the keeper of his prison, was very hopeless. He had been many years in prison; and had no means of redress afforded him. His cause being never fairly tried, his innocence could not be cleared; and there was every reason to apprehend that his confinement would terminate only with his life. The hopes he had entertained from the kind offices of Pharaoh's cupbearer had completely failed; and God had allowed him to be thus disappointed, in order that, "having the sentence of death in himself, he might not trust in himself, but in God that raises the dead." But when God's time had arrived, every difficulty vanished, and his elevation was as great as it was sudden and unexpected.

It would be well if we bore in mind the ability of God to help us. People when brought into great trials by loss of dear friends, by financial difficulties, or by some other calamitous event, are apt to think, that, because they see no way for their escape, their state is hopeless; and, from indulging despair, they are ready to say with Job, "I am weary of life," and "my soul chooses strangling, and death rather than my life! [Job 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 7.15)."

But we should remember that there is "a God with whom nothing is impossible;" though human help may fail us, "his arm is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear;" yes rather he would glorify himself, as he did in rescuing Israel at the Red Sea, if we would call upon him; and our extremity would be the opportunity he would seize for his effectual interpositions, "In the mount, the Lord would be seen."

We may apply the same observations to those who seem to have cast off all fear of God, and to have sinned beyond a hope of recovery. But while the conversion of Saul, and the deliverance of Peter from prison, stand on record, we shall see that there is nothing too great for God to effect, and nothing too good for him to give, in answer to the prayer of faith.

II. God is never at a loss for means whereby to effect his gracious purposes.

He had decreed the elevation of Joseph to the highest dignity in the land of Egypt. To accomplish this, he causes Pharaoh to be disturbed by two significant dreams, which none of his magicians could interpret. The solicitude of Pharaoh to understand the purpose of his dreams leads his cupbearer to "confess his fault" in having so long neglected the youth who had, two years before, interpreted his dreams; and to recommend him as the only person capable of satisfying the mind of Pharaoh.

Instantly Joseph is sent for (not from a sense of justice to an injured person, but from a desire for the information which he alone could give); and, upon his interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, and giving suitable advice respecting the steps that should be taken to meet the future distress, he is invested with supreme authority, that he may carry his own plans into execution. Thus God, by suggesting dreams to Pharaoh, and to Joseph the interpretation of them—effects in an hour what, humanly speaking, all the power of Pharaoh could not otherwise have accomplished.

If we were duly observant of God's works of Providence, we would see, in many instances relating to ourselves, how wonderfully God has brought to pass the most unlooked-for events! Things the most strange have been made to subserve his gracious purposes, and to accomplish what no human foresight could have effected for us. In relation to the concerns of our souls this may perhaps be more visible than in any temporal matters. The history of God's people, if it were fully known, would furnish thousands of instances, not less wonderful than that before us, of people "raised" by the most unexpected and apparently trivial means "from the dust or a dunghill—to be set among princes, and to inherit a throne of glory." We are far from recommending any one to trust in dreams, or to pay any attention to them whatever; "For in a multitude of dreams there is futility and worthlessness." But we dare not say that God never makes use of dreams to forward his own inscrutable designs; on the contrary, we believe that he has often made a dream about death or judgment the occasion of stirring up a person to seek after salvation; and that he has afterwards answered the prayers, which originated in that apparently trifling and accidental occurrence.

At all events, there are a multitude of little circumstances which tend to fix the bounds of our habitation, or to bring us into conversation with this or that person, by whom we are ultimately led to the knowledge of the truth. So we should commit our every way to God, and look to him to order everything for us according to the counsel of his own gracious will.

III. We are never in a fairer way to exaltation to happiness than when we are waiting God's time, and submitting to his providential will.

We hear nothing respecting Joseph but what strongly impresses us with a belief that he was perfectly resigned to the will of God. It is most probable indeed that he had formed some expectation from an arm of flesh; but two years experience of human ingratitude had taught him that his help must be in God alone. At last, his recompense is bestowed, and ample compensation is given him for all that he endured. With his prison garments, he puts off his sorrows; and, from a state of oppression and ignominy, he is made the benefactor and the savior of a whole nation.

How profitable would it be for us if we could leave ourselves in God's hands, and submit ourselves in all things to his wise disposal! We are persuaded, that our lack of submission to Divine Providence is that which so often necessitates God to afflict us; and that if we could more cordially say, "May Your will be done," we should much sooner and much oftener be favored with the desire of our own hearts.

Have we a husband, a wife, a child in sick and dying circumstances? Our rebellious murmurings may provoke God to inflict the threatened stroke, and to take away the idol which we are so averse to part with. Whereas, if we were once brought to make a cordial surrender of our will to His, he would in many instances arrest the uplifted arm, and restore our Isaac to our bosom. At all events, he would compensate by spiritual blessings whatever we might lose or suffer by a temporal bereavement.

We may yet further learn from this subject,

1. To submit with cheerfulness to all the dispensations of divine Providence.

We may, like Joseph, have many great and long-continued trials; the end of which we may not be able to foresee. But, as in his instance, and in that of Job, "we have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" Just so, we may be sure that our trials shall terminate well; and that however great or long-continued they may be, our future recompense, either in this world or the next, will leave us no reason to complain.

2. To be thankful to God for the Rulers whom he has been pleased to set over us.

It is "by God that kings reign, and princes decree justice." Sometimes, "for the punishment of a land, children (that is, people weak and incompetent) are placed over it," that their infatuated counsels or projects may bring upon it his heavy judgments. We, blessed be God! have been highly favored in this respect. By his gracious providence, we have for a long series of years had people exalted to posts of honor, who, like Joseph, have sought the welfare of the nation, and have promoted it by their wise counsels and indefatigable exertions. Let us thankfully acknowledge God in them, and endeavor to show ourselves worthy of this mercy, by the peaceableness of our demeanor, and the cheerfulness of our submission to them.

3. To be thankful, above all, for our adorable Emmanuel.

"Him has God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior." "To Him has he given a name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow! Compare with [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11)." To Him does our almighty King direct us, saying to every famished soul, "Go to Jesus!" In Him there is all fullness treasured up; to Him all the nations of the earth may go for the bread of life; nor shall any of them be sent away empty. They shall receive it too "without money and without price."

O what do we owe to God for raising us up such a Savior! and what do we owe to Jesus, who has voluntarily undertaken this office, and who suffered on the cruel cross as the appointed step to this glorious elevation! Let us thankfully bow the knee to him; and go to him continually for our daily supplies of grace and peace!

#54

THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE

**[Genesis 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.21)**

"They said to one another: Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."

The history of Joseph appears rather like a well-concerted fiction, than a reality. In it is found all that gives beauty to the finest drama; a perfect unity of design; a richness and variety of incident, involving the plot in obscurity—yet gradually drawing it to its destined end; and the whole issuing happily, to the rewarding of virtue and discouraging of vice. The point to which all tends, is, the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams in the submission of his whole family to him. And here we find his dreams realized through the very means which were used to counteract their accomplishment.

Already had his brethren bowed themselves down with their faces to the earth; but this was only the commencement of their subjection to him; they must be brought far lower yet, and be made to feel the guilt they had contracted by their cruelty towards him. With this view Joseph forbears to reveal himself to them, but deals roughly with them, imprisoning them as spies, and threatening them with death if they do not clear themselves from that charge. They had formerly cast him into a pit, and sold him as a slave; and now they are cast into prison and bound; they once were deaf to his cries and entreaties; and now the governor of Egypt is deaf to theirs. This brings to their remembrance their former conduct; and they trace the hand of an avenging God in their sufferings. Their conscience, which had been so long dormant, now awakes, and performs its office.

This is the incident mentioned in our text; and, confining our attention to it, we shall show,

I. The general office of conscience.

To enter into any philosophical discussion respecting that faculty which we call conscience, would be altogether beside our purpose, and unsuited to the present occasion. It will be sufficient to take the word in its popular sense, as importing that natural faculty whereby we judge both of our actions and the consequences of them.

1. Conscience is given to us by God to operate as a guide.

Of itself indeed it cannot guide, but only according to rules which before exist in the mind. It does not so much tell us what is right or wrong, as whether our actions correspond with our apprehensions of right and wrong. But as we are apt to be biased by interest or passion to violate our acknowledged obligations, conscience is intended to act as a guide or monitor, warning us against the commission of evil, and inciting us to the performance of what is good.

It is true indeed that conscience often stimulates to evil under the notion of good; for Paul followed its dictates in persecuting the Christians, when "he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus, [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9)." Our blessed Lord informs us, that many who would kill his disciples would do it under an idea that they were rendering unto God an acceptable service, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2).

The fault of these people consists not in following the dictates of their conscience, but in not taking care to have their conscience better informed. A thing which is evil in itself cannot be made good by any erroneous conceptions of ours respecting it; but things which are of themselves innocent, become evil, if they are done contrary to the convictions of our own minds, [Romans 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.14); for we ought to be fully persuaded of the propriety of a thing before we do it [Romans 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.5); and "whatever is not of faith is sin, [Romans 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.23)."

2. Conscience is given to us by God to operate as a judge.

Conscience is God's vice-regent in the soul, and authoritatively pronounces in the soul the judgment which God himself will pass on our actions, [Romans 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.15). It takes cognizance not of our actions only, but of our principles and motives, and brings into its estimate everything that will form the basis of God's judgment. Of course, in this, as well as in its suggestions, it may err; for, if it forms a wrong judgment of the qualities of our actions, its judgment must be wrong also as to the consequences of them. It may promise us God's approbation upon grounds that are very erroneous; but when its apprehensions of our duty are themselves just, its award respecting our performance of it is a prelude of God's final judgment; for John says, "If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things;" but "if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God, [1 John 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.20-21)."

But, as its operations are by no means uniform, we proceed to mark,

II. The insensibility of the conscience, when dormant.

Astonishing was the insensibility of the consciences of the sons of Jacob!

When they conspired against their brother Joseph, and cast him into the pit, that he might perish with hunger, they regarded not the cries and entreaties of the youth, but proceeded in their murderous career without remorse. But the seasonable appearance of a company of Ishmaelites suggested to them somewhat of an easier method of ridding themselves of him. At the suggestion of Judah, "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, and our flesh;" they acceded to it, and "were content."

In the first instance, after putting him into the pit, "they sat down to eat bread," evidently without any compunction; but now they were quite "content," applauding themselves for their humanity, instead of condemning themselves for their injustice and cruelty, [Genesis 37:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.23-28).

View next their mode of deceiving their aged father. They took Joseph's coat, and dipped it in the blood of a young goat which they killed for the purpose; and brought it to their father, in order that he might conclude, that an evil beast had devoured his son. (How far God might design this as a just retribution for the deceit which Jacob himself had practiced towards his aged father, when he, by assuming Esau's coat, stole away the blessing that belonged to Esau, we stop not to notice; with this the sons of Jacob had nothing to do.) They behold their aged parent overwhelmed with grief, and absolutely inconsolable for the loss of his son; and these detestable hypocrites "rise up to comfort him, [Genesis 37:31-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.31-35)." Where is conscience all this time? Has it no voice? Is there not one among them all who has a functioning conscience? Not one among all the ten? Does no heart relent at the sight of the anguish of an aged and pious parent, sitting from day to day and from month to month "with sackcloth on his loins," and "going down mourning to the grave?" No; not one of them all, as far as we know, ever "repented, saying: What have I done?" For the space of twenty-two years they all continued in impenitent obduracy; and were not made even at last to feel the guilt they had contracted in selling their brother, until they themselves were brought into somewhat similar circumstances with him, and constrained to read their own crime in their punishment. Such was conscience in them!

Yet this is in reality what we may see in ourselves and in all around us:

Behold the profane, who have not God in all their thoughts, and who never utter the name of God but to blaspheme it; they can go on for years and years, and yet never imagine that they have once offended God.

Behold the sensual, who revel in all manner of impurity; they "wipe their mouth, like the adulteress, and say, I have done no wickedness! [Proverbs 30:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.20)."

Behold the worldly, who have no cares whatever beyond the things of time and sense; their idolatrous love to the creature raises no doubts or fears in their minds; yes, rather, they bless themselves as wise, prudent, and diligent, and think that they have done all that is required of them.

Behold the self-righteous, who, from an excessive conceit of their own goodness, will not submit to the righteousness of God; they can make light of all the invitations of the Gospel, and pour contempt upon its gracious overtures—and yet never once suspect themselves to be enemies of Christ.

Behold the professors of religion who "confess Christ with their lips but in their works deny him;" they will spend a whole life in such self-deceit, and never entertain a doubt but that he will acknowledge them as his in the day of judgment.

And whence is all this? Is it not that conscience is asleep? If it performed in any measure its office, could it be thus? Yet thus it is sometimes even with those who are well instructed in religion. The sins of David are well known; yet even he, who at one time was smitten with grief and shame at having cut off the skirt of a man who sought his life, now kills the very man who was daily hazarding his life for him, and feels no remorse; yes, after having seduced the wife of his friend, and then murdered him, he continues at least nine months as obdurate as the most profligate of the human race; to such a degree was his "conscience seared as with a hot iron! [1 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.2)." To such a degree may our "hearts also be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin! [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13)."

But the text leads us to contemplate more particularly,

III. The power of the conscience, when awake.

God has various ways of awakening a drowsy conscience:  
Sometimes he does it through some afflictive dispensation, as in the case before us;  
sometimes through the conversation of a friend, [2 Samuel 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.7);  
sometimes by the public ministry of the Word, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25);  
sometimes by an occurrence arising out of men's wickedness, [2 Samuel 24:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.10), or in some way connected with it, [Daniel 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.5-6); [Matthew 14:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.1-2).

But by whatever means it is called into activity, our conscience will make us hear when it speaks to us.

The conscience inspires some, only with terror.

Thus it wrought on Joseph's brothers; they saw their guilt, and the wrath of God upon them on account of it, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother," said they, "and behold his blood is required of us."

Thus it wrought also on the unhappy Judas, who, when he saw what he had done, could no longer endure his very existence, [Matthew 27:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.3-5).

And on how many does it produce no other effect than this! They see how grievously they have offended God; and, not having the grace of repentance given to them, they sink into despondency. Life now becomes a burden to them; and they choose rather to rush into an unknown state, than to endure the stings of an accusing conscience.

Hence the *suicides* that are so frequent in the world. Men live in sin, imagining that no painful consequences shall ever ensue; but at last "their sin finds them out;" and they seek in suicide a refuge from the torments of a guilty mind. But where a sense of guilt does not drive men to this extremity, it makes them tremble, as Felix did; and embitters to them their whole existence, so that they are utter strangers to peace, according as it is written, "There is no peace," says my God, "to the wicked."

On others, the conscience operates with a more congenial influence.

Thus it wrought on Manasseh, when he was taken among the thorns, [2 Chronicles 33:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.11-13). And thus on Peter also, when he "went out, and wept bitterly [Luke 22:61-62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.61-62)." Happy, happy are they, on whom it produces such effects as these! They will have no reason to repine at any afflictions that are productive of such a blessing, [Job 36:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.8-9). What if the intermediate trials be severe? we shall have reason to bless God for them to all eternity, if they lead to this end! [Psalm 32:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.3-6); and shall have cause to say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

On all, the testimony of conscience is somewhat as the voice of God himself.

It speaks with authority. The stoutest man in the universe cannot endure its reproaches; and the most afflicted man in the universe is made happy by its testimony in his behalf, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12). We should therefore keep our conscience tender, and be ever attentive to its voice. On no occasion should we violate its dictates; for though we may silence its voice for a time, or drown it in vanity and dissipation, it will speak at last, and constrain us to hear all that it has recorded concerning us. And when once it does speak, then we may say concerning it, that "he whom it blesses, is blessed; and he whom it curses, is cursed."

Advice.

1. Seek to maintain a good conscience before God.

Let your minds be well instructed in the written word, and your lives be regulated by its dictates. To have always a conscience void of offence towards both God and man is no easy matter; but it is worth the utmost labor and vigilance that you can bestow upon it.

2. Do not however rest too confidently in testimonies of its approbation.

It will not always speak the same language, when it is blinded by prejudice or passion. At the time of committing this great evil, the sons of Jacob "were content;" and they applauded themselves for their forbearance towards their ill-fated brother. But at a subsequent period, how different were their views of the very same action! So will it be with us. We may now approve and applaud our own conduct; but we must not conclude that we shall therefore always do so. We are now too apt to be partial in our own favor; but at a future period we shall judge righteous judgment, even as God himself will do; and we are no longer certain that our judgment of our own state is correct, than when it manifestly accords with the Word of God.

3. Look forward to the future judgment.

That will certainly be correct; for God knows our hearts, and will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil! But oh! how painful will be the review in that day, if then for the first time we are made sensible of our sins! What a bitter reflection will it be, 'I did so and so; and therefore all this has come upon me; I have procured it all unto myself.' On the other hand, how delightful will it be to look back, and be able to appeal to God and say, "I have walked before you with a perfect heart!" True it is, this will afford us no ground for boasting; but, if we walk before God in all good conscience now, we shall have its approving testimony in a dying hour, and the approbation of our God in the day of judgment! [Isaiah 38:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.3).

#55

JACOB'S UNBELIEVING FEARS

**[Genesis 42:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.36)**

"Their father Jacob said to them: You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin! Everything is against me!"

The best of men are weak when they come into temptation. The trials of Jacob were indeed heavy; and, if we suppose that he had any idea that his sons had been active agents in bereaving him of his beloved Joseph, his grief must have been poignant beyond all expression. Not having been able to bring home to them any proof of such a conspiracy, he seems never to have dropped any hint to them before respecting it; and possibly he did not even now mean to charge it home upon them, but only to say, that he had been bereaved in some measure through them; nevertheless his words seem to betray a lurking suspicion, that they had been accessory to Joseph's death, "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin!"

But in the complaint he uttered respecting the ultimate end of his trials, he was manifestly wrong. We say not, that we would have shown more constancy than he; it is more than probable that none of us in his circumstances would have acted better; but from his language on the occasion we may learn, how we do act in trying circumstances, and how we ought to act.

I. How we **do act** in trying circumstances.

"We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" none therefore can hope to escape it; and least of all those who, like Jacob, have large families. While our trials are light, we can bear them with composure; but if they become heavy and accumulated, we are then apt to indulge:

1. Murmuring complaints.

Whether Jacob meant to reflect on his sons or not, he certainly meant to complain of his afflictions; which was, in fact, to complain of God, who, in his all-wise providence, had appointed them.

It was thus with his posterity during their sojourning in the wilderness; they always murmured against Moses, and against God, whenever they were involved in any difficulty or distress; and, when they were discouraged by the report of the spies respecting the land of Canaan and its inhabitants, they even proposed to set a Captain over them, and to return unto Egypt, [Numbers 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.4).

And how many such "murmurers and complainers" are there among ourselves! Some will expressly declare, that they think God deals harshly with them; others content themselves with venting their spleen against the instruments of their calamities. But all, in one way or other, are apt to "charge God foolishly," as if he were unmerciful, if not unrighteous also, in his dispensations towards them.

2. Desponding fears.

So filled was Jacob with a sense of his present calamities, that he could not indulge a hope of a favorable outcome from them; he thought of nothing but increasing troubles, which would "bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

Thus also his descendants, whom we have before alluded to; they had seen bread given them from Heaven, and water out of the rock; but they doubted whether God were able to provide flesh also for their sustenance; and when they were brought to the very borders of Canaan, they doubted whether it were possible for them ever to conquer the inhabitants, and take their fenced cities.

And are not we also ready to say, on some occasions, "Our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts?" Are we not ready to ask with David, whether his "mercy be not come utterly to an end?" Yes; in temporal things we too often sink under our troubles as absolutely irremediable; and in spiritual matters, we doubt almost the ability, and at all events the willingness, of Christ to save us.

While we condemn the unbelief of this afflicted patriarch, we acknowledge, in fact:

II. How we **ought to act** in trying circumstances.

However dark may be the dispensations of God towards us, we should:

1. Await his perfect time.

We are not to be impatient because relief does not come at the first moment that we ask for it. There must be a time for the dispensations of God to produce their proper effects upon our hearts. We do not expect that a medical prescription shall effect in one moment all for which it was administered; we expect its operation to be unpleasant; and we are contented to submit to pain for a season—that we may afterwards enjoy the blessings of health.

Now we know that our heavenly Physician prescribes all things concerning us with unerring wisdom, and consults our greatest good. Whatever time therefore the accomplishment of his designs may occupy, we should wait with patience, assured that the intended benefits shall ultimately be enjoyed. We should give him credit, if we may so speak, for his wisdom and love; and leave him to display them in his own way, "He who believes, shall not make haste."

2. Rest on his promises.

The promises of God to his people, respecting the outcome of their trials, are exceeding great and precious. He declares, that we shall have "no temptation without a way to escape;" that "all things shall work together for our good," and "work out for us a more exceeding weight of glory!" Surely such promises as these should reconcile us to trials, however great. What can we wish for more? And how can we dare to say, "All these things are against me," when God tells us positively that they are working for us? Did we ever know any one of God's promises to have failed? Why then should we doubt the accomplishment of these, when they have already been fulfilled in so many thousand instances? Let it satisfy us, that God has promised; and that "what he has promised, he is able also to perform."

3. Hope against hope.

This was Abraham's conduct under far heavier trials than we have ever experienced, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18) with [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19). What though we cannot see how God can effect our deliverance? Is he also at a loss? The darker our state, the more simple should be our trust. We should say with Job, "Though he slay me—yet will I trust in him." How was Jacob reproved at last, when he saw the outcome of those things which in his haste he had so deplored! Let us remember that there is the same gracious, almighty God at this time; and that "those who trust in Him shall never be confounded."

We may further learn from this subject,

1. What an excellent grace faith is.

Faith beholds nothing but paternal love in the heaviest chastisements. Faith "brings meat out of the eater," and tastes sweetness in the bitterest cup. Faith looks to the end of things, and sees them, in a measure, as God sees them. Faith is the great and sovereign antidote to troubles of every kind. If Jacob had exercised faith as Abraham did, the trials of which he complained would scarcely have been felt at all. But God is pleased to try us on purpose that we may learn to trust in him. In this world "we are to walk by faith, and not by sight." Let us therefore cultivate continually this divine principle of faith, which, while it honors God, tends exceedingly to the advancement of our own happiness.

2. How blessed a state Heaven will be.

Here God has wisely and graciously hidden futurity from our view. But when we are arrived at the heavenly mansions, we shall see all the merciful designs of God developed, and the wisdom of his dispensations clearly displayed. We shall then see that the trials of which we once complained, were not only beneficial, but absolutely necessary for us; and that, if they had been withheld from us, there would have been wanting a link in that chain, by which we were to be brought in safety to Heaven.

Who will there adopt the language of the text? Who will utter it in reference to any one trial of his life? Who will not rather say, "He has done all things well?" Let us then look forward to that time, and not pass our judgment on present things, until we see and understand the design of God in them!

#56

GOD VIEWED IN JOSEPH'S ADVANCEMENT

**[Genesis 45:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.8)**

"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God!"

By looking through second causes to the first Cause of all—we learn to trace events to an all-wise Being, who "works all things after the counsel of his own will," and whose prerogative it is to bring good out of evil, and order out of confusion. To this view of things we are directed, and in this we are greatly assisted, by the Holy Scriptures; which draw aside the veil of mystery that is on the ways of God, and set before our eyes the most hidden secrets of divine providence. The history before us more especially affords a beautiful illustration of those ways in which the Governor of the Universe accomplishes his own designs; he allows, in many instances, such adverse circumstances to occur, as apparently to preclude almost a possibility of their terminating according to his original purpose; yet does he wonderfully interpose in such a manner as to bring them easily, and, as it were, naturally, to their destined outcome.

If in anything God's intentions could be frustrated, we would have found them fail in reference to the predicted elevation of Joseph above his brethren; yet that event took place at last, and that too through those very means which were used to defeat it; and Joseph, alter the event was actually accomplished, referred the whole dispensation to God, as its primary Author and infallible Director.

To elucidate this subject, we shall show,

I. What part God takes in the actions of wicked men.

Though God cannot be a partaker in the wickedness of men—yet he may, and certainly does, bear a part in those actions which wicked men perform. We need go no further than the text, to confirm and establish this truth. That the conduct of Joseph's brethren, notwithstanding it, was ultimately instrumental to his advancement, was deeply criminal, can admit of no doubt; yet says Joseph, "It was not you who sent me here, but God." The question is then: What is that part which God takes in the actions of wicked men? To this we answer,

1. He affords them opportunities of perpetrating the wickedness that is in their hearts.

The brethren of Joseph were full of envy and malice against him; but while he was under his father's wing, they could not give full scope to their hatred, because they were afraid of their father's displeasure. To remove this difficulty, God so ordered matters that Joseph should be sent to inquire after the health of his brethren when they were at a distance from home. This gave them an opportunity of executing all the wickedness that was in their hearts. But as the executing of their first intention would have defeated the plans of Providence, it was so appointed that certain Ishmaelite merchants would be passing that way, and that he would be sold to them for a slave instead of being put to death.

That we do not err in tracing these more minute incidents to divine providence, is manifest; for the elevation of Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt is expressly said to have been effected by God for that very purpose, that he might be an instrument on whom the divine power would be exerted, and in whose destruction God himself would be glorified, "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth, [Romans 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17)."

But in thus facilitating the execution of evil, God does not make himself a partner in the crime; he only affords men power and opportunity to do what their own wicked dispositions prompt them to; and this he does, as in the instances before referred to, so also in every crime that is committed in the world. What our blessed Lord said to his judge who boasted of having power to release or condemn him, we may say to every criminal in the universe, "You could have no power at all to commit your crimes, except it were given you from above."

2. He allows Satan to instigate them to evil.

"Satan is always going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" but he cannot act without divine permission. He could not tempt Job, or even enter into the herd of swine, until he had first obtained permission from God. For the most part, God imposes a restraint on this our inveterate enemy; or, if left to himself, he would soon "sift us all as wheat," and reduce us all to the lowest ebb of wickedness and misery! But at times he leaves the fiend somewhat more at liberty, and permits him to exercise his power over his wretched vassals. On these occasions Satan operates upon their minds with more than usual violence, and not only leads them captive at his will, but instigates them to the commission of the most heinous crimes.

Of these acts God is frequently represented as the author, while in other parts of Scripture their origin is referred to Satan. We are told that Satan moved David to number the people; and that he sent forth lying spirits into all the prophets of Baal, that they might induce Ahab to go up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, where he was sure to fall. But both these things are also said to have been done by God, [2 Samuel 24:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.1) with [1 Chronicles 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.1) and [2 Chronicles 18:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.20-22).

The fact is, that God did these things through the agency of Satan; that is, he permitted Satan to act according to the impulse of his own mind, and left the people whom he assaulted, to comply with his temptations.

3. He withdraws from them his restraining grace.

Man needs nothing more than to have the preventing grace of God withheld, and he will as surely fall, as a stone, cast out of the hand, will gravitate to the earth. Now it is in this way that God often punishes the sins of men; he leaves them to put forth the depravity of their own hearts; he withholds those mercies which he sees they despised, and gives them up to follow their own vile propensities without restraint. To this effect, it is often said in Scripture, "So I gave them up." Yes, the sacred records speak yet more strongly, and represent God as "blinding the eyes of men," and "hardening their hearts, [Exodus 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.3); [Exodus 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.13); [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10), which is quoted six times in the New Testament."

But we must not imagine that God ever actively concurs in the production of sin; in fact, there is no occasion for any active exertion on his part. Nothing further is necessary than for him to withdraw his preventing grace—and evil will blaze forth, as fire will to consume the stubble, when no counteracting influence is used to extinguish the flames.

To remove all objection against his participating in the actions of wicked men, we proceed to point out,

II. The benefit arising from acknowledging God in them.

It may be thought that such an acknowledgment, if it did not make God a minister of sin, would at least represent him in a very unamiable light; and that it would tend to justify men in their iniquities. But we affirm, on the contrary, that such an acknowledgment is calculated rather to bring good to man, and honor to our God.

1. It affords us sweet consolation under our troubles.

Were we to look no further than to second causes, we would be grieved beyond measure at the instruments of our affliction, and be filled with apprehensions at their malevolent desires. But when we reflect that our enemies are no more than the sword in our Father's hand, and the rod with which he corrects us; when we consider that his design in correcting us is widely different from theirs, [Isaiah 10:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.4-6), and that after he has made use of them for our good, he will cast them into the fire, [Isaiah 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.12); [Isaiah 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.16), and receive us to his bosom in an improved state, [Isaiah 10:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.24-27), our minds are pacified, and we say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems him good!"

What a source of comfort was this to Job, when the Sabeans and Chaldeans slew his servants and his cattle! "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away—blessed be the name of the Lord!" It is thus with all the sons and daughters of affliction, when once they can view the hand of God in their trials; they adopt the language of the Psalmist, "I was silent, and opened not my mouth, because You are the one who had done this!"

2. It disposes us to a ready forgiveness of those who injure us.

It does not incline us to palliate their faults, as if they were mere unconscious instruments impelled by the force of Him who made use of them; (for in all that they do, they act as freely as if God bore no part at all in their actions,) but it inclines us to pity, to forgive, and pray for them—as slaves to their own passions, enemies to their own welfare, and real, though unwitting, benefactors to our souls.

This effect is strongly exemplified in our text; Joseph saw the hand of God overruling the designs of his brethren; and from that consideration, he not only readily forgave them, but entreated them "not to be grieved or angry with themselves;" since, whatever had been their intentions, God had made use of their counsels for the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes; yes, thrice does he repeat this idea as a ground whereon he would have them satisfied with the dispensation, as he himself also was.

We have also a similar effect mentioned in the history of David. Shimei, in the hour of David's adversity, loaded him with execrations; and Abishai, eager to avenge the insult offered to his master, asked permission to go and kill him; but David forbade it, saying, "Let him curse, because the Lord has said unto him: Curse David; let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him; it may be that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day, [2 Samuel 16:5-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 16.5-12)."

Thus shall we also mortify all vindictive feelings, when once we discern that our enemies are agents for Him; we shall say with Stephen and our blessed Lord, "Lay not this sin to their charge;" "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

3. It fills us with an admiration of God's wisdom.

It is impossible to trace all the parts of this history, and not adore God's wisdom whereby the various incidents in Joseph's life were made to concur to the production of one great outcome—the preservation of Jacob and all his family.

If we contemplate the still greater diversity of circumstances, whereby Jesus was made to fulfill the Scriptures, and to effect the redemption of the world; or the astonishingly mysterious designs of God relating to the excision of the Jews, as the means of engrafting the Gentiles into their stock; and the restoration of the Jews, as the means of bringing in all the fullness of the Gentiles; I say, if we contemplate all these things, we are necessitated to exclaim with the Apostle, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

In like manner, the more we are habituated to trace the mercies of God in our own personal experience, and the numberless instances wherein he has made "the wrath of men" and devils "to praise him," the more heartily shall we join in the adoring language of Moses, "Who is like unto You among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders! [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11)."

In prosecuting this subject, we cannot but be struck with the following reflections:

1. How happy is the Christian in this world!

Those who know not God, have no refuge to flee unto; no consolation under the trials they endure, no security against the evils they dread. But the true Christian is persuaded, that, though he navigates a tempestuous ocean, he has an all-wise, almighty Pilot at the helm; and "therefore he will not fear though the waves thereof roar, and the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea." He knows not indeed what will be the precise outcome of impending calamities; but he knows that it shall be precisely such as his heavenly Father sees to be best for him; and with that assurance he is satisfied. Thus is he kept in perfect peace, because he "trusts in God."

2. How happy will he be in the future world!

Here "he walks by faith, and not by sight." He believes that all things are working for his good, because God has said that they shall do so. But in Heaven he will have a perfect discovery of all the links in that chain of providences whereby he has been brought to glory. He will see the importance of those things which once appeared most trifling, and the necessity of those things which once were most distressing, and the perfect harmony of those things which once were involved in the most impenetrable darkness and confusion. What cause will he then see to bless and adore his God! What views will he then have of the unsearchable depths of wisdom, which ordered everything for his good! Well may he leave himself at God's disposal now, when such shall be his recompense at last! Let us then commit ourselves entirely to God, and be satisfied with all his dealings towards us; and "what we know not now—we shall know hereafter."

#57

JACOB'S RESOLUTION TO VISIT JOSEPH IN EGYPT

**[Genesis 45:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.27-28)**

"But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, "I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

It is of very great importance to exercise sound wisdom and discretion in interpreting the Holy Scriptures, lest, by imposing on them a forced or fanciful meaning—we bring the sacred oracles themselves into contempt. Yet is there a certain latitude allowed to us, provided we do not set forth the subordinate and accommodated sense as if it were the true and primary import of the passage.

The Apostles themselves frequently take this liberty. The prophet, speaking of the Babylonish captivity, says, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to he comforted for her children, because they were not, [Jeremiah 31:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.15)." This passage Matthew applies to the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem, to which, in its primary sense, it had no reference, [Matthew 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.17-18); nevertheless, the citation of it was just, and the accommodation beautiful.

A similar use, the same evangelist makes of a passage primarily referring to the atonement which Christ would offer for the sins of mankind; he applies it to his miraculously healing their bodily disorders. Compare [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4) with [Matthew 8:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.16-18). These examples, and others which might be adduced, would justify a considerably greater latitude of observation than we propose to adopt on the present occasion.

In considering this portion of sacred history, we do not found upon it any doctrine relating to the Gospel; we do not even insinuate that it was originally intended to illustrate any of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity; we shall merely take occasion from it to introduce to your notice some useful observations, with which indeed it has no immediate connection, but with which it has a very striking correspondence.

Joseph having made himself known to his brethren, and cautioned them against "falling out by the way," (an event too probable in their circumstances,) sends them back to their father, with orders to inform him of all that they had seen and heard, and to bring him and their respective families down to Egypt. Jacob, when first he received the information, could not believe it; but upon further conversation with his sons he was convinced of the truth of their report, and determined to accept the invitation which his beloved Joseph had sent to him.

Now we propose to notice,

I. The grounds of Jacob's doubts.

There seem to have been two reasons for his questioning the truth of the information he received:

1. The report contradicted all that he had before received for truth.

He had above twenty years before had reason to believe that his son Joseph had been torn in pieces by a wild beast; he had even seen his son's coat torn and drenched in blood; nor had the lapse of so many years brought him any other information; how then could this son be the person that presided over the kingdom of Egypt at this time? There might be someone that resembled him in name; but it could not possibly be his darling son; had Joseph been alive, he must long since have heard of him; whoever therefore the person might be, or whatever he might profess to be, he could not be the long-lost son of his beloved Rachel. Such were Jacob's arguments, and such his reasons for rejecting the testimony of his sons.

And do we not here see one ground on which the testimony of those who preach the Gospel is rejected? We find men rooted in certain opinions, which, in their opinion, they have adopted on very sufficient grounds. The general acceptance which those opinions meet with, and the confirmation of them during a long course of years, concur to render them, as it were, fixed principles in their minds.

But the doctrines of the Gospel are directly the reverse of those which pass current in the world.

The extreme depravity of human nature,  
the desert and danger of all mankind,  
the insufficiency of any good works to recommend us to God,  
the necessity of seeking justification by faith alone,  
the nature and extent of true holiness, and  
the impossibility of being saved without an entire consecration of ourselves to the service of God,

are as opposite to the doctrines and opinions of the world, as light is to darkness; and on this account they are rejected by the generality with scorn and contempt. It was on this ground that Nicodemus rejected the doctrine of the new birth, "How can these things be?" 'I have never held this sentiment; therefore it cannot be true.' And on the same grounds it is, that the preaching of the Gospel is at this time, no less than in former ages, accounted foolishness.

2. The tidings were too good to be true.

There is a proneness in the human mind to believe evil reports more easily than those which are favorable. Jacob instantly acceded to the idea that his son Joseph had been torn in pieces, notwithstanding, if he had considered the spirit and temper of his brethren towards him, there was very abundant reason to doubt the fact. But, when he is told that Joseph is alive, and at the head of the Egyptian kingdom, he cannot entertain the thought one moment, "his heart even faints" at the mention of the fact, (not because he believed it, but) because he believed it not.

Here again we trace the workings of the human mind in relation to higher things. If we come and tell people that they must make their peace with God by a long course of repentance and good works, they will believe us readily enough; though, if they duly considered the nature of such tidings, they would have evidence enough of their falsehood. But if we declare to them:  
that Christ has made a full atonement for our sins;  
that a free and full salvation is offered them through Him;  
that they may partake of it "without money and without price," that is, without anything on their part to merit it;  
and that their former guilt, however great and aggravated, is no bar to their acceptance with God, provided they simply and sincerely believe in Christ;  
'all this seems too good to be true; it can never be, that the way to Heaven should be so easy.' This is the argument used by all the train of self-righteous Pharisees, who, "being whole, feel no need of a physician;" and by multitudes also of repenting "Publicans, who dare not lift up their eyes to Heaven," or entertain a hope, that "grace should ever so abound towards them, in whom sin has so greatly abounded, See [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.24-25)."

Having canvassed thus his doubts, we proceed to notice,

II. The means of the removal of Jacob's doubts.

Of these we are minutely informed in the words of our text. They were,

1. A fuller recital of Joseph's words.

Jacob's sons had told him of Joseph's elevation; but not being believed, proceeded to "tell him all the words that Joseph had said unto them." Now their testimony became so circumstantial and convincing, that he could resist no longer; his incredulity was borne down by a weight of evidence that could not be withstood.

Thus also it is that the Gospel forces its way into the hearts of thousands, to whom, at its first statement, it appeared no better than an idle tale. Ministers set forth innumerable declarations which Jesus has made respecting us; they report his gracious invitations, his precious promises, his tender expostulations; all of which evince such a perfect knowledge of our state, and are so suited to our necessities, that we cannot any longer doubt from whom they come. They shame us out of our doubts, and constrain us to exclaim, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

2. An actual sight of the tokens of his love.

A view of the wagons which Joseph had sent, stored with everything requisite for his accommodation in his journey, completed his conviction. All the patriarch's doubts were dissipated, and his "spirit instantly revived."

And what will not give way before the sensible manifestations of God's love to the soul?

Let "His love be shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit;"  
let the promises be applied with power to the soul;  
let "the Spirit of God once witness with our spirit that we are God's;"  
and no fears will then remain respecting the truth of the Gospel or the power and grace of Christ. We shall then "have the witness in ourselves," that "Jesus is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior," and that he is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

With the removal of his doubts, there was an instantaneous change in his determinations. This will appear while we consider,

III. The effect which their removal produced upon him.

He had been hitherto reluctant to leave his home; but now:

1. He desired nothing so much as to see the one object of his affections.

Joseph was now more dear to him than ever; and if he might but live to enjoy a sight of him, he would consider himself as having attained all for which he wished to live, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die!"

Just so, let us once be persuaded that Jesus is set at God's right hand, far above all principalities and powers, and that he has all Heaven at his disposal, and has sent to invite us to come unto him, and has made ample provision for us by the way, and prepared mansions for us at the end of our journey, and engaged that we shall dwell in his immediate presence forever and ever; let us be persuaded of this, and shall we feel no disposition to visit him?

Will it not, on the contrary, be the first desire of our hearts? Shall we not say, "Whom have I in Heaven but You; and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with You?" Will not the attainment of this object appear to be the only thing worth living for? And having an assured prospect of this, shall we not say, "Now let your servant depart in peace?" Yes; this desire will swallow up, as it were, every other; and to secure this happiness will be the only end for which we shall wish to live.

2. He disregarded all the difficulties he might encounter in the way to him.

It was not a pleasing thing for an infirm old man, who was one hundred and thirty years of age, to leave his home, and set out upon so long a journey; but the mountains became a plain, when such an object was to be attained.

Nor is it pleasing for flesh and blood to encounter the difficulties which we must meet with in our journey heaven-ward. But who that loves our exalted Jesus will regard them? Who will not welcome reproach, and take up with cheerfulness whatever cross may lie in his way to that blessed kingdom? Suppose that we must suffer the loss of our worldly interests and accommodations; who will not account them mere "stuff," that is unworthy of one moment's notice? who will not readily exchange them for the fullness of the heavenly land, and for the enjoyment of the Savior's presence? Difficulties become no difficulties, and sacrifices no sacrifices, when by faith we behold the Savior's glory, and have an assured hope of participating in it forever.

Reflections.

1. How amiable is the exercise of sincere love!

Joseph, for peculiar reasons, had imposed a restraint upon his feelings, until the proper time arrived to give them vent; but when he was no longer under any necessity to conceal them, they burst forth in a torrent of affection, as waters that have broken down the dam by which they had been confined. He retained no anger against his murderous brethren, but fell on their necks and kissed them. His charge to them "not to argue along the way," showed how ardently he desired that they might maintain, with each other as well as with himself, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And how animated was his message to his dear aged father! "Hasten and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus says your son Joseph; God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me; tarry not; and you shall dwell in the land of Goshen; and you shall be near unto me, you and your children, and your children's children, and your flocks, and your herds, and all that you have; and there will I nourish you!"

Nor was the aged patriarch's affection less ardent, when once he was persuaded that his Joseph was yet alive. His whole soul was enrapt up in his darling son; and, in his determination to visit him, he lost sight of all his temporal interests; the thought of enjoying plenty in Egypt seems not to have entered into his mind; all that he cared for was a sight of Joseph; and beyond that he had no wish in life.

Would to God it were thus in every church, and every family! Thus indeed it will be, wherever the grace of God reigns in the heart. Instead of "rendering evil for evil," we shall "heap coals of fire on the heads" of those who injure us, to melt them into love. Instead of harboring envy, or hatred, or a selfish indifference in our hearts, we shall feel the sublimest happiness in the exercise of love; parents will love their children, and children will seek to requite their parents, and "brethren will delight to dwell together in unity." O let us cultivate such a spirit, which shall be the best evidence, both to ourselves and others, that we are Christ's disciples.

2. How delightful will be our interview with Christ in Heaven!

If we had beheld the meeting of this aged patriarch with his beloved Joseph, who among us could have refrained from tears? But what must be the meeting of the soul with Jesus, on its first admission into his presence? Who can conceive the tender endearments of the Savior's love, or the admiration, gratitude, and joy with which the soul shall be overwhelmed in his embrace? Surely such an interview is worth the longest and most arduous journey. Well may we account everything as dung and dross, to obtain it; more especially because it shall not be transient, like that which Jacob enjoyed, but permanent and everlasting. Behold then, we invite you all to a participation of it. He has said respecting you, "Father, I will that they whom you have given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me."

Is there one among you that will not add his Amen to that petition? Make haste then, tarry not, "Mind not your stuff" but commence your journey instantly; and soon shall death transport you into his presence; and "then shall you be forever with the Lord. Comfort one another with these words!"

#58

JACOB'S INTERVIEW WITH PHARAOH

**[Genesis 47:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 47.7-10)**

"Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence."

To acknowledge God in all our ways, and to commit our way to him, secures to us his gracious interposition for the direction of our paths, and the accomplishment of our desires. It is possible that Jacob, after he had set out towards Egypt in the wagons that Joseph had sent for him, felt some doubts about the propriety of leaving the promised land, when, at his advanced age, he could have no reasonable prospect of returning there with his family. But knowing from experience the efficacy of prayer, he betook himself to that never-failing remedy; he stopped at Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the Lord. That very night God appeared to him in a vision, and dissipated his fears, by an express command to proceed on his journey, and by a promise that he would in due time be brought back again, [Genesis 46:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 46.1-4).

He then prosecuted his journey in safety, and had a most affecting interview with his beloved Joseph. Soon after his arrival, five of his sons were introduced to Pharaoh; and afterwards he himself. It is this introduction of the aged patriarch to Pharaoh that we are now more particularly to consider. In the account given us of the interview, we notice,

I. The question which Pharaoh put to Jacob.

It could not be expected that people so remote from each other in their station, their views, and habits of life, should have many topics in common with each other whereon to maintain a long and interesting conversation. The interview seems to have been very short, and of course the conversation short also. All that is related concerning it contains only one short question. This, as far as it related to Jacob, was a mere expression of kindness and respect on the part of Pharaoh. To have questioned him about matters which he did not understand, would have been embarrassing to Jacob, and painful to his feelings; and to have asked him about anything in which neither party was at all interested, would have betrayed a great lack of judgment in Pharaoh. The topic selected by Pharaoh was liable to no such objection; for it is always gratifying to a person advanced in years to mention his age, because the "hoary head, especially if found in the way of righteousness, is always considered as a crown of glory, [Proverbs 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.31); [Leviticus 19:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.32)."

As a general question, independent of the history, it cannot fail of suggesting many important thoughts to all to whom it is addressed. "How old are you?"

Are you far advanced in life? Then how much then of your allotted time is gone, and how little remains for the finishing of the work that is required of you! How diligently therefore should you redeem every hour that is now added to your expiring term!

Are you, on the contrary, but just setting out in the world? Then how little do you know of its snares, temptations, sorrows! what disappointments and troubles have you to experience! and how deeply are you concerned to have your views rectified, and your conduct regulated by the Word of God!

Whatever your age, you should consider every return of your birthday rather as a call to weep and mourn, than as an occasion of festivity and joy; for it is the knell of a departed year; a year that might, in all probability, have been far better improved; a year in which many sins have been committed, which are indelibly recorded in the book of God's remembrance, and of which you must shortly give a strict account at his judgment-seat.

We notice,

II. Jacob's answer to it.

The patriarch's mind was fraught with zeal for God; and therefore not contenting himself with a plain short answer, he framed his reply in words calculated to make a deep impression on the mind of Pharaoh, without giving him the smallest offence.

He insinuates, and repeats the idea, that life is but a "pilgrimage;" that we are merely sojourners in a foreign land, and that our home and our inheritance is in a better country.

This part of his speech is particularly noticed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as being an open acknowledgment of his principles as a worshiper of Jehovah, and of his expectations in a better world, [Hebrews 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-14); [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16); [Hebrews 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.21). He intimates also that his years, though they had been a hundred and thirty, were few. This age might appear great to Pharaoh; but it was not nearly equal to that of Jacob's progenitors. Terah was 205 years old; Abraham 175; Isaac 180.

On a retrospect, every person's days appear to have been but few. Various incidents of former life seem to have been but recently transacted; the intervening time being lost, as it were, like valleys intercepted by adjacent hills. He further declares, that these years of his had been replete with evil. Certainly his life, from the time that he fled from the face of his brother Esau to that hour, had been a scene of great afflictions. His fourteen years' servitude to Laban, the disgrace brought on him and his family by Dinah his only daughter, the murderous cruelty of his vindictive sons, the jealousies of all his children on account of his partiality to Joseph, the sudden loss of Joseph, and all his recent trials, had greatly embittered life to him, and made it appear like a sea of troubles, where wave followed wave in endless succession. And who is there that does not find, (especially in more advanced life,) that the evil, on the whole, outweighs the good?

These hints, offered in so delicate a manner to a potent monarch, with whom he had only one short interview, afford a beautiful pattern for our imitation, at the same time that they convey important instruction to our minds.

We conclude with commending to your imitation the whole of Jacob's conduct towards Pharaoh.

At his first admission into Pharaoh's presence, and again at his departure from him, this holy patriarch blessed him. We do not suppose that he pronounced his blessing in a formal and authoritative manner, as Melchizedek did to Abraham; but that he rendered him his most grateful acknowledgments for the favors he had conferred, and invoked the blessing of God upon him and upon his kingdom on account of them. Such a mode of testifying his gratitude became a servant of Jehovah, and tended to lead the monarch's thoughts to the contemplation of the only true God.

Well may it put to shame the greater part of the Christian world, who systematically exclude religion from their social converse, under the idea that the introduction of it would destroy all the comfort of society. True Christians, however, should learn from this instance not to be ashamed of their religion; but, as inoffensively as possible, to lead men to the knowledge of it; and to make the diffusion of it a very essential part of all their fellowship with each other. More especially we should embrace every opportunity of impressing on our own minds and on the minds of others the true end of life; that we may thereby secure that rest which remains for us after our short but weary pilgrimage.

#59

JACOB BLESSING THE SONS OF JOSEPH

**[Genesis 48:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 48.15-16)**

"Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth."

There are not any more profitable scenes than those which we behold in the chambers of dying saints. There religion is exhibited in the most lively colors, and evinces itself to be, not a visionary phantom, but a real and substantial good. We are bidden to "mark the perfect man, and to behold the upright, because the end of that man is peace." There are some instances where people on their death-bed are transported with unutterable joy; they seem to breathe the very atmosphere of Heaven, while they are yet in the body. But it is more frequent to behold them waiting for their dissolution with a peaceful dignified composure; and improving their precious moments for the benefit of their surviving friends.

Such was the closing scene of Jacob. We read not of any particular ecstasies that he enjoyed; but we see him with a hope full of immortality, and an affectionate attention to the welfare of all his children. It seems indeed that several of the patriarchs were on these occasions endued with a spirit of prophecy, and directed to pronounce blessings on those for whom God, of his own sovereign will, had reserved them. They were not left to their own caprice or judgment in this matter; but were overruled, sometimes contrary to their own intentions to convey the blessings of the first born to the younger branches of the family in preference to the elder.

Thus Isaac, having unwillingly given the blessing to Jacob, was constrained to confirm it to him, notwithstanding Esau labored with tears to prevail upon him to recall his word.

Somewhat similar to that was the transfer of the blessing to the younger of Joseph's sons in preference to the elder. Joseph brought his sons to his dying parent, and placed them so that Manasseh, his first-born, would have the right hand of Jacob placed upon his head; but the dying patriarch was inspired by God to counteract the wish of Joseph in this particular, and, by crossing his hands, to convey the principal blessing to Ephraim, who was the younger son.

We might remark upon this subject, that God often, if we may so speak, crosses his hands in bestowing his blessings, since he gives them to those who, in our eyes, are least worthy of them, and least likely to receive them.

But our object at present is rather to inculcate the necessity of attending to the spiritual interests of young people, and especially of those who by the ties of kinship are connected with us.

In prosecuting this subject, we observe, that,

I. We should feel a concern for the spiritual welfare of the rising generation.

We should by no means be indifferent to the souls of any; on the contrary, the conveying of religious instruction to children is an occupation well worthy of the attention of all, who have leisure and ability to engage in it. But we are more especially bound to instruct those who are related to us and dependent on us; indeed they may justly claim this service at our hands.

1. Their spiritual welfare is incomparably more important than their temporal welfare.

All people feel it incumbent on them to consult the temporal welfare of their children, and account themselves happy if they can bequeath them an inheritance, that shall make them independent of the world; or give them such an education, as shall enable them to make a comfortable provision for themselves.

But how much richer is a child that possesses a saving knowledge of Christ, however low he is in outward circumstances, than the heir of a kingdom would be, if destitute of that knowledge! Shall we then be diligent in promoting the temporal prosperity of our relations, and show no regard for their eternal interests? God forbid! Let rather our care be most bestowed on those things which most of all deserve our care.

2. Their spiritual welfare greatly depends on us.

Who is to instruct our children, if we do not? Or how can they gain knowledge without instruction? We provide for their bodies, because nature, as well as custom, tells us that it is our duty to do so. But is it not equally our duty to provide for their souls? If we educate them in ignorance, what can be expected but that they should grow up in sin? How can it be thought that they should bestow any pains in cultivating divine knowledge for themselves, when they see us, whom they suppose to have formed a right estimate of things, indifferent whether they possess it or not? On the contrary, if we conscientiously discharge our duty to them in this respect, we have reason to hope, that God will bless our endeavors, and make us instruments of good to their souls. For though the best efforts may not universally succeed, we may assume it as a general truth, that "if we bring up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it."

3. Their souls will be required at our hands.

This is a truth acknowledged in reference to ministers; all agree that they must give account of the souls committed to their charge. Why then should not this be the case with those who have the care of children? Methinks every parent, as soon as ever a child is born, should receive it as it were from the hands of God, with this charge, "Bring this child up for me! [Exodus 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 2.9)." As for the attention which a parent bestows on the temporal advancement of his children, it will not only not excuse his neglect of their better interests, but will be a fearful aggravation of it. The Judge will say to them as he once did to the hypocritical Pharisees: These things ought you to have done, and not to leave the others undone.

If we should feel this concern at all times for the rising generation,

II. We should express it more especially in a dying hour.

Every word acquires weight from the circumstance of its being uttered at the approach of death. We should avail ourselves therefore of that advantage, to impress the minds of young people with a concern for their souls. Two things in particular we should do:

1. We should commend God to them.

This Jacob did; and we cannot do better than follow his example.

Young people are ready to think that religion is a new thing, and that the exhortations of their parents are the effects of needless preciseness, or of superstitious fear. On this account, it is well to show them that all those eminent characters of old, whom they profess to reverence, were devoted to the service of God; and that, in recommending the gospel, to them, we recommend only what all the wise and good in all ages have approved; that, if God is our God, he was "the God also, before whom Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob walked."

Moreover, though it is not always expedient to be talking of our own experience—yet, at such a season, we may do it to good effect. We may declare to others what we have known of God, both as a God of providence and of grace. It is of great importance to make them entertain right opinions respecting the providence of God, and to make them know that whether they become rich by industry or by inheritance, it is "God who feeds them all their life long."

It is also indispensably necessary to direct their attention to that "Angel," Jehovah, the Lord Jesus Christ, "the Angel of the Covenant. The same Person is spoken of as in the former members of the text; nor would Jacob have prayed to him, if he had not been God. Compare [Genesis 32:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24); [Genesis 32:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.28); [Genesis 32:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.30) with [Hosea 12:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.3-5) and [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1)," through whom alone we have redemption, either from the moral evil of sin, or from the penal evil of damnation. It is "He who redeems us from all evil," temporal, spiritual, and eternal.

If we can from our own experience bear testimony to Christ in this view, it will avail more than a thousand lectures given in a time of health; for then the surrounding relatives will see that the sting of death is taken away, and that "they are indeed blessed who put their trust in Christ."

2. We should pray to God for them.

The prayer of Jacob is short, but sententious. The expression, "God bless you!" is often uttered in a dying hour, but without any just ideas affixed to the petition. But we, in imploring the blessing of God upon our children, should distinctly inform them wherein that blessing consists. We should inform them, that, to enjoy God in the dispensations of his providence, and Christ in the riches of his grace, and to walk before God in Christ, as our God and Savior, in all holy obedience—is to be truly blessed; and that we are then indeed blessed, when God by his Spirit enables us thus to enjoy and to serve him. Having these things in our own minds, and conveying them to the minds of those whom we desire to instruct, we need not multiply words in prayer; while we entreat of God to bless those for whose welfare we are particularly concerned, we shall find acceptance with God, and obtain mercies for them.

It is recorded of Jacob, that in this prayer of his he exercised faith, [Hebrews 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.21). Now we have not precisely the same grounds for faith that he had; because he was inspired to pronounce over the youths the blessings which God had before determined to bestow; but the more we are enabled to believe in God as a prayer-hearing and promise-keeping God, the more reason we have to hope that our prayers shall be answered, whether for ourselves or others.

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are advanced in life.

You see before you the composure of a dying saint. Seek to obtain such for yourselves. And that you may "die the death of the righteous," be diligent to live his life. If your own business be not already transacted with God, (so to speak,) you will have little disposition either to speak to others in a dying hour, or to pray for them; but if your own calling and election be made sure, then will your dying exhortations be delivered with ease, and received with benefit.

2. To those who are coming forward into life.

You are apt to slight the instructions of your parents, under the idea that they are unnecessary or unsuitable to your state. But you see what has always occupied the minds of dying saints. You know that Jacob's example is commended by God himself. Be thankful then, if you have friends or relatives who walk in the steps of Jacob; and let that, which they above all things desire for you, be your chief desire for yourselves.

#60

CHRIST THE TRUE SHILOH

**[Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.10)**

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff (a lawgiver) from between his feet, until Shiloh comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."

There was a series of predictions relative to the Messiah from the very beginning of the world; and, as the time for the accomplishment of the prophecies drew near, the predictions concerning him were more particular and minute.

About seventeen hundred years before his appearance, the time of his coming was fixed with great accuracy and precision. At the very first moment that the sons of Jacob were made heads of different tribes, it was foretold, that the continuance of Judah's power should extend beyond that of the other tribes, and that the Messiah should arrive before its expiration. In explaining this prophecy we shall of necessity be led to speak of,

I. The **time** of Christ's advent.

This, according to the text, was to precede the departure of Judah's scepter.

Judah is here represented as a lion gorged with his prey, and couching in his den with a scepter between his feet; a scepter, which none should ever wrest from him, until he should come, whose right it was. "The scepter" does not import dominion over the other tribes, but only the same kind of separate and independent jurisdiction which was vested in Dan, and in all the other tribes. Nor does the term "lawgiver" mean a person who should enact laws; but rather, one who should execute and enforce them. Moses was the only lawgiver of the Jews; and even the kings were required to write a copy of his law, and to obey it in all things.

Now it was here foretold, that this particular power should remain with Judah after that the other tribes should have been deprived of theirs; and that it should continue vested in people belonging to that tribe until the Messiah should come. The precise import of the term "Shiloh" is not certainly known; but it is thought by most to mean, The Peacemaker. All however are agreed that it is a name for the Messiah, whose advent was to precede the dissolution of the Jewish polity.

The event exactly corresponded with the prediction.

The ten tribes were spoiled of their power when they were carried captive to Assyria. But the tribe of Judah retained both their ecclesiastical and civil polity even in Babylon. If they did not exercise it to the same extent as before, they had by no means wholly lost it. As they had possessed it in Egypt, and retained it the whole time of their Egyptian bondage, [Exodus 34:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.31-32), so they still nominated their chiefs and elders, yes and appointed fasts and feasts, while they were oppressed with the Chaldean yoke. Moses and Aaron were sent to the elders of the people, [Exodus 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.16); [Exodus 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.29); and these were heads of houses, [Exodus 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 6.14); and rulers of the congregation, [Exodus 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.22). Compare [Numbers 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 1.3); [Numbers 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 1.16).

Their bondage in Babylon was indeed, on the whole, exceeding heavy; but many of them were allowed to build houses and plant gardens, and to live rather as a colony than as slaves, [Jeremiah 29:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.5); [Jeremiah 29:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.7). On their return from Babylon, their own chiefs and elders were appointed to superintend the execution of Cyrus' decree, [Ezra 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 1.5); [Ezra 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 1.8); and, after that period, they continued to enjoy their privileges until the time of our Lord's advent.

Soon after that, they were reduced to the state of a Roman province; but still exercised the same powers, only in a more limited manner. Compare [John 18:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.3); [John 18:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.31). But, forty years after the death of Christ, when his Gospel had been fully preached, and people of all nations had been gathered to him, their city and temple were utterly destroyed; and they themselves were dispersed into all lands. From that time their scepter has utterly departed from them; nor can the smallest vestige of their former power be traced. They are therefore living proofs throughout the whole world that their Messiah has indeed come.

The time of Christ's advent being thus clearly ascertained, let us consider,

II. The **consequences** of Christ's advent.

The last clause of the text is by some applied to Judah, to whom the tribe of Benjamin was attached, and the few of the other ten tribes, who returned after their dispersion by the Assyrians, were gathered, [1 Chronicles 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 9.3). But the sense of that clause is both more clear, and infinitely more important, as applied to Shiloh. And, if it is understood, as it may well be, as a further limitation of the time beyond which Judah should not retain this power, it will mark, with most astonishing accuracy, the precise period at which his scepter was to depart.

But, taking it according to its general acceptance, it declares the calling of the Gentiles to the knowledge of Christ.

The Scriptures speak much upon this glorious subject. Without noticing the innumerable passages that declare God's intention to convert the Gentiles, we will confine our attention to two or three that speak of it almost in the very same terms as those in the text.

Isaiah, representing Christ as standing for an ensign to the people, says, "To him shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious, [Isaiah 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.10)." There was a remarkable prophecy to the same effect unwittingly uttered by Caiaphas the high-priest. While he designed nothing more than to instigate the Jews to destroy Jesus, God overruled his mind to declare that Jesus should die for the whole world, and should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad, [John 11:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.52). Our Lord himself also, foretelling the same glorious event, said, "I, if I am lifted up, will draw all men unto me, [John 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32)."

Nor is only the mere circumstance of their conversion declared in the test; the manner also of their coming to him is strongly intimated. They "shall be a willing people in the day of God's power," and as the prophet describes at large, shall fly to him as a cloud, or as doves to their windows, [Isaiah 60:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.3-8).

This part of the prediction also has received, and is daily receiving, its accomplishment.

No sooner had our Lord given up the Spirit, than the centurion, the first fruits of the Gentiles, was led to acknowledge him as the Son of God. Presently, not Judea only, but the whole Roman empire, was filled with those who were gathered unto him. And, at this moment, "all who are taught of God come unto him" as the one foundation of all their hopes, and the only fountain of all their blessings. There is a period still future, when this prophecy shall be fulfilled in its utmost extent; when "all kings shall bow down before him, and all nations shall serve him." Blessed period! May "God hasten it in its time!" May his "Gospel run and be glorified," and "his glory fill the whole earth!"

Let us now ADDRESS a few words,

1. To those who are yet dispersed, and at a distance from the Lord.

We need not here turn our eyes to Jews, but reflect how many are there even in this Christian land, who have no more fellowship with Jesus than if he had never come into the world! But what account will they give to him when they shall stand at his tribunal in the last day? Are not the words of our text a direction, as well as a prophecy? Are they not equivalent to an express command? Has not Christ himself enforced this command by repeated invitations and promises, "Look unto me, and be saved!" "Come unto me, and you shall find rest unto your souls!" Has he not even sworn that all shall come to him, or perish for their neglect, [Isaiah 45:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22-25).

Why then should we not all gather ourselves around him as in the days of his flesh? Why should not the blind, the lame, the leprous, the possessed, come to him for deliverance? Why should not the poor trembling sinner press through the crowd, and "touch the hem of his garment!" Surely none should find it in vain to come unto him, "Virtue would go forth from him to heal them all." O let the prophecy then receive a fresh accomplishment this day; and may God so "draw us by his Spirit that we may run after him," and abide with him forever!

2. Those who, through grace, have been gathered to him.

The scepter is now passed into the hands of Jesus. He is the true lion of the tribe of Judah, [Revelation 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.5), to whom all power in Heaven and in earth has been committed. What then have you to fear, who are under his protection? Who shall ever pluck you from his hands! [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28). When, or to whom shall his scepter ever be transferred? His mediatorial kingdom will indeed be done away with, when there shall be no more occasion for it, [1 Corinthians 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.24). This relates to the peculiar mode of administering the affairs of his kingdom as our Mediator.

Though he will cease to mediate between God and man, his sovereign dominion shall exist to all eternity, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; of your kingdom there shall he no end! [Isaiah 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.7); [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44); [Hebrews 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8)."

Rejoice then, believers, in your Lord, "let the children of Zion be joyful in their king." Cherish his attractive influences; gather yourselves around him yet daily and hourly; spread before him your every need; commune with him on every occasion; consult him; listen to him; obey him; cleave to him with full purpose of heart. So will he keep you steadfast unto the end, and admit you to the richer fruition of his presence in his kingdom above!

#61

JOSEPH A TYPE OF CHRIST

**[Genesis 49:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.22-24)**

"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel"

Peculiar care is to be used in unfolding the types, lest, by indulging our own imagination, we bring the very truth of God itself into contempt. Where the Scriptures themselves have marked the typical reference, we may proceed without fear; but when once they cease to guide us, we should not venture one step but with fear and trembling.

This observation is peculiarly applicable to the subject before us. It does not appear that Joseph is anywhere declared to be a type of Christ, notwithstanding the circumstances wherein they resemble each other are as numerous and remarkable, as in almost any other instance whatever. We forbear therefore to assert anything on this subject with confidence; while, in compliance with the opinion of the most judicious commentators, and indeed with the almost irresistible conviction of our own mind, we proceed to trace the resemblance of Joseph to Christ:

I. The resemblance of Joseph to Christ, **in his distinguishing character**.

Joseph is represented as "a fruitful vine".

Every tribe is distinguished by something characteristic, either of the patriarchs themselves, or of their descendants. The distinction assigned to Joseph, is that of peculiar fruitfulness; and to him it eminently belonged. All of his brethren indeed were honored with being heads of distinct tribes; but Joseph had both his sons chosen of God, and appointed to be leaders of separate tribes; and thus two tribes sprang from him, while one tribe only sprang from any of his brethren.

To our Lord also is a similar title frequently ascribed.

Jesus was that "beautiful and glorious branch," which was in due time to spring from the stem of Jesse, [Isaiah 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.2); [Isaiah 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.1), the fruit whereof was to fill the whole earth [Isaiah 27:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.6). It was not one tribe only, or two, that was to acknowledge him as their head, but all the tribes. Yes, Gentiles as well as Jews, even all the ends of the earth; his fruit was to shake like the woods of Lebanon, and they, who should spring from him, were to be numerous as:  
the grass of the earth, [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.16),  
the stars of Heaven, [Genesis 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.5),  
and the sands upon the sea-shore, [Genesis 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.17).

And so abundantly has this prediction been already verified, that we may say of this Branch as the Psalmist did of that which typically represented it, "It has taken deep root, and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River, [Psalm 80:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 80.9-11)."

But the resemblance will more fully appear, while we consider,

II. The resemblance of Joseph to Christ, **in his grievous sufferings**.

Joseph was for many years very grievously afflicted.

He was eminently the beloved of his father, [Genesis 37:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.3); and, being utterly averse to sin himself, he would reprove, and lay before his father, the misconduct of his brethren, [Genesis 37:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.2). He also, unreservedly, communicated to them all the repeated intimations, which he had had in dreams, respecting his future exaltation above his whole family, [Genesis 37:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.5); [Genesis 37:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.9). For these reasons he was envied, hated, and persecuted by his brethren, [Genesis 37:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.4); [Genesis 37:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.11). And when he came to them from his father, upon an errand of love, they conspired against him to kill him, [Genesis 37:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.18-20). An opportunity offering at the moment, they sold him into the hands of strangers for twenty pieces of silver, [Genesis 37:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.28). After that, he was accused of a crime he utterly abhorred, and, without any one to plead his cause, was cast into prison, [Genesis 39:12-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.12-20), where, for a time at least, "he was laid in irons," and galled with heavy fetters, [Psalm 105:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.18); so "sorely did the archers grieve him, and shoot at him, and hate him!"

And can we err in tracing here the sufferings of our Lord?

Jesus was, infinitely above all others, the well-beloved of his Father, [Matthew 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.17); and, while he faithfully reproved the sins of his brethren, declared to them his future exaltation and glory, [John 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.7) and [Matthew 26:64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.64). Filled with envy and wrath against him, they said, as it were in malignant triumph, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him! [Matthew 21:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.38)." So cruelly "did they reward him evil for good, and hatred for his love, [Psalm 109:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 109.3-5)." When he was come to them from his Father with the most benevolent design, behold, one of his own disciples sold him, and that to strangers too, for thirty pieces of silver, [Matthew 26:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.15-16). He was accused of blasphemy against God, and of rebellion against his king; and, without anyone appearing to speak on his behalf, [Isaiah 53:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.8), and [Psalm 69:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.20), was instantly condemned; and thus, though "none could convince him of sin," "was numbered with the transgressors." Could there have been such a coincidence of circumstances between his lot and Joseph's, if it had not been particularly ordained by God?

We may pursue the comparison yet further, in,

III. The resemblance of Joseph to Christ, **in his unshaken constancy**.

Joseph was marvelously upheld under all his trials.

Though he besought his brethren with cries and tears, we read not of any reproachful language that he used. When he entreated Pharaoh's cupbearer to intercede for him, he did not so much as mention either his brethren, who had sold him, or his mistress, who had falsely accused him, [Genesis 40:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 40.14-15). Nor, while he was enduring his hard lot, did he once murmur or repine at the providence of God; through the whole of his trial he possessed his soul in patience. Nor, when he had it in his power to revenge himself, did he render anything but love for hatred, and good for evil.

The apparent unkindness of his deportment, which he adopted for a time, was a violence done to his own feelings, in order that he might discern the real state of their minds, and reveal himself to them afterwards to better effect, [Genesis 42:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.7); [Genesis 42:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.9); [Genesis 42:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.12). When the proper season was arrived, he fully evinced the tenderness of his heart, and the delight he took in the exercise of mercy; and, so far from upbraiding his brethren, he said all he could to extenuate their crime, and referred the whole event to the overruling providence of God, [Genesis 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.5). So effectually were "his hands strengthened by the mighty God of Jacob," that in no instance was he "overcome of evil, but at all times overcame evil with good."

Our blessed Lord also shone like him, only with infinitely brighter luster.

Never did an inadvertent word drop from the lips of Jesus under all his persecutions, "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously! [1 Peter 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.23)." "As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so opened he not his mouth, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7)" either in threats, or complaints. His meekness was uniform, his fortitude undaunted, his patience invincible. He sought nothing but the good of those who were daily conspiring against his life; he wept over them, when they resisted all his overtures of mercy, [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41). He even prayed for them, and apologized for their crimes, when they were in the very act of putting him to death, [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34). After his resurrection, commanded that the offers of salvation through his blood should be made first to the very people who had so lately shed it, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47).

There is yet one more feature of resemblance to be noticed, in,

IV. The resemblance of Joseph to Christ, **in his glorious advancement**.

After all his trials Joseph was exalted to a throne.

Through the good providence of God, Joseph was enabled to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh, and was, on that account, brought from the dungeon, and made, next to Pharaoh, the supreme governor of the Egyptian kingdom, [Genesis 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 41.14-15); [Genesis 41:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 41.41). All were ordered to bow the knee to Joseph, [Genesis 41:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 41.43); and all, who came for a supply of grain, received this direction, Go to Joseph! [Genesis 41:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 41.55). Thus did God exalt him to be both the shepherd and the rock of Israel, that he might not only provide for Egypt and the neighboring kingdoms, but be an effectual support to all his kindred, and preserve the lives of those very people who had sought his destruction.

Can we reasonably doubt but that in this he was a type of Jesus?

Jesus was raised from the prison of the grave by the effectual working of God's power, "he was highly exalted; and had a name given him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11); [Psalm 72:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.8-9); [Psalm 72:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.11)." "All power was committed to him in Heaven and in earth; and all things were put under him, [1 Corinthians 15:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.27)." Whatever we want for our souls, we must receive it all out of his fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16); the direction given to every living creature is, Go to Jesus! Look to Jesus! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22); [John 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37).

And how does he exercise his power? Behold, he calls his sinful brethren from a land of want and misery, and brings them to his own land of peace and plenty. There he nourishes them with the bread of life, and "reigns over the house of Jacob forever and ever." Thus, as "the great Shepherd of the sheep," he both feeds and rules his flock, while as "the foundation" and "cornerstone" he supports and connects, confirms and dignifies, all the "Israel of God!" [Hebrews 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20); [1 Peter 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.6).

By way of **improvement** we observe,

1. The purposes of God shall surely be accomplished, whatever may be done to frustrate them.

We are amazed at the variety of incidents, that seemed to put the elevation of Joseph, and of Christ, almost beyond the reach of Omnipotence itself. Yet God's purposes were accomplished by the very means used to defeat them. Thus shall it be with us also, if we confide in the Word of God. Whatever means Satan, or the world, may use to "separate us from God," they shall not prevail. "What God has promised, he is able also to perform." Let us therefore trust in him; for He will work, and who shall hinder him? He has purposed, and who shall disannul it? His counsel shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure! [Isaiah 43:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.13); [Isaiah 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.27); [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.10).

2. God's dearest children must expect many trials in their way to glory.

Joseph, and Christ, endured much before their exaltation. And we also "through much tribulation shall enter into the kingdom!" The number and weight of our trials are no grounds of concluding ourselves to be objects of God's displeasure; they should rather, especially if they are sanctified to us, be considered as tokens of his love, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6). As the Captain of our salvation was, so also must we be made perfect through sufferings, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10). Let us then "arm ourselves with the mind that was in Christ." We shall surely have no reason to regret the difficulties of the way, when we have attained the eternal rest prepared for us!

3. We should not labor to control events, but study rather to accommodate ourselves to the circumstances in which God has placed us.

How often might Joseph have escaped from the house of Potiphar, or sent to his brethren the news of his exaltation in Egypt. But he left all in the hands of God, endeavoring only to fulfill his duty—whether as a slave or a steward, whether as a jailor or a prince. Thus did our Lord also, when he could in ten thousand ways have changed the course of events. Let us do likewise.

Whatever be our circumstances or condition in life, let us be more desirous of glorifying God under them, than of contriving, by any means, to alter them. God's time and manner of accomplishing his own ends will be found infinitely better in the outcome, than any we can devise, [Isaiah 55:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.8-9). Let us then tarry his leisure, and leave ourselves wholly to his disposal, and approve ourselves to him as faithful, and obedient children.

#62

JOSEPH'S BRETHREN FULFILLING THE PROPHECY RESPECTING THEM

**[Genesis 50:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.15-17)**

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

The heart of man by nature is vindictive. It was a just observation of Saul to David, "When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? [1 Samuel 24:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.19)." Hence, when men have injured any person, they hate him, because they think he must of necessity have become their enemy; and, if they are within the reach of his power, they fear him, because they conclude that he will avail himself of any favorable opportunity to revenge himself upon them.

It was thus with Joseph's brethren. Their father being dead, and they being entirely at the mercy of their brother whom they had sold into Egypt, they concluded, that "he would requite them all the evil which they had formerly done unto him." It is probable that this apprehension was strengthened by a recollection of what their father Jacob had suffered from the vindictive spirit of Esau, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob." Full of fear, they sent to Joseph to implore his forgiveness; which, as will be seen, they readily obtained.

The points to which we would direct your attention are:

I. The means they used to conciliate his favor.

These were certainly well adapted to the end proposed.

1. They plead the dying request of their revered father.

What more cogent argument could be used with a pious mind than this? The dying request of a friend is sacred; and how much more of a parent, a parent of such consummate piety as Jacob! A request too so reasonable in itself, and so conducive to the welfare of his whole family!

It is probable indeed that the representation which they gave of their father's request was not altogether correct. We cannot conceive that Jacob would have entertained any suspicions about the subsequent conduct of Joseph; or that, if he had, he would have left a posthumous request to be made through his other children, when he could have urged it himself with so much more effect in his lifetime. The probability is, that he enjoined them to act in a submissive spirit towards Joseph, and not by any refractory conduct to bring upon themselves his displeasure. But however this might be, the plea was very powerful, and could not fail of obtaining for them the favor they implored. True indeed it is, that people of a headstrong disposition frequently forget, and that at no distant period, the dying advices of their parents; but it was not probable that Joseph would do so, after having so long evinced a disposition most contrary to that of which he was suspected.

2. They unite with it, their own most humble and earnest entreaties.

However strong may be our propensity to revenge, the entreaties of a penitent offender will disarm us. It is scarcely possible for a man to revenge himself on one who lies prostrate at his feet. But there is a very peculiar delicacy in this address which they make to Joseph; in speaking to him of Jacob, they do not designate him as their father, but as his, "Your father did command." And when they speak to him of themselves, they do not designate themselves either as Jacob's sons, or as Joseph's brethren, but as "the servants of the God of your father," thus keeping out of view everything which might appear presumptuous, and calling to their aid Joseph's love to his parent, and his duty to his God.

If this was the result of ingenuity, we admire it; but if of real humility, we greatly applaud it; for there is a delicacy in humility, a beautiful and lovely delicacy, which, though in words it amount to little, as indicating the spirit by which a man is actuated, is extremely valuable.

The true point to be aimed at in asking forgiveness is humility; to be open and sincere in our confessions, to take shame to ourselves for what we have done amiss, and to make all the reparation in our power. This is the spirit we should cultivate; and it is pleasing to see these long-obdurate men brought at last to a measure of this experience.

Reserving for a while our further observations on this part of our subject, we pass on to notice:

II. The effect produced on Joseph's mind.

Considering how long they had forborne to humble themselves aright, he might well have upbraided them, both with their former cruelty, and their subsequent impenitence; or he might have imposed conditions upon them, as Solomon afterwards did on Shimei; or he might have pardoned them in kind and condescending terms. But the way in which he expressed his forgiveness was more eloquent and convincing than any words which human ingenuity could ever have devised, "Joseph wept when they spoke unto him."

His weeping was from mixed emotions in his mind. The human heart is susceptible of greatly diversified impressions even at the same moment. The two Marys, when they had ascertained beyond a doubt the resurrection of their Lord, "departed from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, [Matthew 28:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.8)." Thus in the bosom of Joseph, we apprehend, there was a mixture both of grief and joy:

1. Of grief.

It must have been inexpressibly painful to him to have such suspicions entertained respecting him, especially after he had for the space of seventeen years manifested such uniform kindness towards them. A man possessed of a generous mind cannot endure that all the love he exercises should be construed as a mere hypocritical pretense, covering a rooted enmity that will break forth as soon as an opportunity shall enable him to manifest it with effect; yes, the more conscious a man feels of his own integrity, the more deeply will he feel such unfounded suspicions. If jealousy is painful to him who harbors it, it is no less painful to him who is undeservedly the object of it. This avowal therefore of their secret fears could not but inflict a deep wound on his tender spirit.

At the same time it must be distressing to Joseph to see, that, after all they had witnessed of piety in their father Jacob, and all the reason they had to believe he was possessed of the same divine principle—they should betray such ignorance of religion, as to suppose, that, where the lowest degrees of it existed, a vindictive spirit could be indulged. If indeed they thought Joseph a determined hypocrite, they might suppose him capable of harboring such resentment; but, if he had any hope of forgiveness from God himself, he never could suffer such feelings to rankle in his bosom.

While therefore they doubted the influence of true religion in him, they showed, that they were in a very great degree strangers to it themselves; and this discovery must have been painful to him, in proportion to the love he bore them, and the desire he felt for their eternal welfare. Hence that expression of his, "Am I in the place of God," to whom exclusively "vengeance belongs," and whose prerogative, if I avenged myself, I would usurp, [Romans 12:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.19) with [Genesis 50:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.19).

2. Of joy.

While they thus betrayed an ignorance of genuine religion, they gave by their voluntary humiliation some reason to hope that the seeds of true piety were springing up in their souls. And this hope doubtless filled him with holy joy.

Say, any of you, who have wept over an abandoned child, or the impiety of a friend or brother—what joy has not sprung up in your bosom when you have first seen the obdurate heart to relent, and the tears of penitential sorrow to flow down, so as to justify a hope that a work of grace was begun in the soul! How have you secretly lifted up your heart to God in devout aspirations, to entreat, that he would confirm the rising purpose, and perfect in their souls the work he had begun! Doubtless then, in such a pious mind as Joseph's, the very first dawn of piety in his obdurate brethren could not but cause the tear of love and gratitude to start from his eyes.

Another thought too, that could not fail of rushing into his mind, and filling him with adoring gratitude to God, was, that in this act of humiliation his brethren had voluntarily fulfilled those dreams which they had before accomplished only from necessity and constraint.

To trace the ways of Providence, and especially to see how mysteriously God has dealt with us, and made all things to work together for our good—is one of the sublimest enjoyments that we can experience on earth; and I doubt not but that it will constitute in no small degree the blessedness of Heaven. Well therefore might Joseph now weep for joy, more especially as the exaltation which all his previous trials had led to, enabled him now to requite, not evil for evil, as they feared—but good for evil, and to "overcome evil with good! [Romans 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.20-21)."

From hence then we may learn,

1. To ask forgiveness of those whom we have injured.

This is a hard task to an unhumbled spirit; but it is indispensably necessary; nor can any man be upright before God, who will not submit to it. To approach the table of the Lord without first endeavoring to conciliate our offended brother is directly to oppose the command of God, who says, "Leave your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift, [Matthew 5:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.23-24)." Many will be the excuses which we shall be ready to offer for our neglect of this duty; but the command of God is plain and express; and a compliance with it is indispensable, to prove that our penitence is sincere; nor can we ever obtain forgiveness from God, if we are too proud to solicit forgiveness from man.

2. To forgive those who have injured us.

This is a far easier duty than the other; because, while a compliance with the other humbles us, the performance of this elevates and exalts us. Is it asked, "How often shall I forgive an offending brother? Up to seven times?" I answer, Yes, and "until seventy times seven, [Matthew 18:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.21-22)."

Nor is our forgiveness to be merely negative, such as consists in a forbearance from retaliation; no; it must be real, cordial, permanent; for in the parable of the unforgiving servant who is represented as cast into prison until he shall have paid the uttermost farthing, we are warned, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you, unless you forgive your brother from your heart! [Matthew 18:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.35)."

Let not any one then say, 'I cannot forgive! Or, Though I forgive, I cannot forget!' For we must, in the mercy which we extend towards man, resemble that which we ourselves hope to receive from God; and must "forgive our brother as completely and cordially as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us, [Ephesians 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.32)."

#63

THE BURNING BUSH

**[Exodus 3:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.1-3)**

"Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

If God have on some occasions revealed himself to people, when, like Saul, they have been in the very act of committing the most heinous sins, [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4)—he has more generally favored them when they have been occupied, like the shepherds, in their proper calling, [Luke 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.8-9).

Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, when God appeared to him in a burning bush, and gave him a commission to deliver Israel from their bondage in Egypt. By this extraordinary appearance God not merely awakened the curiosity of Moses, but conveyed to him some very important instruction; to elucidate which we shall,

I. Show what was intended by the burning bush.

1. The burning bush was intended to represent the state and condition of the **Israelites**in Egypt.

They were cruelly oppressed, and every effort was made to destroy them, [Exodus 1:9-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 1.9-22). Nor had they in themselves any more ability to withstand their enemies, than a thorn-bush has to resist the action of fire. Yet not only were they preserved from destruction, but they even multiplied in proportion as means were used to prevent their increase.

2. The burning bush was intended to represent the state and condition of the **true church**of God in the world.

The church, whose state was typified by that of Israel, has at all times suffered by persecution, though it has enjoyed some intervals of comparative rest. And, considering that all the powers of the world have been confederate against it, we may well be amazed that it has not been utterly consumed. But it has endured the fiery trial to this hour, and still defies the impotent attacks of all its adversaries.

3. The burning bush was intended to represent the state and condition of every **true Christian**.

The declaration that "all who would live godly in Christ Jesus should suffer persecution," has been verified in every place and every age, "the third part are, and ever will be, brought through the fire." And it is no less than a miracle, that, when the believer has so many enemies, both without and within, he does not "make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience." But the furnace, instead of destroying, purifies and refines him; and his very graces are perfected by the trials that endanger their existence, [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5).

Having pointed out both the primary and more remote signification of this phenomenon we shall,

II. Account for the miracle which it exhibited.

Well might the sight of a bush burning, but not consumed, excite the astonishment of Moses; but his wonder would cease when he found that God was in the bush.

The person here called "the angel of the Lord" was Christ.

The angel expressly called himself "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" which sufficiently proves that he could not be a created angel, seeing that it would be the most daring blasphemy in any creature to assume that incommunicable title of Jehovah. Yet it was not God the Father; for Stephen, recording this history, informs us, that "God sent Moses by the hand of the angel, [Acts 7:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.30-35);" consequently the angel was God the Son, and not God the Father. Indeed Christ, who is elsewhere called "The angel of the covenant," was the person, who, in all the appearances of God to man, assumed the human or angelic shape; thereby preparing the world for the fuller manifestation of himself in his incarnate state. And it is on this account that he is called "The image of the invisible God, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15)."

It was Christ's presence with the Israelites that prevented their destruction.

He was in the bush, and therefore the bush was not consumed; so he was in the midst of his oppressed people; and therefore the Egyptians could not prevail against them. Christ was among them before he gave them any symbol of his presence; for it was he who rendered the assistance of the midwives unnecessary, and emboldened them to withstand the commands of Pharaoh. He was afterwards with them in the pillar and the cloud, protecting them from the Egyptian hosts, and stopping the progress of their enemies until they were overwhelmed in the sea. When, for the punishment of their sins, he refused to go with them, they were sure to be overpowered, [Numbers 14:42-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.42-45); [Joshua 7:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.4-5); but whenever he returned in mercy to them, they prospered and prevailed.

It is that same presence of Christ that preserves the true church and every true Christian.

Christ has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world;" and hence it is that "the gates of Hell have never prevailed against the church;" yes, we are assured, they never shall prevail. We are also told that "he dwells in the hearts" of all his people, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17), and is "their life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4);" and that, wherever they live and act, it is not so much them, as Christ in them, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). It is by this consideration that he encourages them to "go through fire and water," persuaded that no evil shall happen to them, [Psalm 46:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.5). And to his continued interposition and support they must ascribe their preservation in every danger, and their deliverance from every enemy, [Psalm 124:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 124.1-5).

Let us now "turn aside and behold this great sight!"

Let us turn from every worldly thought, and inspect this wonderful appearance, not with curiosity, but profoundest reverence. Let us observe herein,

1. To what state, God's most favored people may be reduced.

Your afflictions may be heavy. But are any discouraged by reason of their great trials? Be it known that tribulation is the way to the kingdom; and all, who arrive there, have trodden the same path, [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22); [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14). Nor need we be alarmed at any fire that is kindled for us, since Christ will be with us in the midst of it, [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10), and "bring us out of it purified as gold!"

2. What they may expect at God's hands.

In seasons of great trial we are tempted to think that God has forsaken us; but he never was more immediately present with the Hebrew youths, than when they were cast into the furnace. Nor did he ever feel more love to his own Son, than in the hour when he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Let us then learn to trust God, and expect that, when we walk through the fire, we shall not be burned, [Isaiah 43:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2).

3. What in the midst of all their trials should be their chief concern.

Moses in his valedictory address to the twelve tribes, congratulates Joseph on "the good-will of Him who dwelt in the bush, [Deuteronomy 33:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.16)." And most truly are they blessed who are thus savingly interested in the divine favor. To them God is "a wall of fire" for their protection, [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5); but to others he is "a consuming fire" for their destruction, [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29).

Alas! alas! in what a fearful state are they, who shall be "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone!" Into "a fire that never shall be quenched," and in which they shall continue unconsumed to all eternity! Oh! "who can dwell with everlasting burnings! [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14)."

But, if we are reconciled to him in the Son of his love, we have nothing to fear; we have nothing to fear either in time or eternity; for, however painful our state in this world may be, he will support us with his presence; and in the world to come, we shall be forever beyond the reach of harm, even in "his immediate presence, in the fullness of joy for evermore!" Seek then his favor; yes, seek it with your whole hearts!

#64

GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE

**[Exodus 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.12)**

"And God said: Certainly I will be with you."

There is nothing more amiable in the character of a saint than true and genuine humility. Without the virtue of humility, all graces are defective, and all attainments worthless in the sight of God. But it is no uncommon thing to see other dispositions assuming the garb of humility, and claiming an excellence which they do not possess.

The Prophet Jeremiah, when called to the prophetic office, declined it under an idea that he was "a child, and unable to speak." But God said to him, "Say not, I am a child; for you shall go to all that I shall send you, and whatever I shall command you, you shall speak, [Jeremiah 1:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.4-7)." His pretended insufficiency for the work was, in reality, no other than a cover for his dread of the dangers to which it would expose him; and therefore God, in order to remove the impediment, replied, "Be not afraid of their faces; for I am with you, to deliver you! [Jeremiah 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.8)."

Thus Moses, when God said to him, "Come now, and I will send you unto Pharaoh, that you may bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt;" replied, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt, [Exodus 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.10-11)." This was specious enough, and had the semblance of true humility; but it was only a pretext, and a cover to his fears and unbelief. He had, forty years before, exerted himself with great vigor in behalf of that people, and had even slain an Egyptian who was contending with them; but they had thrust him from them, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" and Pharaoh had sought his life, as forfeited to the laws of the land.

Now, therefore, he was afraid that the people would show the same disregard of his efforts, and that his slaughter of the Egyptian would be visited with the punishment which the laws of the land denounced against him. This indeed, did not at first sight appear to be his real motive; but his numerous refusals of the office delegated to him, repeated as they were under a variety of pretexts, clearly discovered at last what was in his heart, and justly excited the displeasure of God against him, [Exodus 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.13-14); [Exodus 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.19). But the very first answer of God should have been quite sufficient to remove every apprehension. God said to him, "Certainly I will be with you!" and, having that assurance, he should without hesitation have gone forth to his destined labors.

Let us consider,

I. The extent of the promise.

As relating to **him**, it comprehended all that he could wish.

True, his work was arduous, and to unassisted man impracticable; but, if God was with him, what could he have to fear? He would be guided by a wisdom that could not err, and he aided by a power which could not be overcome. With such an assurance, what had he to do with discouragements? Could Pharaoh hurt him, while he was under such protection; or the Israelites withstand his solicitations, when enforced by such powerful energy on their minds? Every difficulty should have vanished from his mind; and he should have leaped for joy at the prospect of effecting so great and good a work.

But it relates to **us** also, and pledges God to an equal extent in our behalf.

A similar promise was given to Joshua, on an occasion precisely similar, [Joshua 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.5); and that is quoted by the Apostle Paul as applicable to every true believer, "God has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you; so that WE may boldly say: The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6)." Here the very promise made to Moses, is renewed to Joshua, and declared to belong to us also. Whatever difficulties, therefore, we may have to encounter in the discharge of our duty to God, we need not fear; his promised presence shall be with us in our efforts, and his almighty power secure to us a successful outcome.

The more minute consideration of the subject will fall under the next head of my discourse, while I endeavor to show,

II. The encouragement this promise affords to us.

We may properly view it, in the first place, as applicable to **ministers**.

Ministers have, if I may so speak, the very same office delegated to them as was assigned to Moses; they are sent to bring men out of spiritual thraldom, and to deliver them from a bondage far more terrible than that of Egypt. The power that opposes them is far stronger than that of Pharaoh; and the unhappy captives are in love with their chains; they are themselves as averse to leave their hard taskmaster, as he is to lose their services. Were we to go in our own strength, we would soon desert our post; as Moses did, when, in reliance on his own arm, he prematurely offered to the people his assistance. But with the promise of God's presence, a promise specifically given to us by our Divine Master for our encouragement, [Matthew 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.18), we go forth with confidence; and to every obstacle that is in our way, we say, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)."

We know that the people to whom we speak are as incapable of hearing our words, as dry bones scattered upon the face of the earth; yet do we not despond, or even doubt the efficacy of our ministrations for those to whom we are sent; and, in dependence on this word, we hope and believe, that the word which we speak shall prove "the power of God to the salvation" of those who hear it.

We are not unmindful of the question put by the Apostle, "Who is sufficient for these things?" but, if the rod of Moses wrought effectually in his hand for the deliverance of Israel, we have no fear but that the Word of God, by whoever administered, shall be alike effectual for all the ends for which it is sent. It is "the rod of God's strength;" and not all the powers of darkness shall be able to withstand it.

But it is also applicable to **all of God's people**.

To this extent, as we have before observed, Paul applies it; and every believer needs it for his support. Every one is engaged in a great work, for which no finite power is sufficient. Every one, therefore, needs to be encouraged with an assurance, that God will be with him in all his endeavors to perform it, and will secure to him the desired success.

Believer, have you much to do for God, even so much as you could have no hope of effecting without the arm of Omnipotence exerted in your behalf? Hear what God has said for your encouragement, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10)."

See here, how God, in every successive part of these promises, accommodates himself to your weakness and your fears. When he says, "I am with you," a thought may perhaps arise, that he will be with you only to witness your defeat; he therefore adds, "I will be your God."

Does a sense of your weakness press upon you? He further says, "I will strengthen you." Are you still discouraged, because the work is left to you? He adds, "I will help you."

Are you still dejected through an apprehension of your failure at last? he takes the whole responsibility on himself, and declares, for your comfort, "I will altogether uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." This shows the extent to which this promise goes, in relation to everything which our necessities may require.

Again, Have you also much to suffer for God in your Christian course? Doubtless you must have some cross to bear, else you could not be conformed fully to your Savior's image. But, whether your trials are more or less severe, the promise in my text secures to you an effectual help, and a sure deliverance. For thus says the Lord, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you; for I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior! [Isaiah 43:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2-3)." Here again the extent of the promise clearly appears, and its perfect sufficiency for every trial to which you can be exposed.

Is there yet a lurking apprehension that in the extremity of death your heart will fail? At this season, also, shall the presence of your God afford you effectual support, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me, [Psalm 23:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.4)." Now, though the valley of this shadow of death may comprehend the whole of the present life as beset with snares and difficulties—yet it must include the closing scenes of life, as well as those that have preceded it; and, consequently, when our flesh and heart fail, we may be assured that "God will be the strength of our heart, and our portion forever! [Psalm 73:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.26)."

Learn from hence.

1. To undertake nothing but in dependence on God.

When God given his assistance to Israel, no man could stand before them; but when they went up against the Canaanites in dependence on an arm of flesh, they were put to flight and slain, [Numbers 14:43-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.43-45). So it will be with us, if we presume to engage in anything without first asking counsel, and imploring help, from him. God is jealous of his own honor; and if we place our reliance on anything but him, we must expect a curse, and not a blessing, on all our labors, [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-6).

2. To shrink from nothing to which God calls us.

If Moses was forbidden to shrink from the duties imposed on him—then what shall we not willingly and confidently undertake for God? We must not contemplate human means, when the path of duty is clear; but must expect him to "perfect his own strength in our weakness." With him it is alike "easy to save by many or by few;" nor need we doubt a moment, but that "through Christ strengthening us we can do all things." "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

3. To despair of nothing which we undertake at his command.

We may be in the path of duty, and yet find many difficulties, even such as may appear utterly insuperable. Moses himself was so discouraged by his lack of success, that he complained of God as having disappointed and deceived him. But he succeeded at last; and the very difficulties which had discouraged him served but the more to illustrate the power and grace of God.

Just so, we may find it for a season; but we should bear in mind, that his word, which he has pledged to us, is immutable, and that his counsel shall stand, though earth and Hell should combine to defeat it. Let us then "commit our every way to him;" and, with a holy confidence, advance, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might!"

#65

THE SELF-EXISTENCE AND IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

**[Exodus 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.14)**

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

It is of great importance that ministers should be considered as ambassadors of God. They should deliver nothing which they cannot enforce with, Thus says the Lord! Without this, their word can have but little weight. But ministrations thus supported will produce the happiest effects.

Moses was commissioned to offer deliverance to the oppressed Israelites. But he rightly judged that they would ask from whence he had his authority. He therefore inquired of God, what answer he should return, and received from God the direction recorded in the text.

To understand the words aright, we must consider,

I. The title God assumed.

God had hitherto revealed himself to man by the name of God Almighty. Though he had been called Jehovah, he was not fully known by that name, even to his most highly-favored servants, [Exodus 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 6.3). He now was pleased to assume a title similar to that; but, if possible, of still plainer import.

The name, I AM THAT I AM, represents him to be:

1. Self-existent.

Creatures have only a derived existence, and therefore a dependent existence. They are now what they once were not, and may again cease to be. But God from all eternity was precisely what he now is. To him therefore this august title may be properly applied. Nor are there lacking other similar descriptions of him to confirm it, [Psalm 102:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.27); [Revelation 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.4).

2. Immutable.

Every creature in earth and Heaven is liable to change. But "with God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He himself claims immutability as his own peculiar prerogative, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6). And in this view, the title assumed in the text must ever belong to him.

3. Incomprehensible.

No words can convey, or imagination conceive, an adequate idea of God, [Job 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.7); [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16). Hence God does not endeavor to explain his nature to Moses. But, by declaring himself to be what he is, intimates, that he is what can neither be comprehended nor expressed. His answer, in effect, was similar to that which he afterwards gave to Manoah, [Judges 13:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.17-18).

The title thus explained, it will be proper to consider,

II. For what end God assumed this title.

The Israelites were extremely cast down by means of their long bondage. It was necessary therefore to prepare their minds for the intended deliverance.

Though they groaned under their oppression, they were too much reconciled to their yoke. They rather affected a mitigation of trouble, than the attainment of liberty. Though the promises made to their fathers were not wholly forgotten, the accomplishment of them was not cordially desired. Indeed, they scarcely conceived it possible that their emancipation should be effected. Hence it was necessary to stimulate their desires, renew their hopes, and confirm their expectations, of a better country.

The title which God assumed was admirably adapted to this end.

If God was so incomprehensible a Being, he could easily devise means of executing his own sovereign will and pleasure. If he was the one self-existent, independent Creator of the universe, all creatures must be wholly subject to his control. And if he were absolutely immutable, he could not recede from the covenant entered into with their fathers. He therefore could not want either inclination or power to deliver them. Yes, He could not but deliver them for his own great name's sake. He could not be I AM, if his promised interposition would be either withheld or defeated. Thus the declaration of his name must inspire them with confidence, and induce them willingly to put themselves under the direction of Moses.

Inferences:

1. What a solemn attention does the Gospel demand!

The Gospel is a message of mercy to those who are in bondage to sin. And they who preach it are ambassadors from the great I AM. Jesus, who sends them forth, assumes to himself this very title, [John 8:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.58). To the same effect also, his character is drawn in [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8). He has commissioned his servants to go forth into all the world, [Mark 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15); and promised (as God did to Moses) to be always with them, [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20).

Shall we then make light of the mercy which He offers to us; or doubt his power and willingness to fulfill his promises? Shall we thrust away his servants, saying, Why do you interfere with us? [Acts 7:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.27).

Let us remember who it is that speaks to us in the Gospel, [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.16). Every faithful minister may say, I AM has sent me unto you. Nor, though miracles have ceased, shall signs be wanting to confirm the word; the deaf shall hear, the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers be cleansed. And blessed is he whoever shall not be offended at the Redeemer's voice, [Matthew 11:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.5-6).

2. What encouragement is here afforded to those who are groaning under spiritual bondage!

God brought out his people safely, notwithstanding all their difficulties; and in due time put them into possession of the promised land. Shall the spiritual redemption offered by him be less effectual? Are not his power and faithfulness the same as in former ages? [Isaiah 59:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.1). Will he not remove our obstacles, supply our needs, and destroy our enemies? Surely there are none so weak but they shall be made to triumph! [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.24-25). Nor shall the Prince of Darkness oppose with more success than Pharaoh, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20).

Behold, then, I AM has sent me to proclaim these glad tidings. Let all arise, and cast off their yoke, and burst their bands asunder. Let not unbelief represent the obstacles as insurmountable; nor fear induce you to comply with the imperious dictates of the world.

Pharaoh, after many successive plagues, agreed first that they should sacrifice to God in the land, but not in the wilderness; then that they should go into the wilderness, but not far; then that the men should go, but without the women or children; then that the women and children, but not the flocks, [Exodus 8:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.25); [Exodus 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.28); [Exodus 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.11); [Exodus 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.24).

Thus the world would prescribe limits to the service we shall pay to God. Behold! the Pillar and the Cloud are ready to conduct your path. The great I AM is for you; who then can be against you? Go forth in obedience to Him! [Isaiah 55:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.12).

#66

MOSES DECLINING THE COMMISSION GIVEN TO HIM

**[Exodus 4:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.10-14)**

Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you."

That iniquity should prevail among the blind and ignorant, is no more than might reasonably be expected; but when we behold it in the most eminent saints, we are ready to exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that you are mindful of him, and the son of man, that you so regard him?" It would seem indeed that God has determined to stain the pride of human glory, by recording the faults of his most favored servants. It is remarkable that those who are most noted in Scripture for their piety, not only fell, but manifested their weakness in those very graces for which they were most distinguished.

Abraham yielded to unbelief.

Job yielded to impatience.

Moses yielded to anger.

Peter yielded to fear.

The circumstances here related concerning Moses, clearly show, not only what Moses was, but what human nature is, when put to the trial. The following observations therefore, while they elucidate the text, will lead us to behold our own faces as in a looking-glass.

I. There is in man a backwardness to engage in God's service.

Who was this man? Moses, in some respects the most pious of mankind. What was the service to which he was called? The most honorable and beneficial that could possibly be assigned to him. Yet, with a pertinacity truly surprising, he persisted in declining it, and desired that any one might be employed in it rather than he.

We, it is true, are called to no such service. But is there no work committed to us? Has not God appeared to us in his word, and commanded us to devote ourselves to his service? Has not the Savior bidden us to "deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily, and follow him?" And have we not shown an utter aversion to obey his call? As glorious as his service is, have we not declined it; and, like Moses, been more studious of our own ease than either of God's honor or the benefit of our fellow-creatures? Because we have foreseen difficulties, we have been unwilling to embark in the cause of God and of our own souls; when we ought rather to have gloried in enduring hardships for God, and closed with the proposal at once, saying, "Here am I, Lord; send me! [Isaiah 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.8)."

II. We are prone to cloak this backwardness with vain excuses.

Moses would not in plain terms refuse to obey his God; but he tried by even method to excuse himself from undertaking the office assigned him. He first pretends to decline through modesty, [Exodus 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.11); and we might have given him credit for real humility, if his subsequent refusals had not shown that he was actuated by a far different principle. When God has obviated all objections arising from his unworthiness, then, in direct opposition to God's promise, he objects, that the people will not believe his message. Compare [Exodus 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.18) with 4:1.

To remove all apprehensions on this ground, God works three miracles before him, and commissions him to perform the same in the sight of Pharaoh and the people of Israel. Still averse to engage in this work, he pleads his lack of eloquence, and his consequent unfitness for such an undertaking. To obviate this, God asks him, "Who made man's mouth;" and whether He, who had given him the faculty of speech, was not able to give effect to his endeavors? Yes, he promises to "be with him, and to teach him what he shall say." And does not all this overcome his reluctance? No; he still declines the service, and begs that God would employ any other person rather than himself.

Now we say that these were vain excuses; for the real principles by which he was actuated, were unbelief and cowardice. He had failed in this attempt forty years before, when he had run unsent, and acted in his own strength, and striven for the victory with no other than carnal weapons; and now he is apprehensive of another failure, when expressly sent, and furnished with a wonder-working rod, and assured of success by a God of almighty power and unimpeachable veracity. Moreover, as on the former occasion Pharaoh sought his life, he is afraid to put himself within his reach, lest Pharaoh should execute his threats upon him.

And what are the pleas whereby we attempt to justify or extenuate our neglect of God? Have they any solidity? Have they any foundation in truth? Are they not mere excuses? Is not an aversion to the service to which we are called, the true reason of our declining to engage in it? We will not say in plain words, 'I hate God; I hate religion; I am determined never to follow the Savior's steps!' But we pretend that this is not a convenient season, or that the work to which we are called is impracticable. Yes; if we will only allow our own consciences to speak, they will tell us that our pleas are mere excuses, and that, in fact, we are hypocrites, and dissemblers with God.

III. However satisfactory our excuses may appear to ourselves, they will only bring upon us God's displeasure.

Possibly Moses was unable to discern the true workings of his own heart; but did not God spy them out? Was not God's anger kindled against him? How God manifested his anger, we know not; it is sufficient to know God's "judgment was according to truth."

Who then are we, that we should think to impose upon God, or to hide from him the motives by which we are actuated? Has he not cautioned us sufficiently against such fatal mistakes, saying, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap?" Has he not warned us, that we shall certainly incur his displeasure, if we allow anything to keep us back from his service? He has mentioned the excuses made by those whom he invited to his feast; one had bought a piece of ground; and another a yoke of oxen which he wanted to see; another had married a wife, and therefore could not come. Now these were as weighty excuses for not going to an entertainment, as any that you can urge for not serving your God; and yet he declared that none of them should ever taste of his supper, [Luke 14:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.18-24).

If this was the doom of those who were invited but once, do you think that you shall sit down at his supper, who have rejected ten thousand invitations! No; you may excuse your supineness by saying, "There is a lion in the way; there is a lion in the streets;" but he will say, "You wicked and slothful servant!" "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."

The spies thought they had reason enough for postponing the invasion of the promised land; but they were all excluded from it; as were all others who yielded to their pernicious counsels.

Advice.

1. Beware of self-deception.

The heart is deceitful above all things; and we have a subtle adversary, who will not fail to help forward the most fatal delusions. We see how others are biased, and how empty the pleas are by which they often justify their conduct. Let us see in them an image of ourselves; and learn to suspect the treachery of our own hearts. Let us remember that we cannot deceive our God; and that the time is coming when we shall be judged, not by our professions, but by our practice.

2. Learn what are the duties to which you are called.

With respect to particular steps in life, it may be extremely difficult to judge. For instance, whether one should go to such or such a station; whether one should undertake the office of a missionary, etc; but about a life of devotedness to God there can be no doubt. Endeavor then to ascertain what the Scriptures require of you; and set yourselves instantly to fulfill it. Do not invent excuses to shift off your duty; but look up to God to direct you in his way, and to strengthen you for the performance of all his will.

3. Yield not to any discouragements in the way of duty.

It is not to be expected that you should meet with no difficulties. You must doubtless have conflicts, and many of them severe; but "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." You may not improperly, in a view of your own weakness, say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But you must never forget who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you." Go on then, expecting assuredly that "your strength shall be according to your day of trial;" that the weaker you are in yourselves, the more shall "Jehovah's strength be magnified in your weakness;" and that "you shall at last be more than conquerors through Him that loved you!"

#67

PHARAOH'S IMPIETY

**[Exodus 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.1-2)**

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'" Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go!"

Many of the characters in the Old Testament are "set forth to us as examples;" and their history is recorded "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come, [1 Corinthians 10:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.6); [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11)."

Among these, Pharaoh holds a very conspicuous place. When he persisted in his rebellion against God, Moses was inspired to declare to him what a monument of God's indignation he would be made to all future generations, and that God had raised him up to his exalted station for that express purpose. Not that God had infused any evil disposition into his mind; but by investing him with regal authority, and continuing him in the exercise of that authority notwithstanding his impious abuse of it—he enabled Pharaoh to display more conspicuously the wickedness of his heart, and to involve himself and his whole kingdom in more awful judgments than he could have done if he had moved in the situation of a private man.

Paul quotes this declaration, in order to show that God disposes of men according to his sovereign will and pleasure, either converting them unto himself, or permitting them to proceed in their wickedness, in such a way as shall ultimately conduce most to the honor of his own name, and to the accomplishment of his own eternal purposes. Compare [Exodus 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.16) with [Romans 9:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.15-18).

In this view, the passage before us is commended to us, as of singular importance. It shows us not only what Pharaoh was, but what human nature itself is—if left to manifest its dispositions without restraint. I shall take occasion from it, therefore, to show,

I. The impiety of Pharaoh.

I will bring it before you in a brief but comprehensive way. Mark,

1. The **source** of Pharaoh's impiety.

It arose from pride and ignorance. Because there was no man of greater eminence than himself on earth, this unhappy monarch imagined that there was none above him even in Heaven. Poor foolish worm! Swelling with his own importance, while the plagues inflicted on him showed how impotent he was to repel the assaults of the most base insects. What insufferable arrogance was there in that question, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" And what horrible impiety in that declaration, "I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go!"

True, you son of Belial, you have unwittingly assigned the real cause of your obstinacy, "I know not the Lord! [1 Samuel 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.12)." As Paul says of the Jews, "Had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory! [1 Corinthians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.8)." So I say unto you: Had you known what a great and holy Being you were resisting, you would not have dared to withstand him thus. No; you would have bowed before him, and submitted instantly to his commands. Your profaneness was proof enough of your ignorance.

2. The **operation** of Pharaoh's impiety.

His obstinacy was irreclaimable, whether by judgments or by mercies. Nine successive plagues, and the removal of them all at your request, were insufficient to subdue the pride and haughtiness of your spirit. Not even the tenth, the greatest and heaviest of them all, prevailed on you to desist from fighting against God. Your relentings were only momentary; your hardness returned the very instant you were out of the furnace; your own consent, you did recall; and follow with murderous rage those you had permitted to go forth from your land. How blinded were you by the wickedness of your own heart! You were alike insensible to the evil and the danger of your ways. And in this you have shown what is, in every place and in every age, the sad effect of sin.

3. The **outcome** of Pharaoh's impiety.

Where did it lead this devoted monarch, but to shame and ruin? You said, "Neither will I let Israel go!" But when that Jehovah whom you defied put forth his hand against you, you did thrust them forth from your land; and so anxious were your whole people to get rid of them, that they loaded them with all their most valuable jewels, and with everything that could be desired to speed their way.

But when they seemed to be entangled in the land, and an opportunity was afforded to you, as you thought, for their destruction, you could not forbear; you would seize the occasion, and summon all your hosts, and execute upon them your vengeance to the uttermost. You saw the sea opening for them a way; but you had yet to learn that God would put a difference between the Israelites and Egyptians!

Presumptuous wretch! You would follow them even through the sea itself, and lead on in passion your infatuated hosts. I see you enter within the watery walls which Omnipotence had raised; but there you hastened to your destruction! Now escape from the snare into which your impiety has led you. You cannot; your chariot wheels are broken; and too late do you find that Jehovah fights for Israel. Of all that followed this infuriated monarch, not one escaped! The sea came upon them, and overwhelmed them all; not so much as one was left, to report to Egypt the calamity they had sustained.

Not to dwell any longer on the impiety of Pharaoh, I shall proceed to that which is of more immediate interest to ourselves; namely, to show,

II. To what an extent this proud, impious spirit prevails among religious professors today.

To you the messages of Heaven are sent.

We are ambassadors of God to you, and in his sacred name do we bring you the counsels which we offer; and every word that is so delivered, in accordance with his mind and will, must be received, "not as the word of man, but as the Word of God himself." To every different class of hearers we have a message suited to their state.

We call upon the licentious to forsake their evil ways.

We call upon the worldling to seek for better things than this world can give.

We call upon the formal and self-righteous to renounce their self-dependence, and to make the Lord Jesus Christ the ground of all their hopes.

But who among you can be prevailed upon to obey the Word?

The same spirit by which Pharaoh was actuated, pervades the great mass of mankind; every one displaying it in a way suited to his own particular state.

Some will openly say, with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?"

Others, who would not altogether express themselves in such impious terms, will yet in effect maintain the same language, and practically follow the same ungodly course. The inspired writers give this precise view of the ungodly world.

Job speaks of them, as saying to God in his day, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of your ways! Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him [Job 21:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14-15)."

David gives a similar representation of them in his day, "They have said: With our tongues shall we prevail; our lips are our own; who is Lord over us [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)."

The Prophet Jeremiah gives exactly the same character of those in his age; all classes of the community said to his very face, in answer to the messages he delivered to them from the Lord, "As for the word that you have spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto you; but we will certainly do whatever thing goes forth out of our own mouth, or comes into our own hearts! [Jeremiah 44:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16-17) with 23:17."

Now from these testimonies it is evident that I am not putting an undue construction on the words of Pharaoh, or pressing them too far, when I represent them as characterizing the spirit of the present day. It is clear that men do at this day, "reject the word of the Lord," and "cast it behind them," and, in effect, say as he did, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" It is obvious, too, that they do this in the midst of all the judgments and mercies with which God is pleased to visit them.

There may be in many an occasional relenting, or purpose to amend; but all endeavor to lower the commands of God to the standard that is agreeable to their own minds. Nor do any, except those who have been savingly converted to God, through Christ, ever surrender up themselves to God, or yield an unreserved obedience to his commands.

And what must the outcome of your disobedience be?

Ask of people in their career of sin, and they will tell you that they have nothing to fear. The confidence of Pharaoh and all his host exactly represents their state. Behold that whole army; onward they go, in prosecution of their bloody purpose; but little do they think how soon they will rue their folly, and how irretrievable will their ruin be in a short time. See them pressing forward; how little do they apprehend the dreadful fate that awaits them!

Behold the various classes of ungodly men; how little do they dream of the destruction to which they are hastening! Wait but a short time, and they will all sink into everlasting perdition! But will not their confidence deliver them? No! the greater their confidence, the more certain is their ruin.

But surely we may hope that their numbers will be some protection. No; of the whole Egyptian army, not one soul escaped; nor, if the unconverted world were a million times more numerous than they are, would one single soul escape the wrath of God. They are willingly and determinately treasuring up wrath to themselves against the day of wrath; and at the appointed season it shall come upon them to the uttermost. Then they will know who that Lord is, whom now they so despise! They shall find, to their cost, that "those who walk in pride he is able to abase, [Daniel 4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.37)."

See then, from hence,

1. How great is the folly of ungodly men!

Were a small child to contend in battle with a warrior, who would not upbraid him for his folly and presumption in entering into so unequal a contest? But what shall we say of those who set themselves in array against the Majesty of Heaven? Truly, a contest of briers and thorns against a devouring fire would not be more absurd! This is the very comparison which is made by God himself, "Who would set briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, and burn them up together! [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.4)." I beg you, brethren, remember against whom it is that you fight. It is against Him, who by a word spoke the universe into existence, and by a word could reduce it in an instant to absolute nonentity.

Look at the fallen angels, and see the consequence of rebelling against God!

Look at the antediluvian world, and say, whether it be not an evil and bitter thing to sin against him, and to provoke his displeasure.

Were it possible for you to withstand his power or to elude his search—then you might have some excuse for casting off his light and easy yoke; but indeed you must, before long, be summoned to his tribunal, and receive at his hands a doom which can never be reversed. And "will you be strong in the day that he shall deal with you, or will you thunder with a voice like his!" I beg you, lay down the weapons of your rebellion without delay, and implore mercy at the Savior's hands, while yet "the day of salvation lasts, and the accepted time is continued to you."

2. How greatly are the ungodly to be pitied!

See how secure they are in their own apprehensions, and how confidently they expect a successful termination of their conflicts! Unhappy men! Methinks I see you in the agonies of death, and behold you at the instant of your entrance into the presence of your God. Oh! could we but conceive your terrors, and hear your cries, and witness your unavailing lamentations—then how would we pity you! Could we further behold the triumphant exultations of that cruel fiend, who was once your tempter, and will then be your tormentor to all eternity—how would we weep over you! And lastly, if we could behold you suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, under the wrath of Almighty God, methinks it would be too much for us to endure; the very sight would overwhelm us, even though we had no fears for ourselves.

Truly, it was with good reason that the Savior wept over the devoted city of Jerusalem; and we would wish that "our eyes also were a fountain of tears, to run down day and night" on account of your present obduracy, and on account of the dreadful miseries that await you in the eternal world!

3. How desirable is the knowledge of God, as revealed in the Gospel!

Never was there one who sought the face of God in vain. However long you may have rebelled against God, there is mercy for you, if you turn to him with your whole hearts. Think how many of those who crucified the Lord of glory obtained mercy at his hands—and so shall you also, if you will humble yourselves before him, and seek for mercy through his sin-atoning blood. "Not so much as one of you should perish, if you would but go to him." Truly, "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "All who believe in him shall be justified from all things." "Acquaint, then, Yourselves with God, and be at peace." Seek "that knowledge of him which is life eternal." And know, that, while "those who know him not, and obey not his Gospel, shall be banished from the presence of his glory," his believing and obedient servants shall both serve him, and be served by him, in his kingdom and glory, forever and ever.

#68

THE OPPOSITION THAT IS MADE TO RELIGION

**[Exodus 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.17-18)**

Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks."

Man prides himself upon his reason. But only let him be under the influence of passion or self-interest, and nothing can be found more unreasonable:

his eyes are blinded,

his heart is hardened,

his conscience is seared

—and his actions are nearer to those of a maniac, than of a rational being. Nor is his madness ever carried to a greater extent, than when religion is concerned. Look at the persecutors of God's people, from Cain to this present moment—what have they been, but agents of the devil, fighting against God, and murdering their fellow-creatures with insatiable cruelty?

A just specimen of their conduct we have in the history before us. Moses and Aaron were sent of God, to require that the Hebrew nation, who were then in Egypt, should go and offer sacrifices to him in the wilderness; where they might serve him without any fear of offending, or of being interrupted by the people among whom they dwelt. Pharaoh not only refused his permission, but proudly defied Jehovah, and ordered immediately that such burdens should be laid upon the people as it was impossible for them to bear. On their complaining to him of the oppression which they suffered, and of the unmerited punishment that was inflicted on them—he relaxed nothing of his unrighteous decree, but exulted in their miseries, and dismissed them with invectives, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks."

In discoursing on these words, it will be profitable to us to consider,

I. What is that sacrifice which God requires at our hands.

We, as well as the Hebrews, are called to sacrifice unto our God.

But is it our flocks and our herds that he requires? No! [Psalm 50:8-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.8-15); [Psalm 51:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.16). This is the message which he has sent us, "My son, give me your heart [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26)." The sacrifice that he demands, is,

1. A humble heart.

Every man must, at his peril, present this to God. And every one that presents it to him, shall certainly he accepted, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17).

2. A believing heart.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, [Hebrews 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.6)." It is faith that renders every other offering pleasing and acceptable to him, [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4). This he considers as a sacrifice. It was not sufficient, that penitents under the law confessed their sins, or that they brought their sin-offering to be presented by the priest; they must lay their hands upon the head of their offering, and thereby profess their faith in that atonement which in due time was to be made for the sins of the whole world, [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17).

The lamb that was offered every morning and evening, was to have a meat-offering of fine flour mingled with oil, and a drink-offering of wine poured upon it; and all was to be consumed together; [Exodus 29:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.40). Paul, referring to this, calls their faith the sacrifice; and says, that he should rejoice in offering (in pouring out as a libation) his own blood, to be presented to God together with it. In like manner we also must not only "acknowledge our iniquity," but must by faith transfer it to the sacred head of Jesus, who atoned for it on the cross, and through whom alone we can ever find acceptance with God, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29).

3. A thankful heart.

This is a tribute most justly due to Him, who has loaded us with so many benefits, but, above all, has redeemed us by the blood of his only-begotten Son. The command given us is, "Rejoice evermore!" "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice!" This is a sacrifice peculiarly pleasing to God, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15); [Psalm 107:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.22); [Psalm 116:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.17); and "the very stones will cry out against us," if we should refuse to offer it, [Luke 19:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.40).

4. An obedient heart.

This is the crown of all. It is the end of all. For this we repent; for this we believe; for this we give thanks to God; all without this were only a solemn mockery. It is in order to this that God has given to us so many mercies, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). We may be well assured that every act of obedience, however small, if only it proceeds from a humble, believing, and thankful heart, shall be accepted by him, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16).

As reasonable as such a sacrifice is, we are shocked to see,

II. In what light it is regarded by an ungodly world.

Did Pharaoh contemptuously resist the divine mandate; did he treat the request of the Hebrews as a pretext for lazyness; and did he make it an occasion for the most cruel oppression? Here we may see a true picture of the world at this day; it is precisely thus that religion is now opposed:

1. With contempt.

Pharaoh regarded the proposal of Moses as unworthy of notice. He saw no necessity for either himself or others to obey the commands of God; nor did he believe that any evil consequences would ensue from disobedience. He calls the threats with which God's command was enforced, "vain words." And how are the requisitions, which are now made to us in Jehovah's name, attended to among us? Is not this the universal cry: 'There is no need of so much religion; we shall do very well without it; we have nothing to fear, though we live in the neglect of it?' Yes; all our exhortations to serve God with your whole hearts are, by many, considered in no better view than as weak, though well-intentioned, effusions of a heated imagination.

2. With calumny.

Men who choose not to obey the calls of God will always revile those who do. They will impute their zeal to hypocrisy, or pride, or vanity. They will presume to judge the motives of pious people, with as much confidence as if they could see the heart. Pharaoh had certainly no reason to ascribe to idleness the request that had been made to him; yet with a malignant triumph he professes to have seen through their motives, which he was determined to counteract.

Just so, at this time, the enemies of true religion will represent the professors of it as heretical and seditious, and the ministers of it as people that "turn the world upside down."

3. With oppression.

It is good for us that all the ungodly do no possess the power of Pharaoh; and that the law has affixed bounds to the tyranny of man. Were it not so, we should still see that the natural enmity of man against his God is as fierce as ever. Civilization has altered our habits, but made no change at all in our hearts. Husbands, parents, masters, in numberless instances, obstruct the progress of religion in the hearts of those over whom they have influence; either requiring services that shall interfere with their religious duties, or laying snares to divert their attention from them. And when complaint is made by their injured dependents, they will show no regard to their consciences, but will exult in tyrannizing over them with their imperious mandate.

ADDRESS.

1. To the opposers of true religion.

Many who in themselves are serious and devout, are as bitter enemies to spiritual religion as the most abandoned profligate can be. When the Jews wanted to expel Paul and Barnabas from Antioch, they could find no better, or more willing, agents than "devout and honorable women, [Acts 13:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.50)." But it were better for any one to have a millstone about his neck, and to be cast into the sea, than to be found among the opposers of vital godliness! [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6). "Their Redeemer is mighty;" and he will avenge their cause. Instead therefore of setting yourselves against them, and calumniating them—inquire what is the reason that you yourselves are not pious. May not your own words be retorted upon you, "You are lazy, you are lazy; therefore you say, Let us not sacrifice unto the Lord?" Yes; it is no calumny to affirm this, "Go therefore now, and work." Go; and instead of obstructing the sacrifices of others, present to God the sacrifice that he demands of you.

2. Those who meet with persecution for righteousness' sake.

"All who will live godly in Christ Jesus are taught to expect persecution." Therefore think it not strange that you are called to suffer; but rather "rejoice that you are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake."

Are you discouraged, because the relief you have sought for is withheld, and your troubles seem to increase? It was thus that God dealt with the Hebrews in the instance before us; and he frequently deals thus with his people, in order that he may be the more glorified in their ultimate deliverance. If therefore the shadows of the night are still lengthened, you need not despair; for "at evening-time it shall be light;" and in the hour of your deepest distress God will surely interpose for your support and relief, [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36).

Take care however that the enemies of religion have no cause to find fault with you for neglecting the duties of your station. It isa great stumbling-block in their way, when you give them occasion to adopt the language of the text. See to it then, that you be active and diligent in every work to which God, in his providence, has called you. The direction given you by God himself combines worldly activity with spiritual fervor, and represents each of them, in its place, as truly acceptable to him, "Be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11)."

#69

THE DESPONDENCY OF ISRAEL

**[Exodus 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 6.9)**

"Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage."

"As face answers to face in a looking-glass, so does the heart of man to man." We are apt, indeed, to imagine that the Jews were a people of more than ordinary depravity; but it is found that mankind almost universally act precisely as they did, under similar circumstances. We have here a remarkable instance of despondency. The Hebrews had been long groaning under a most cruel oppression; and God had sent his servant, Moses, to deliver them from it. But the effect of his interposition hitherto had been only to augment their troubles. Of this they had bitterly complained, as indeed had Moses himself also; and now, for their comfort, God sent them by Moses a most consolatory message, assuring them that, however gloomy their prospects might appear to be, a most perfect deliverance was at hand. But they, we are told, "did not listen to Moses because of their discouragement and cruel bondage."

Let us consider,

I. Their **conduct** on this occasion.

The testimony of Moses was in every respect worthy of receiving.

He had wrought before the people the miracles which God had commissioned him to work, in confirmation of his divine mission, [Exodus 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.30); and hitherto, if he had not yet succeeded in his embassy, he had executed his office with fidelity and courage. It might be supposed, indeed, that if Moses himself had fainted under the discouragement which they had experienced, much more might they. But, on the other hand, if God had renewed his commission to Moses, and expressly authorized him to assure them of a speedy and certain deliverance, so that his mind was left without any doubt of ultimate success—they might well receive his testimony, and rest upon it with composure.

Nor could anything be conceived more suited to their necessities.

They were under the most "cruel bondage." But Moses declared, that God had entered into covenant with their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to deliver them; that he had confirmed this covenant with an oath; that, from compassion to them, he was about to fulfill the engagements he had entered into; that he not only would deliver them from their sore bondage, but would, by the judgments which he would inflict on Pharaoh, make him more anxious to rid himself of them than ever he had been to detain them; and would constrain him, in fact, to "drive them out from his land."

He further declared, that God would bring them safely into Canaan, wherein their forefathers had sojourned as pilgrims and strangers, and give it to them for their inheritance; and would "take them to him as his peculiar people, and be unto them a God," yes, and "their God."

In reporting to them these "great and precious promises," he was careful particularly to make known to them the grounds on which they might be received with the most implicit trust; for that God had repeatedly pledged his power and veracity for the performance of them. Thrice had God renewed that solemn declaration, "I am Jehovah"—the eternal, self-existent, and immutable Jehovah; and, times almost without number, he had undertaken to execute, with his own irresistible arm, the whole that he had promised, "I will bring you out. I will deliver you. I will redeem you. I will bring you into the land. I will give it you. I will take you to me for a people. I will be your God!"

Yet the people would not receive, or even "listen to," his words.

Their minds were so wholly occupied with their present troubles, that they could think of nothing else; they were altogether overwhelmed with "anguish of spirit;" and so utterly did they despair of relief, that they desired to be left to live and die under their present servitude, rather than run the risk of augmenting their afflictions by any further application to Pharaoh in their behalf, [Genesis 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.11-12).

Without dwelling any longer on their conduct, I beg permission to call your attention to,

II. The **instruction** to be derived from it.

We may notice from hence,

1. The weakness of the human mind.

It has been justly said, that "oppression destroys a wise man's reason, [Ecclesiastes 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.7)." The common experience of all is, that "hope deferred makes the heart sick, [Proverbs 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.12)." In my text, we see both the one and the other strongly exemplified. And, in truth, where afflictions are great and of long continuance, the mind of every man is apt to faint; nor can anything but divine grace adequately sustain it. Even David, when hunted by Saul as a partridge upon the mountains, forgot for a season the power and fidelity of his Protector, and in a fit of despondency exclaimed, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul."

Just so, under various circumstances, the Church of old complained, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God!" "The Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me." Sometimes her despair has been so entire, that she has even made the justice of it a ground of appeal both to God and man, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?"

But this experience, in whoever it is found, is decidedly contrary to the mind and will of God. We are never to limit the power of God, or to doubt his veracity. We are not to suppose, that, because we see not how deliverance can come, God is at any loss for means whereby to effect it. It is well to "have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we may not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead," and has promised: "The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left,

[Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36)."

2. The proper office of faith.

Faith is to look above all created things, to God; and to realize, under every dispensation, the presence of him that is invisible. It is to lay hold on God's Word, and to rest upon it, and to expect its accomplishment, in defiance of men or devils. It is to hope, even "against hope." Its legitimate exercise may be seen in Abraham, when he was commanded to offer up his son, "I have no fear but that God will fulfill his promise in Isaac; even though I should reduce him to ashes upon an altar, God can raise him up again, yes, and will raise him up again, rather than allow one jot or tittle of his word to fail." "Being strong in faith, and giving glory to God," he both formed, and acted upon, this assured expectation; and in proportion to the strength of our faith will be our confidence in God, even under the most discouraging circumstances. We shall say, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights! [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18)."

Had Israel on this occasion been able to confide in God, how sweetly composed had their minds been in the midst of all their troubles! Let us learn to exercise this grace of faith, and under the darkest dispensations to say, "Though he slay me—yet I will trust in him."

3. The excellency of the Gospel dispensation.

What Moses said to Israel, we are authorized and commissioned to declare to you. You are under a bondage far more cruel than that which Israel experienced; but in the name of Almighty God we come to you, and proclaim:

that he has entered into covenant with his Son for your redemption;

that he has confirmed that covenant with an oath;

that he will bring you out from the power of sin and Satan;

that he will conduct you in safely to the heavenly Canaan.

For the fulfillment of all this he pledges to you his word, saying, in relation to every part of the work, 'I, the immutable Jehovah, will do it for you; I will work; and who shall hinder?' Only believe in him; believe that "what he has promised he is able also to perform."

You have seen what he did for Israel, notwithstanding their unbelief. What then shall he not do for you, if you will truly believe in Christ as your appointed Savior? He will not only bring you forth out of the land of your captivity, but will preserve you throughout the whole of this dreary wilderness, and introduce you finally to the full possession of your glorious inheritance. Yes, brethren, these things we declare unto you in the name of Almighty God; and if, with Caleb and Joshua, you will "follow the Lord fully," like them you shall have your portion assuredly in the realms of bliss!

#70

GOD HARDENING PHARAOH'S HEART

**[Exodus 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.3)**

"I will harden Pharaoh's heart!"

As there are in the works of creation many things which exceed the narrow limits of human understanding, so are there many things incomprehensible to us both in the works of providence and of grace. It is not however necessary that, because we cannot fully comprehend these mysteries, we should never fix our attention at all upon them; as far as they are revealed, the consideration of them is highly proper; only, where we are so liable to err, our steps must be proportionably cautious, and our inquiries be conducted with the greater humility.

In particular, the deepest reverence befits us, while we contemplate the subject before us. We ought not, on the one hand, to indulge a proud and captious spirit that shall banish the subject altogether; nor, on the other hand, to make our assertions upon it with a bold, unhallowed confidence. Desirous of avoiding either extreme, we shall endeavor to explain and vindicate the conduct of God, as it is stated in the text.

I. We shall endeavor to **explain** the conduct of God.

We are not to imagine that God infused any evil principle into the heart of Pharaoh; this God never did, nor ever will do, to any of his creatures, [James 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.13). What he did, may be comprehended in three particulars.

1. He left Pharaoh to the influence of his own corruptions.

Pharaoh was a proud and haughty monarch; and while he exercised a most arbitrary and oppressive power over his subjects, he disdained to respect the authority of Jehovah, who was "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

God, if he had seen fit, might have prevented him from manifesting these corruptions. He might have struck him dead upon the spot; or intimidated him by a dream or vision; or have converted him, as he did the persecuting Saul, in the midst of all his malignant projects; but he left him to himself, precisely as he does other men when they commit iniquity; and allowed him to manifest all the evil dispositions of his heart.

This is no other conduct than what God has pursued from the beginning. When men have obstinately "rebelled against the light," he has "given them up to follow their own hearts' lusts, [Romans 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.24); [Romans 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.26); [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28); [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12); [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12)." We have reason to expect that he will deal thus with us, if we continue to resist his will, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3); [Leviticus 26:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.27-28); [Proverbs 1:24-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-30).

2. He allowed such events to concur as should give scope for the exercise of those corruptions.

He raised Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, and thereby invested him with power to oppress, [Romans 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17). By multiplying the Jews, he made their services of great importance to the Egyptian empire. The labors of six hundred thousand slaves could not easily be dispensed with; and therefore the temptation to retain them in bondage was exceedingly great. Besides, the request made of going to serve their God in the wilderness must appear to him frivolous and absurd; for, why should they not be content to serve him in the land? Moreover, the success of his magicians in imitating the miracles of Moses, would seem to justify the idea that Moses was no more than a magician, only perhaps of a more intelligent order than those employed by him. The frequent and speedy removal of the judgments that were inflicted on him, would yet further tend to harden him, by making him think light of those judgments. Thus the unreasonableness of his opposition would be hidden from him; and he would persist in his rebellion without compunction or fear.

3. He gave Satan permission to exert his influence over him.

Satan is a powerful being; and, when the restraints which God has imposed upon him are withdrawn, can do great things. He cannot indeed force any man to sin against his will; but he can bring him into such circumstances, as shall have a strong tendency to ensnare his soul. We know from the history of Job, how great things he can effect for the distressing of a most eminent saint; much more therefore may we suppose him to prevail over one who is his blind and willing vassal, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4); [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26).

We do not indeed know, from any express declarations, that Satan interfered in this work of hardening Pharaoh; but, when we recollect how he instigated David to number the people; how he prevailed on Peter to deny, and Judas to betray, his Lord; how he filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira that they might lie unto God; and finally, how expressly we are told that he works in all the children of disobedience;" we can have no doubt respecting his agency in the heart of Pharaoh.

Thus, as far as respects:

a withholding of that grace which might have softened Pharaoh's heart,

and a giving him an opportunity to show his malignant dispositions,

and a permitting of Satan to exert his influence

—God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

But as being a perfectly free agent, Pharaoh hardened his own heart; and this is repeatedly affirmed in the subsequent parts of this history.

When once we have learned what was the true nature of God's agency, and how far it was concerned in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart,

II. We shall endeavor to **vindicate** the conduct of God.

We must never forget that "God's ways and thoughts are infinitely above ours;" and that, whether we approve of them or not, "he will never give account of them to us;" yet, constituted as we are, we feel a satisfaction in being able to discern their suitableness to the divine character. Of the dispensation then which we are considering, we may say,

1. The conduct of God was **righteous**, as it respected the individual himself.

It was perfectly righteous that Pharaoh should be left to himself. What injury would God have done, if he had acted towards the whole human race precisely as he did towards the fallen angels? What reason can be assigned why man, who had imitated their wickedness, should not be a partaker of their punishment? If then none had any claim upon God for the exercise of his grace, how much less could Pharaoh have a title to it, after having so proudly defied God, and so obstinately withstood his most express commands? If there was anything unjust in abandoning Pharaoh to the corrupt affections of his heart, all other sinners in the universe have reason to make the same complaint, that God is unrighteous in his dealings with them. In that case, God could not, consistently with his own justice, permit sin at all; he must impose an irresistible restraint on all, and cease to deal with us as people in a state of probation.

Again, it was righteous in God to suffer such a concurrence of circumstances as should give scope for the exercise of his corruptions. God is no more bound to destroy man's free agency by his providence, than he is by his grace. Was it unrighteous in him to let Cain have an opportunity of executing his murderous project against his brother Abel? Has he been unjust, as often as he has permitted others to accomplish their wicked purposes? Doubtless he has interposed, by his providence, to prevent the execution of many evils that have been conceived in our minds, [Hosea 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.6); but he is not bound to do so for anyone; nor could he do it universally, without changing the nature of his government, and the whole course of the world.

Moreover, it was righteous to give Satan liberty to exert his influence over Pharaoh. Pharaoh chose to believe the agents of Satan, rather than the servants of the Most High God; and to obey their counsels rather than his. Why then should God continue to restrain Satan, when Pharaoh desired nothing so much as to yield to his temptations? When Ahab sent for all his lying prophets to counsel him and to foster his delusions, God permitted "Satan to be a lying spirit in the mouth of all those prophets," that they might all concur in the same fatal advice [1 Kings 22:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.21-23). Was this unjust? Was it not agreeable to Ahab's own wish; and was not the contrary counsel of the Lord's prophet rejected by him with disdain? Pharaoh wished to be deceived; and God permitted it to be according to his own heart's desire.

On the whole then, if men are to be left to their own free agency, instead of being dealt with as mere machines; and if God have ordered the general course of his providence agreeably to this rule, resisting the proud while he gives grace to the humble; then he was fully justified in allowing this impious monarch to harden his already proud and obdurate heart! Compare [Deuteronomy 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 2.30) and [Joshua 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 11.20).

2. The conduct of God was **merciful**, as it respected the universe at large.

We form erroneous conceptions of the divine government, because we view it on too contracted a scale. God, in his dealings with mankind, consults, not the benefit of an individual merely, but the good of the whole. Now this conduct towards Pharaoh was calculated exceedingly to promote the welfare of all succeeding generations. It has given us lessons of instruction that are of the greatest value:

It has shown us the extreme depravity of the human heart. Who could have conceived that a man, warned as Pharaoh was by so many tremendous plagues, should continue, to the last, to set himself against the God of Heaven and earth? But in him we see what men will do when their pride, their passions, and their interests have gained an ascendant over them. They will defy God to his face; and, if softened for a moment by the severity of his judgments, they will soon, like metal from the furnace, return to their usual hardness.

It has shown us our need of divine grace. As widely as men differ from each other in their constitutional frame both of body and mind, they all agree in this, that "they have a carnal mind, which is enmity against God; and which neither is, nor can be, subject to his law, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7)." We may all see in Pharaoh a striking portrait of ourselves! If we are enabled to mortify the evils of our heart, while others continue in bondage to their lusts, then we must say, "By the grace of God I am what I am!" If we have no more grace than Pharaoh in our hearts, we shall have no more holiness in our lives!

It has shown us the danger of fighting against God, [Isaiah 45:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.9). "Fools make a mock at sin," and "laugh at the threatened judgments" of God. But let anyone see in Pharaoh the danger of being given over to a reprobate mind; let any one see in what our hardness of heart may issue; and he will tremble lest God should say respecting him, "He is joined to idols—let him alone!"

It has shown us the obligations we lie under to God for the patience he has already exercised towards us. When we read the history of Pharaoh, we realize how blessed we are that we have not been left, like him, to be a warning to others. No tongue can utter the thanks that are due to him on this account. If we know anything of our own hearts, we shall be ready to think ourselves the greatest monuments of mercy that ever were rescued from eternal perdition!

Now these lessons are invaluable; and everyone who reads the history of this doleful monarch, must see them written in it as with the pen of a diamond!

ADDRESS.

We are told to "remember Lot's wife;" and it will be well also to "remember Pharaoh." Let none of us trifle with our convictions, or follow carnal policy in preference to the commands of God; Let the messages of God be received with reverence, and obeyed with cheerfulness. Let us be afraid of hardening our own hearts, lest God should give us over to final obduracy, [Job 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.4). If God withdraw from us, then Satan will quickly come, 1 Samuel 16:14. If we are left to Satan's agency, better were it for us that we had never been born! Seek of God the influences of the Holy Spirit, who will "take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh."

#71

PHARAOH'S ELEVATION TO THE THRONE OF EGYPT

**[Exodus 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.16)**

"I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth!"

It is justly said in reference to evidence, that it is strong in proportion as it arises out of incidental points, which had no necessary connection with the fact to be established. The same I may say in relation to the doctrines of our holy religion, especially those doctrines which are most controverted, and most stand in need of evidence for their support. Of this kind is the doctrine of election; which, being extremely opposed to the pride of human nature, meets with strong opposition from the carnal mind.

I am far from saying that that doctrine is not extremely objectionable, if viewed as its adversaries, and not a few of its advocates also, are accustomed to state it. But, if viewed in its true light, and as the Scriptures themselves state it—I conceive that it cannot reasonably be doubted.

In the passage before us, there was no particular intention to establish that doctrine. Moses had labored in vain to induce Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go to worship Jehovah in the wilderness. He had, as God's appointed instrument, inflicted many plagues on the land of Egypt, and removed them again by his intercessions. Yet neither by the judgments nor the mercies, had he prevailed on Pharaoh, who still continued to harden his heart against God. He now assumed a bolder tone; and declared, that not only should the Egyptians be smitten with pestilence, but that Pharaoh himself also "should be cut off from the earth," for his obstinate resistance to God's express commands. And then he delivers to him, from God himself, this solemn declaration, "I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth!"

It is my intention:

I. To **explain** God's solemn declaration.

God here asserts, that he had raised up Pharaoh for a special purpose, with which his own glory was intimately connected. He had determined to bring forth his people from Egypt, in such a way as should display most remarkably his own power, and should bring glory to his name throughout all the earth. Some, by the expression "raised up," understand restoring him to health from the disorder inflicted on him in common with his people and the magicians. But it does not appear that Pharaoh had been visited with that disorder; and the threatening in the verse before our text, "I will smite you," rather seems to show, that he had not yet been smitten in his own person. But, whether we understand the words as relating to his elevation to the throne, or to a restoration to health—the main object of the declaration will be the same; namely, that God, knowing what would assuredly be the result of a further trial of his obedience, had determined so to try him, in order that by the outcome of the contest,, God's glory might be displayed throughout all the earth.

The substance of the declaration, then, may be considered as expressing the following truths:

1. That God allots to every man his station in life.

Nothing can be more clear, than that the time and place of every man's entrance into life is fixed by God. That we are born in this age and country, has in no respect depended on ourselves; we might as well, if God had so ordained, been born of Heathen or Mohammedan parents, or never have been permitted to see the gospel truths, and perished in our mother's womb! We might have been brought into the world from parents either of the highest or lowest rank, and been doomed to occupy a place in society widely different from that which we at present fill. All this was true of Pharaoh, and it is equally true of every man. "Our times are in God's hands! [Psalm 31:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.15)," and "he determines the bounds of our habitation! [Acts 17:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.26)."

2. That he foreknows how every man will act in the situation to which he is called.

He infallibly foresaw how Pharaoh would act in resisting all the means that would be used to bring him to a compliance with the divine command. Nor is there anything hidden from his all-seeing eye! If there were, it would be impossible for him to foretell, as he has done by his Prophets, the minutest circumstances that would occur, and at the distance of many hundreds of years. The prophecies relating to the death of our blessed Lord specify what should be said, as well as done, by people who were least of all aware that they were fulfilling any prediction, and who would rather, if it had been possible, have prevented its accomplishment. We may be sure, therefore, that that testimony respecting him is true, "Known unto him are all things, from the beginning of the world! [Acts 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.18)."

3. That, while he leaves to every man the free exercise of his will, God overrules the actions of all for the accomplishment of his own eternal purposes!

God, as we have observed, had decreed to magnify himself in his mode of bringing forth his people from Egypt. But, in order to this, it was necessary that his will should be opposed, and that occasion should be given for the executing of his judgments upon the oppressors of his people. He knew what Pharaoh would do under such circumstances; and he both preserved him in life, and elevated him to the throne, that he might have an opportunity of manifesting what was in his heart, and be able to carry into effect the dictates of his own depravity.

In all that he did, he was perfectly a free agent; for though it is said, that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," he did so, not by infusing any evil principle into him, but by giving him up to the impulse of his own inveterate corruptions. God foresaw how those corruptions would operate, and that they would lead to the accomplishment of his own eternal purpose; and he needed only to leave Pharaoh to the dictates of his own mind, to secure the final execution of all that he himself had ordained.

God had determined everything respecting the crucifixion of our blessed Lord; but he needed not to inspire the Jewish rulers with envy, or the Roman governor with timidity, or Judas with covetousness, or the populace with cruelty. It was sufficient to give them up respectively to the dominion of their own lusts; and they all infallibly concurred to "do what his hand and his counsel had determined before to be done, [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28)."

It is precisely in the same way that we are to account for all that is done, whether it be good or evil; except that, in the effecting of what is good, God puts the desire to effect it into the heart of the agent, while in the perpetration of evil he merely gives up the person to the influence of his own lusts. In either case, the agent is perfectly free, and follows the bent of his own heart; only, in the one case, the heart is renewed, and in the other it is left under the power of its own depravity.

Josiah and Cyrus both fulfilled the counsels of Heaven; the one by burning men's bones on the altar which Jeroboam had raised, and the other by liberating the Jews from Babylon. Both these events were foretold hundreds of years before they came to pass; and the very names of the agents were declared hundreds of years before any people of their name were known in the world.

Sennacherib also fulfilled the will of Heaven, in punishing God's offending people, "Howbeit he meant not so, neither did his heart think so; it was in his heart only to aggrandize himself at the expense of other nations, [Isaiah 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.7)."

But God, by all, accomplished "the counsel of his own will, [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11);" and in all things "shall his counsel stand, and he will do all his will, [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.10)."

4. That by all, whatever their conduct be, he will eventually be glorified.

That God will be glorified in the obedience of the righteous, is a truth which needs not to be confirmed. Whatever they do, it is "to the praise of the glory of his grace;" and at the last day the Lord Jesus will come "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all those who believe."

But will he be glorified in the ungodly also? Yes. He declared that he would "get himself honor upon Pharaoh and all his hosts, [Exodus 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.17);" and this he did by overwhelming them in the sea. Just so will he do in the destruction of the wicked, at the last day. He will then make known the inflexibility of his justice, and "the power of his wrath;" and the whole universe shall be constrained to say, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments Revelation! 16:6-7; [Revelation 19:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.2)."

Having thus explained the declaration in my text, I proceed:

II. To **apply** God's solemn declaration.

All Scripture is said to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness," or, in other words, for the establishment of sound doctrine, and for the enforcing of a holy practice. For these two ends I will endeavor to improve the subject before us.

1. For the establishment of sound doctrine.

The doctrine which I hinted at, in the commencement of this discourse, is strongly insisted on by the Apostle Paul; and the words of my text are adduced by him in confirmation of his statement. He is showing that God, in the exercise of his mercy to the Jewish nation, had acted altogether in a way of grace, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure; that he had entailed his blessings on Isaac and his seed, instead of imparting them to Ishmael and his posterity. In like manner, God had again limited his blessings to Jacob, the younger son of Isaac, and withheld them from Esau, the elder son.

This had God done "in order that his purpose according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that called." Then, knowing that the proud heart of man would rise against this doctrine, and accuse it as "imputing unrighteousness to God," he further confirms his statement by express declarations of God to Moses. "He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion!" From thence he draws this conclusion, "So, then, it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy!"

To this declaration he adds another of a similar tendency, addressed to Pharaoh, even the very words of my text, "For this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth;" from which words he draws again this remarkable conclusion, "Therefore has God mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardens! [Romans 9:7-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.7-18)."

Now here the doctrine of election is stated in the strongest and most unequivocal terms. But let not anyone imagine that the doctrine of reprobation is therefore true. God has not said in my text, "I have brought you into the world on purpose to damn you, and to get glory to myself in your everlasting destruction." No, there is no such assertion as that in all the Holy Scriptures. There is, in the Epistle of Peter, an expression which in sound has that aspect; but, when properly explained, it has no such meaning. It is said by him, "These stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed, 1 Peter 2:8." But to what were they appointed? to disobedience? No; but to make that word, which they would not obey, an occasion of falling.

God has ordained, that "they who will do his will, shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17);" but that those who will not do his will, shall stumble at his word, and find the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in it, "a rock of offence; yes, a trap and a snare also, [Isaiah 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14-15), compared with the fore-cited passage from Peter."

This will throw the true light upon our text; God did not bring Pharaoh into the world on purpose to destroy him; but, foreseeing the inveterate pride and obstinacy of his heart, he raised him to the throne, where he would have an opportunity of displaying with effect those malignant dispositions, and would thereby give occasion for God to glorify himself, in an extraordinary display of his justice and his power, in the punishment of sin.

Here, then, we see the electing grace of God. God chose Moses, who had been in rank and authority the second person in the kingdom of Egypt, to be the deliverer of his people. Moses, when called to the work, declined it again and again; and might well have been left to reap the bitter fruit of his folly. But God, by his Spirit, overcame his reluctance, and upheld him in the performance of his duty. To Pharaoh he gave not this grace, but left him to the power of his own lusts. In making this distinction, God did no injury to Pharaoh. Neither Pharaoh nor Moses had any claim upon God. If, when Moses declined the honor which was offered him, God had transferred that honor to Pharaoh, and given up Moses to the evil of his own heart, he would have done no injury to Moses; Moses would have brought the punishment upon himself, by his own wickedness. God had a right to bestow his grace on whoever he pleased; and consequently, in leaving Pharaoh to harden his own heart and to perish m his sins, while he showed mercy to Moses, and made him an honored instrument of good to the Jewish nation—God did no injury to Pharaoh or to anyone else.

In the exercise of mercy, God acted as an Almighty Sovereign. In the exercise of judgment, he acted as a righteous Judge, in perfect consistency with justice and with equity. We see at all events the fact, that "God did, after much long-suffering, make known on one his wrath, as on a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction;" and that toward another "he made known the riches of his glory, as on a vessel of mercy which he himself had prepared unto glory, [Romans 9:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.22-23)." The exercise of his mercy was gratuitous and without desert; but the exercise of his displeasure was merited and judicial.

Now what is there here to be offended with? The fact is undeniable; and, if God was at liberty to exercise his sovereignty in such a way then, he is at liberty to do it still; and if he may justly do it in any case, as that of Ishmael and Isaac, or of Esau and Jacob, or of Pharaoh and Moses, he may with equal justice do it in every case.

Let us, then, not ignorantly and proudly deny to him a right, which all of us claim for ourselves, even that of dispensing our favors to whom we will. If no one has a claim on God, then no one has a right to complain if a favor which he despises is withheld from him. On the other hand, the person on whom that special favor is conferred, must to all eternity adore the sovereign grace that has dispensed it to him.

2. For the enforcement of a holy practice.

All of us, whether high or low, rich or poor, are in the station, which God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has allotted to us. The rich therefore have no reason to boast; nor have the poor any reason to repine. The different members of our own body have not all the same office; but God has "placed each member in the body, as it has pleased him;" and for purposes which each is destined to accomplish.

One great duty is common to us all; namely, that of discharging to the utmost of our power, our respective offices; and of bringing to God that measure of glory of which he has made us capable. God is, in reality, as much glorified in the submission of the poor, as in the activity of the rich. The eye and the foot, equally subserve the interests of the body, while discharging their respective functions; and equally display the goodness of our Creator, in so administering to our needs.

Let us then simply inquire, what that service is which we are most fitted by capacity and situation to perform; and let us address ourselves to it with all diligence.

If placed, like Pharaoh, in a post of great dignity and power, then let us improve our influence for God, and account it our honor and happiness to advance his glory.

If called, like Moses, to labor for the deliverance of God's people from their spiritual bondage, then let us execute our office with fidelity, and never rest until we have "finished the work which God has given us to do. Thus shall we acceptably fulfill the ends of our creation; and God will be glorified in us, both in time and in eternity.

#72

THE DANGER OF DISREGARDING THE WORD OF GOD

**[Exodus 9:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.19-21)**

"Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.'" Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. But those who ignored the Word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the field."

The Word of God in every age has met with a very different reception from different people; from the antediluvian scoffers to the present moment, the generality have deemed it unworthy of their attention, while a few have regarded it with reverence and godly fear. Never had any declaration a better title to belief than that to which the text alludes.

Moses had already, in the space of a few days, foretold many judgments, which were instantly inflicted or removed according to his predictions; and since they had not been effectual to subdue the stubborn heart of Pharaoh, he announced the determination of God to send another judgment on the land of Egypt, even a storm of hail and lightning, which would destroy every man and animal that should be exposed to its fury. There were many however who despised the threatening, and disdained to send their servants and cattle to a place of shelter; but others, who had profited by past experience, used with eagerness the precaution suggested to them.

From this circumstance we are led to show,

I. How a regard for God's Word will influence men here.

In all temporal concerns men are affected by any report in proportion to its credibility and importance.

If they hear of any great good that is placed within their reach, they feel a desire after it springing up in their minds; if there is some considerable probability of their attaining it, their hopes are excited, and their endeavors multiplied in order to secure it. If the possession of it appears near and certain, they already congratulate themselves on the expected acquisition, though not without a mixture of anxious suspense.

On the other hand, do they hear of any great evil that may come upon them? They begin to be disquieted as it approaches nearer and nearer? They think how they may avoid it, and use every precaution that prudence can suggest. Does it appear imminent and almost unavoidable? Their fears and anxieties are proportionably increased. Nor are these effects peculiar to any times, places, or people; they will be found on examination to be invariable and universal.

Thus it must also of necessity be with respect to men's spiritual concerns, in proportion of what God has spoken concerning them is believed and felt.

Suppose a person to be thoroughly persuaded that, "unless he repents, he must eternally perish;" that, "unless he is born again of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven;" and that, "he who has the Son has life, and he who has not the Son of God has not life." What effect must such momentous truths produce upon his mind? Must he not of necessity begin to inquire into the meaning of these expressions, and feel a solicitude to have these questions satisfactorily determined: 'Am I a real penitent? Am I born again? Have I truly received the Son of God?'

If he doubts the truth of these things, or thinks they may be taken in a lower importance—he will of course be less concerned to attain the experience of them. Or, if other things appear to him of superior importance—he will attend to those things in preference. But let him have that faith which gives a present subsistence to things future, and a demonstrable reality to things invisible, [Hebrews 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.1), and it will be impossible for him to trifle with such solemn declarations.

It is true, he may sin against the convictions of conscience; but if he continues so to do, it is evident that his convictions are not proportioned in any degree to the importance of eternal things, and that he cherishes a secret hope of escaping by some means or other the judgments denounced against him.

Let him but feel the worth of his soul in a degree proportioned to its value; let him estimate that as men estimate the worth of their natural life—and he could no more resist habitually the convictions of his mind, than he could sit composed while his house and family were ready to be destroyed by fire; he would surely resemble those Egyptians who sought shelter for their servants and cattle; he would "flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life!"

Such a practical attention will be given to the Word of God by all who truly believe it, because they know:

II. How it will affect their state hereafter.

The distinction put between the believing and unbelieving Egyptians related merely to this present life; but the Scriptures authorize us to declare that an eternal distinction will be made between believers and unbelievers in the day of judgment. Yes assuredly,

1. Those who have sought the appointed refuge shall be eternally saved.

Christ is that hiding-place to which all are enjoined to flee; every other covert will be found "a refuge of lies, which the hail shall sweep away! [Isaiah 28:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.17)." But Christ is a sure refuge, "to which whoever runs shall be safe." Whatever we may have been, and whatever we may have done in past times—we have nothing to suffer from the wrath of God, provided we are found in Christ." "Believing in him, we are justified from all things," and shall unite forever with:

the murderous Manasseh,

the adulterous David,

the filthy Magdalen,

the persecuting Saul,

in singing "Salvation to God and the Lamb!"

We must not however be understood to say, that an attention to the faith of the Gospel will save us, while we neglect its practical injunctions; far from it. But this we do say, that the vilest of sinners may find "acceptance in the Beloved;" and that "all who put their trust in him may be quiet from the fear of evil." The declaration of God himself is, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

2. Those, on the contrary, who have despised the offers of mercy, must eternally perish.

"Whatever men sow, that shall they also reap;" and though God's vengeance may be long delayed, it shall surely come at last! What if we see no signs of it now? There was no appearance of a deluge when Noah warned the old world. Nor were the fire and brimstone visible, when Lot entreated his sons-in-law to escape with him from Sodom. Yet were the predictions relative to these events exactly fulfilled; he who built the ark, and he who fled from the city devoted to destruction, were preserved; while they who took not warning, were destroyed.

So also shall it be in the last day, "the unbelief of men shall not make faith in God of no effect." "Their covenant with death shall be disannulled, and their agreement with Hell made void; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, they shall be beaten down by it, [Isaiah 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.18)." Nor shall the excuses which they now urge with so much confidence, avail them.

It is probable that many of the Egyptians might expose themselves to danger in consequence of urgent business, or from what they judged a necessary obedience to the commands of their masters; but they perished notwithstanding. So shall that word be verified in spite of all excuses, "Whoever despises the word shall be destroyed; but he who fears the commandment, shall be rewarded, [Proverbs 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.13)."

Address,

1. Those who disregard the Word of the Lord.

There are, alas! too many who "stumble at the word, being disobedient." Their language is, "As for the word that you have spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto you! [Jeremiah 44:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16)." If they do not avowedly reject the word, they show by their conduct, that they consider:

its doctrines as fanatical,

its precepts as harsh,

its promises as illusory,

and its threatenings as vain.

But, while "they thus practically reject the word of the Lord, there is no wisdom in them? [Jeremiah 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.9)." Doubtless if they who were in the midst of the storm saw any of their neighbors housed, they would cast a wishful look at them; and will not their lot be envied in the last day, who shall have taken refuge in Christ, and found protection from the wrath of God?

Let then the remembrance of what took place in Egypt, operate powerfully on our hearts.

Let us "search the Scriptures, and make them our meditation day and night."

Let us take them "as a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths."

Let us "treasure them up in our hearts," and labor to follow the directions they give us.

Let us "receive the word with meekness," "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God."

Let us beg of God that it may be "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to our inmost souls, and discovering to us the very thoughts and intents of our hearts."

Let God's blessed word regulate our hearts and lives; then will God look upon us with favorable acceptance, [Isaiah 65:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.2), and acknowledge us as "his in the day that he shall make up his jewels! [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17)."

2. Those who fear the Word of the Lord.

There are some among us, we trust, who having once, like good Josiah, wept on account of the denunciations of God's wrath; now, like holy Job, "esteem God's Word more than their necessary food."

There is not a threatening in it which they dare to despise.

There is not a promise which they do not desire to enjoy.

There is not a precept which they do not labor to obey.

They desire nothing so much as to be "cast into the mold of the Gospel," and to be "sanctified by means of it in body, soul, and spirit." To all of this character I say, Blessed are you; for if "you tremble at the word" of God, you have no reason to tremble at anything else! You may look at death with delight, and at Hell itself without terror—since you are screened under the shadow of your Redeemer's wings! Envy not then the liberty, and the thoughtlessness of sinners; neither let their revilings deter you from your purpose. The time is quickly coming when your God will appear to their shame, and to your joy! [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.5). Then the wisdom of your conduct will be seen in its true colors; and you shall understand the full import of that question, "Does not my word do good to him who walks uprightly? [Micah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 2.7)."

#73

ON DELAYING OUR REPENTANCE

**[Exodus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.3)**

"So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me."

It cannot be denied that Pharaoh was a remarkable character, raised up by God himself to be a monument of God's power and wrath throughout all generations, [Exodus 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.16). Yet we mistake if we think that the dispositions which he exercised were peculiar to him; the occasions that called them forth into exercise, were peculiar; but the dispositions themselves were the common fruits of our corrupt nature, visible in all the human race.

The command given to Pharaoh to permit all the Hebrews to go into the wilderness to offer sacrifice to their God, he chose not to comply with; and all the judgments inflicted on him, and the mercies given to him, were ineffectual for the subduing of his rebellious spirit, and for the reducing of him to a willing obedience.

Every one who reads the history of these events stands amazed at the pride and obduracy of his heart. But if we would look inward, and see how we have withstood the commands of God, and how little effect either his judgments or his mercies have produced on us, we would find little occasion to exult over Pharaoh; we would see, that, however circumstances then elicited and rendered more conspicuous the evils of his heart, the very same corruptions which he manifested, are in us also; and that every individual among us has the same need as he of the expostulation in the text, "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?"

It is remarkable that this very account of Pharaoh was ordered to be transmitted to the last posterity, in order that the men of all succeeding generations might see in it, both what God's enemies and what his friends are to expect at His hands.

That we may render this subject the more generally useful, we will,

I. Show wherein true humiliation consists.

A full and abstract investigation of this point would lead us too far; we shall therefore confine ourselves to such particulars as the context more immediately suggests.

1. True humiliation consists in a deep and**sincere sorrow for sin**, as contrasted with forced acknowledgments.

If confessions extorted by sufferings or by fear were sufficient evidences of humility, then Pharaoh would never have received the reproof in our text; for on the plague of hail being inflicted, he sent for Moses and said, "I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous; and I and my people are wicked, [Exodus 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.27)." But notwithstanding this, in God's estimation he still, as the text expresses it, "refused to humble himself before God."

Yet this is the only humiliation which many among ourselves have ever experienced. In a time of sickness perhaps, or under any great and accumulated afflictions—we have been constrained to confess our desert of God's judgments. We have seen that He has been contending with us; and that yet heavier judgments awaited us, if we did not humble ourselves before him. We have trembled perhaps at the prospect of approaching dissolution, and at the thought of appearing in an unprepared state at the tribunal of our Judge. Hence have arisen some forced acknowledgments of our sinfulness, while yet we neither hated our sins, nor loathed ourselves on account of them; and hence, on our restoration to health, we have returned, like fused metal from the furnace, to our usual hardness and obduracy.

True humiliation is widely different from this. It implies a deep and sincere sorrow for sin, not only on account of the judgments it will bring upon us—but on account of its own intrinsic hatefulness and deformity. It leads us to smite on our bosoms with conscious shame; and fills us with self-loathing and self-abhorrence. It does this not only before we have obtained mercy, but afterwards; yes, and so much the more because God is pacified towards us, [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6) with [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63).

We readily acknowledge that tears are no certain sign of penitence; and that the sensibility that produces them depends rather on the constitutional habit, than on the convictions of the mind. Yet while we read so much in the Scriptures respecting men sowing in tears, and going on their way weeping, and while we behold the Savior himself weeping over Jerusalem, and pouring out his soul before God with strong crying and tears, we cannot but think that those who have never yet wept for sin, have never felt its bitterness; and there is just occasion for us to weep over all who have not yet wept for themselves. It is scarcely to be conceived that any man has a truly broken and contrite spirit, whose sighs and groans have not often entered into the ears of the omnipresent God, and whose tears have not been often treasured up in his vials.

2. True humiliation consists in an **unreserved obedience** to God, as contrasted with partial compliances.

Pharaoh, under the pressure of his successive calamities, yielded in part to the commands of God; he resisted altogether at the first; but gradually receded from his determinations, and permitted the Hebrews to offer their sacrifices in Egypt; then to go into the wilderness, provided they did not go very far into it; then he would let the men go; then at last the women and children also; but he would not allow them to take away their cattle; those he was determined to keep, as a pledge of their return. In all this there was nothing but pride and stoutness of heart. He held everything fast, until it was wrested from him by some fresh judgment, and conceded nothing but from absolute compulsion.

Thus it is that many among ourselves part with their sins. They would retain them all, and gladly too, if the indulgence of them would consist with their hope from Heaven. If they part with any, they do it as a mariner who casts his goods overboard to lighten his ship and keep it from sinking; but it is with reluctance that he parts with them; and he wishes for them all again, the very instant he is safe on shore.

From the same motive flows his performance of certain duties; he engages not in them from any delight that he has in them, but from a self-righteous desire of purchasing Heaven by these sacrifices. But in all this there is nothing of true humiliation, nothing of real piety.

The true Christian, when his heart is right with God, desires to fulfill all the commandments of his God, "not one of them is grievous unto him;" he would not wish to be allowed to violate any one of them; but desires to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." He would not retain a right eye or a right hand, that should be an occasion of offence to his God and Savior. As it is his prayer that "God's will may be done by him on earth as it is in Heaven," so is it his daily endeavor to carry it into effect; and, could he but have the desire of his soul, he would be as "pure as Christ himself is pure," and as "perfect as his Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

This union of deep sorrow for the past, and of unreserved obedience for the future, is marked by God himself as constituting that state of mind which alone will prove effectual for our acceptance with him.

Having explained the nature of true humiliation, we proceed to:

II. Expostulate with those in whom true humiliation is not yet wrought.

There is but too much reason for this expostulation wherever we look. Their need of humiliation before God, none, I apprehend, will venture to deny.

Let us only look back and see how we have acted towards God, as our Creator, our Governor, our Benefactor.

Let us mark our past conduct also towards the Lord Jesus Christ, who assumed our nature, and died upon the cross to save us.

Let us yet further call to mind all the resistance which we have given to the motions of the Holy Spirit within us; and we shall find ground enough for our humiliation before God.

Yet who has humbled himself aright?

Who has sought the Lord from day to day "with strong crying and tears?"

Who has given up himself wholly and unreservedly to God, determining through grace to have no other will but his?

Does not conscience testify against us in relation to these matters, and warn us that there is yet much, very much lacking, to perfect our humiliation before God?

We beg permission then, in the name of the Most High God, to expostulate with all whose consciences now testify against them.

"How long will you refuse to humble yourselves before God?"

Have you ever fixed a time in your minds?

Do you fix your hope upon living to old age? What certainty have you of living to old age?

Do you fix your hope upon having a long time of sickness and of death? How do you know that you shall have space then given for repentance, or that the Spirit of God, whom you now resist, shall be imparted to you for the producing of true repentance? How do you know, that if you do then repent, your repentance will proceed any further, or be more effectual for your salvation than Pharaoh's was?

Consider, I beg you, the guilt, the folly, and the danger of delaying your humiliation before God. Will you make the very forbearance of God which should lead you to repentance, the ground and occasion of protracting your rebellion against him? Do you think that God will not overcome at the last? Will you set briers and thorns in battle against the devouring fire? Did you ever hear of one who hardened himself against God and prospered? Will not sin harden you in proportion as it is indulged? "Will the Spirit strive with you forever?" Have you not reason to fear, that, if you continue impenitent under your present circumstances, God will give you up to judicial hardness, and a reprobate mind?

Beloved brethren, I entreat you to fix some time when you will cast down the weapons of your rebellion, and humble yourselves in truth before God.

Two encouragements I would set before you:

1. It is never too late.

At "the eleventh hour" those who give themselves up to Him shall be received. Let not the aged, or the sick, say, 'There is no hope.' Let not the vilest of the human race indulge despair. A Manasseh holds forth to every child of man the richest encouragement; and an assurance that of those who come to Christ in penitence and faith, "not one shall ever be cast out! [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13)."

2. It is never too soon.

It was not the men only, but the children also, yes, even "the little ones," whom God required to go forth into the wilderness to offer sacrifice to him. In the New Testament our blessed Lord says, "Let the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." O that young people did but know the blessedness of serving God! Who ever yet regretted that he had begun to repent too soon? Who ever yet made it a matter of sorrow that he "had served the Lord from his youth?" "Remember then, my brethren, your Creator in the days of your youth." Let not Satan have the best of your time; and the mere dregs be reserved for God. But "today, while it is called today," begin that life, which is the truest source of happiness in this world, and the most certain pledge of glory in the world to come!

[2 Corinthians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.7) Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

#74

DISTINGUISHING PRIVILEGES OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE

**[Exodus 10:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.22-23)**

"So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived."

Of all the plagues which in rapid succession were inflicted upon Egypt, not so much as one fell upon the children of Israel; their cattle, and everything belonging to them, enjoyed the same exemption as themselves. This distinction was well calculated to convince Pharaoh, that Israel's God was the only true God, and that the idols of the heathen were vanity! [Exodus 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.22).

But while we admit that this was the primary end of all the judgments, and of the plague of darkness among the rest, we cannot but think that this particular plague had something in it more than ordinarily instructive; inasmuch as it served to show, that between the Lord's people and others there is at all times as great a difference, as there then was between Goshen and the rest of Egypt.

We say not, indeed, that this particular application of the subject is anywhere suggested by the inspired writers; but we do say, that it may well be so applied, in a way of accommodation at least, to the elucidation of this most important point.

I will take occasion from it then to show,

I. The difference which God has put between his own people and others.

In their state, and nature, in their relation to God and to each other, in their prospects also, and in their end—the two descriptions of people are widely different from each other.

The one are quickened from the dead, and partakers of a divine nature; united to Christ and to each other in one body and by one spirit; with a heavenly inheritance before them, which they are speedily and forever to possess!

The others are yet "children of the wicked one," with no other prospect than that of a banishment from the divine presence, and an everlasting participation with the fallen angels in their unhappy lot.

But without entering into this large view of the subject, I will endeavor to show what light the children of Israel are privileged to enjoy in,

1. Things **temporal**.

In appearance, "all things come alike to all;" or, if there be any particular difference in relation to temporal things, it is rather in favor of the ungodly. But the godly, whether they possess more or less of this world, have an enjoyment of it of which the world at large are destitute, and in their present state incapable. They taste God's love in everything; and have a more vivid apprehension of the smallest blessings, than an ungodly man has of the greatest. The "blessings" of the ungodly are, in fact, "cursed to them;" "their table is a snare to them;" and even their bodily health and strength are made occasions of more flagrant transgressions against their God. To God's Israel, on the contrary, their severest afflictions are made sources of good; insomuch that they can "glory in their tribulations, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3)," and "take pleasure in their sorest infirmities, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10)." Whatever trials assault them, they "all work together for their good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28);" yes, "light and momentary as they are, they work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17)." The very best portion of the wicked is lighter than vanity; while the worst of a godly man's lot is received by him not only with "patience and long-suffering, but with joy and thankfulness, [Colossians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11-12)." Though he be the poorest of mankind, he does in effect "inherit the earth;" yes, he "inherits all things!"

2. Things **spiritual**.

The ungodly man is truly in darkness with respect to everything that is of a spiritual nature. He neither does, nor can, comprehend anything of that kind, for lack of a spiritual discernment. But God's highly favored people "have light in their dwellings," whereby they can discern things invisible to mortal eyes.

The evil of sin,

the beauty of holiness,

the glory of Christ,

the blessedness of Heaven,

are open to their view, and are contemplated by them with a zest which can be conceived by those only who actually experience it in their souls. What shall I say of "the light of God's countenance lifted up upon them," or of "the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit?" What shall I say of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them as "a Spirit of adoption," "witnessing with their spirits that they are God's children," and "sealing them unto the day of redemption," and being "a pledge of Heaven itself" in their souls? To attempt to describe these things would be only to "darken counsel by words without knowledge."

If we would in vain attempt to convey to one immured in a dungeon a just conception of the luster and influence of the meridian sun; then much more must we fail, if we would attempt to give to a natural man a just apprehension of "the things of the Spirit;" for neither have we any language whereby adequately to express them, nor have they any faculties whereby duly to apprehend them.

3. Things **eternal**.

What can an ungodly man see beyond the grave? Truly in relation to the future world he is in darkness, even in "a darkness that may be felt." If he reflects at all, he can feel nothing but "a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume him," and have no prospect but that of "the blackness of darkness forever."

But in reference to eternity, the child of God is seen to the greatest advantage. O, what prospects are open to his view! What crowns, what kingdoms, await him! Truly he stands as on Mount Pisgah, and surveys the Promised Land in all its length and breadth. He joins already with the heavenly hosts in all their songs of praise, and, according to the measure of the grace bestowed upon him, anticipates "the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore."

But, that I may not tantalize you with joys which you can never taste, let me proceed to show you,

II. How we may secure to ourselves their happy lot.

Can an Egyptian become an Israelite? Yes, he may.

An Israelite is a descendant of Abraham, in the line of Jacob. But how then can this relation be transferred to a foreigner?

After the flesh indeed, an Edomite must remain an Edomite; an Egyptian must continue an Egyptian.

But after the Spirit, the transition may be made by all, of whatever nation, provided only they earnestly desire it.

Through faith in that blessed Savior in whom Abraham believed, we may be brought to a participation of all the blessings which were conferred on him. Hear what the Scripture says, "Know that those who are of faith—the same are the children of Abraham;" the same, too, are "blessed with faithful Abraham;" yes, "the blessing of Abraham comes on them through Jesus Christ;" "if we are Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, [Galatians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.7); [Galatians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.9); [Galatians 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.14); [Galatians 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.29)."

Under this character, we shall be exempted from all the Egyptian plagues, and entitled to all the distinctions that ever were conferred on God's chosen people!

Truly, however gross the darkness which may have covered us in past times, we shall have "light in our dwellings;" yes, we shall be brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light; and not only "be turned from darkness unto light, but from the power of Satan unto God."

Say, brethren, whether this does not accord with the experience of some among you? Say, whether the brightest hours of your former life are comparable even with your darkest now? I well know that in this present life there will be clouds that will occasionally intercept the full radiance of the Sun of Righteousness, and induce a transient gloom over your horizon; but I ask with confidence, whether at such a season you would exchange your portion for that of the happiest worldling upon earth? No, you well know, that though your "darkness may continue for a night, joy will come in the morning, [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5);" and even in the darkest night some gleams of light are accustomed to shine into your soul, according to that sure promise, "Unto the godly there arises up light in the darkness, [Psalm 112:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.4)."

True it is, that sin will bring darkness upon the soul; and true it is, also, that bodily disease may sometimes operate unfavorably in this respect; but, if we are upright before God, "when we walk in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto us, [Micah 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.8);" and, in due season, "our light shall shine in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noonday, [Isaiah 58:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10)."

ADDRESS.

1. Those who are walking in their own carnal enjoyments.

Truly it is but a candle that you possess, while you are regardless of the radiance of the noonday sun! And what does God say to you? "This shall you have of my hand at last, you shall lie down in sorrow! [Isaiah 50:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.11)."

"Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

"My servants will eat, but you will go hungry;

my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty;

my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame.

My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit! [Isaiah 65:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.13-14)."

2. Those who, though Israelites indeed, are yet walking in somewhat of a gloomy frame.

We have before said, that such seasons may occur; but the direction given you by God himself is that which must be your consolation and support, "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of his servant, and yet walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and relyy upon his God, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10)."

There may be reasons for the withdrawment of light from your souls, reasons of which you at present have no conception. Perhaps God has seen that you have not duly improved the former manifestations of his love; or he may see that an uninterrupted continuance of them might give advantage to Satan to puff you up with pride. But, whether you can trace these suspensions of the divine favor to any particular cause or not, learn at all events to justify God in them, and to improve them for the deeper humiliation of your souls; and look forward to that blessed period when you shall "dwell in the light as God is in the light," and enjoy a day that shall never end! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7); [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23); [Revelation 22:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.5).

#75

GOD PUTS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIS PEOPLE AND OTHERS

**[Exodus 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 11.7)**

"But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal. Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel."

A principal intent of God in the various dispensations of his providence is, to make himself known unto the world. By some of his works he makes known his natural perfections of wisdom and power; by others, his moral perfections of goodness and truth. In his dealings with Pharaoh in particular, we are expressly told that he had this end in view, [Exodus 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.1-2). The exercise of his sovereignty was in that instance intended to be displayed, [Romans 9:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17-20); as also in the whole of "the difference which he put between the Israelites and the Egyptians;" but if we consider these two nations as types or representatives of the friends and enemies of God, we shall be rather led to contemplate the equity of all his dispensations towards them. It is in this light that we propose to dwell upon the words before us.

"Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel."

I. He did so from the beginning.

Go back to the antediluvian world. How different was his conduct towards the two first men that were born into the world! [Genesis 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.3-5). What singular honor did he confer on Enoch! [Hebrews 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.5). What distinguished mercy did he grant to Noah! [Genesis 6:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.9-13).

Consult the patriarchal age. How different his regards to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from any that he showed to those among whom they dwelt!

Look at the history before us. From the latter plagues, the flies, the murrain, the darkness, and the slaughter of the first-born—the Israelites were exempt. The cloud also was dark to one, but light to the other; and the sea was both a passage and a grave.

Search the records of all succeeding ages. It is impossible to read the history of David or Elijah in the Old Testament, or of the Apostles in the New, and not see this written as with a sunbeam! The annals of the whole world conspire to establish this important truth.

II. He does so at this present hour.

If we have been attentive observers of what passes around us, or within our own hearts, we shall not need to be told that God does at this time, no less than in former ages, distinguish his people from others.

He does so in his dispensations. He frequently interposes to screen them from calamities, ([Job 5:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19-24).) and always to sanctify the calamities he sends, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). His very presence with them in trouble is equivalent to a deliverance from it, [Psalm 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.20). (The full import of this verse will, when discovered, richly repay our meditations upon it.)

He does so in his providence, and in the communications of his grace. Whence is it that the Lord's people are enabled to triumph, as they do, over the world, the flesh, and the devil? Is it not that they are strengthened by Christ, ([Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13).) and that "his grace is sufficient for them!"

III. He will do so to all eternity.

If we would know the full extent of that difference which he will put between his people and others, we must go up to Heaven, and taste all the glories of it; and go down to Hell, and experience all its miseries! Never until then shall we be adequate judges of this momentous subject.

Questions.

1. Do you believe this truth?

Many think that "God will not do good or evil," and that he will neither reward nor punish. Whether they be conscious of such infidelity or not, their life too plainly proves its dominion over them. Beware of such atheistical opinions; and seek that, whatever becomes of others, you may be monuments of his love and favor!

2. Do you live under the influence of this truth?

Happy were it for us, if we could always bear in mind this solemn truth!

How importunate would be our prayers,

how ardent would be our praises,

how indefatigable would be our exertions!

Let us contemplate the separation which God will make in the day of judgment, [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18); [Matthew 25:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.33); [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.46); and labor incessantly, that we may be numbered among his most favored saints! [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17).

#76

THE PASSOVER

**[Exodus 12:3-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.3-11)**

"Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover!"

The mercies promised to the Lord's people shall be fulfilled to them in due season. Their trials may be long continued, and may increase when the time of their termination is near at hand; but God will not forget his promises, or delay the execution of them beyond the proper time. He had foretold to Abraham that his posterity would be ill-treated in Egypt to a certain period; but that they should then be brought out of it with great substance. The appointed period, foretold four hundred and thirty years before, had arrived, and yet the condition of the Israelites was as distressed as ever; but at its conclusion, "even on the self-same day," the promised deliverance was granted; and an ordinance was appointed to keep up the remembrance of it to all future generations.

From the words of our text we shall be led to notice,

I. The Passover ordinance itself.

1. The ordinance was **commemorative**.

The deliverance of Israel from the sword of the destroying angel, and from their bondage in Egypt, was great, [Deuteronomy 26:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.8), and unparalleled from the foundation of the world, [Deuteronomy 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.34). And in the commemoration of it, God appointed that in all future ages one of the junior members of each family should ask the reason of the institution, and the head of the family should relate what God had done for their nation in passing over the houses of the Israelites when he slew the Egyptians, and in bringing them out of their cruel bondage, verses 5–27. To this the Apostle refers, when he speaks of the Lord's Supper as an ordinance appointed for "the showing forth of the Lord's death, until he comes" again at the end of the world to judgment! [1 Corinthians 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.26).

2. The ordinance was **typical**.

The minutest particular in this ordinance seems to have been intended to typify the redemption of the world by the death of Christ:

"The lamb" which was to be "under a year old," denotes Christ, "the Lamb of God," in a state of perfect purity.

The lamb was to be "a male," as being the most perfect of its kind, and "without blemish," in order to represent the perfect manhood of Christ, who was indeed "a lamb without blemish and without spot! [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19)."

The lamb was to be set apart four days before it was slain; not only to mark God's eternal designation of Christ to be a sacrifice, but to foreshow that Christ, during the four last days of his life, (from his entrance into Jerusalem to his death,) should be examined at different tribunals, to ascertain whether there was the smallest flaw in his character; so that his bitterest enemies might all be constrained to attest his innocence, and thereby unwittingly to declare, that he was fit to be a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The precise hour of the day wherein Jesus was to die, is thought to have been predicted by the time appointed for the slaying of the paschal lamb, which was soon after three o'clock in the afternoon.

The lamb was ordered to be slain by all the congregation; to show that all ranks and orders of men, both of Jews and Gentiles, should concur in his death.

The lamb's blood was to be sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels, to show that the blood of Christ must be sprinkled upon our hearts and consciences, if we would not fall a prey to the destroying angel; but it was not to be sprinkled on the threshold, because the blood of Christ is not to be trodden under foot, or counted by any as an unholy thing! [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29).

The lamb's flesh was to be roasted, (not to be eaten raw or boiled,) that the extremity of our Savior's sufferings from the fire of God's wrath might be more fitly depicted.

The lamb was to be eaten by all; because none can ever be saved, unless they eat of Christ's flesh, and receive him into their hearts by faith.

The lamb was to be eaten whole, and not a bone of it to be broken, [John 19:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.36); probably to intimate, that we must receive Christ in all his offices and in all his benefits; and certainly to foreshow that he should be exempt from the common fate of all who died his death, and be marked out thereby with the most undoubted evidence, as the true Messiah.

None of the lamb was to be left until the morning, lest it should be treated contemptuously by the profane, or become an occasion of idolatry or superstition to mistaken zealots; and to guard us also against similar abuses in the supper of our Lord.

Some other particulars worthy of observation will occur, while we consider,

II. The manner of the Passover celebration.

In this also was the ordinance both commemorative and typical.

The bitter herbs and unleavened bread were intended to keep up a remembrance of the bitter sorrows which they endured, and the bread of affliction which they ate, in Egypt, [Deuteronomy 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.4).

Their standing, with their loins girt, and shoes on their feet, and staves in their hands, denoted the haste with which they were driven out of the land, as it were, by the Egyptians themselves.

As types, these things declared in what manner we should feed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that it is possible to strain types and metaphors too far; but in interpreting the import of the paschal sacrifice, though in some smaller matters we may not be able to speak with certainty, the great outlines are drawn by an inspired Apostle; who says, "Christ our Passover Lamb, is sacrificed for us, [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7-8)." Taking this for our guide, we say that we may learn even from the manner in which the Passover was celebrated, how we are to feast upon the Lamb of God that has been slain for us.

1. We are to feast upon the Lamb with **humble penitence**.

The bitter herbs reminded the Israelites of the misery they had endured; but we must further reflect upon the guilt we have contracted. Their bondage was the effect of force and constraint; ours has been altogether voluntary; and therefore has involved us in the deepest guilt. When we eat of Christ's flesh, we must recollect that his sufferings were the punishment of our iniquities. We must "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn; yes, we must mourn for him as one mourns for his only son! [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)." The more assured we are of our deliverance from wrath through him, the more must we abhor ourselves for all our iniquities, and for all our abominations! [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63).

2. We are to feast upon the Lamb with **true sincerity**.

This is expressly declared by the Apostle to have been intended by the unleavened bread, [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7-8). Sin is a leaven, the smallest portion of which will leaven and defile our whole souls. It must therefore be purged out with all possible care and diligence. If we retain knowingly and willfully the smallest measure of sin, we have nothing to expect but an everlasting separation from God and his people. Let us then search and try our own hearts; and beg of God also to "search and try us, to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting!" We must be "Israelites indeed and without deceit," if we would enjoy the full benefits of the body and blood of Christ.

3. We are to feast upon the Lamb with **active zeal**.

We are in a strange land, wherein "we have no continuing city; but we seek one to come, even a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." We are not to take up our rest in this world, but, as pilgrims, with our loins girt, our shoes on our feet, and our staff in our hand, to be always ready to proceed on our journey to the heavenly Canaan! In this state and habit of mind, we should feed upon Christ from day to day; commemorating the redemption he has wrought out for us, and receiving from him renewed strength for our journey. This weanedness from the world, and readiness to depart out of it at any moment that our Lord shall call us, constitutes the perfection of a Christian's character, and the summit of his felicity.

APPLICATION.

Whether we be Israelites feeding on the Paschal Lamb, or Egyptians lying on our beds in thoughtless security—let us remember, that the hour is fast approaching, when God will put a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians. Let the one rejoice in the safety which they enjoy under the blood sprinkled on their hearts; and let the other tremble at their impending danger from the sword of the destroying angel; and let all endeavor to realize the unavailing cries of God's enemies, and the joyful exultations of his redeemed people. O terrible judgment! O glorious deliverance! May God keep us all from hardening our own hearts, and stir us up to an immediate compliance with the directions given us in the Gospel!

#77

DELIVERANCE OF THE ISRAELITES FROM THE DESTROYING ANGEL

**[Exodus 12:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.21-23)**

"Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down."

The office of a minister is to declare to the people what he himself has received from God to deliver to them, [1 Corinthians 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.3). Nothing should be added by him; nothing should be withheld, [Acts 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.27). The direction given to Moses, "See that you make all things according to the pattern showed to you in the mount, [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5)," is that to which all the servants of God should be conformed in all their ministrations. In this consists fidelity. "If we add anything to the Word of God, the plagues contained in it shall be added unto us. If we take away from it, our names shall be taken out of the book of life, [Revelation 22:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.18-19)."

It is spoken to the honor of Moses, that "he was faithful in all his house;" and we find invariably, that the messages which he delivered to the people, and the ordinances which he established among them, accorded with the commission which he himself had received from God.

In the words before us, he delivers to them a message of terror and of mercy; he informs them of the judgment about to be inflicted on the Egyptian first-born; and of the means which God in his mercy had appointed for exempting them from the general calamity.

We propose to consider:

I. The means prescribed.

God might have preserved his people without any particular means; as he did when he sent forth an angel to destroy almost the whole Assyrian army. But he intended this deliverance as a type of a far greater deliverance, which he would afterwards effect through the incarnation and death of his own Son; and therefore he appointed certain observances which would lead their minds to that great event.

1. They must kill the paschal lamb.

Though the Passover differed from all other sacrifices, inasmuch as no part of it was burnt upon the altar—yet it is expressly called a sacrifice, [Deuteronomy 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.4); and it was ordered to be represented under that character to all succeeding generations, verses 6, 27; and Paul himself speaks of it as prefiguring, in that particular view, the death of Christ, [1 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7).

Here then it is most instructive to us, as it teaches us that without a sacrifice offered unto God for us—we cannot obtain favor in his sight, or escape the judgments which our sins have merited. We do not presume to say, absolutely, what God might, or might not, have done; because we know nothing of God except as he is pleased to reveal himself to us; but, as far as the revelation he has given us enables us to judge, we are persuaded that a vicarious sacrifice was necessary; and that, without such a sacrifice, God could not have been "just, and at the same time the justifier" of sinful man, [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26).

2. They must sprinkle its blood.

The destroying angel might have been instructed to discern between the Israelites and the Egyptians without any external sign upon the walls; but God ordered that the blood of the lamb should be sprinkled on the lintel, and side-posts of the doors, in order to show us yet further, that the blood of Christ must be sprinkled on our souls.

The blood of the lamb did not save the Israelites by being shed, but by being sprinkled; and, in the same manner, it is not the blood of Christ as shed on Calvary, but as sprinkled on the soul, that saves us from the wrath to come! Hence the Scripture so often speaks of our being "come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than the blood of Abel, [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24) and [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2)." We must, as it were, dip the hyssop in the blood, and by faith apply it to our own hearts and consciences, or else we can have no benefit from it, no saving interest in it.

3. They must abide in their houses.

This was appointed, that they might know to what alone they owed their safety—namely, to the blood sprinkled on their houses. If, presuming upon their descent from Abraham, or upon their having killed the Passover, any of them had ventured abroad before the morning—they would, in all probability, have perished, as Lot's wife did after her departure from Sodom, or as Shimei afterwards did by going outside the walls of Jerusalem, [1 Kings 2:41-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 2.41-46). The injunction given to them, teaches us, that we must "abide in Christ, [John 15:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.4-7). Five times in four verses this truth is repeated;" and that, to venture for one moment from under the shadow of his wings, will involve us in the most imminent danger, if not in utter ruin. We have no protection from the pursuer of blood any longer than we continue within the walls of the city of refuge! [Numbers 35:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 35.26-28).

Let us now take a view of,

II. The deliverance given.

The deliverance itself was truly astonishing.

Throughout all the land of Egypt, the first-born of every person, from the king on his throne to the captive in the dungeon, was slain by an invisible agent. By whatever means the various families were awakened, whether by any sudden impression on their minds, or by the groans of their first-born smitten by the destroying angel—there was at the same hour throughout all the kingdom a cry of lamentation and of terror; of lamentation for their deceased relatives, and of terror on their own account, lest a similar judgment should be inflicted on them also.

What dreadful consternation must have prevailed, the instant that the extent of this calamity was seen; when every one, going for relief and comfort to his neighbor, saw him also overwhelmed with similar anguish! But though the first-born of men and cattle was destroyed among all the Gentiles, not one, either of men or cattle, suffered among the Israelites. How must the whole Jewish nation be struck with wonder at this astonishing display of God's mercy towards them!

But a greater deliverance than this was shadowed forth. There is a day coming when God will put a more awful difference between his friends and enemies; when his enemies, without exception, shall be smitten with the second death, and his friends be exalted to eternal glory and felicity! What terror will be seen in that day! What weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth among the objects of his displeasure! And what exultation and triumph among those who shall be the monuments of his distinguishing favor! That deliverance will be indeed wonderful; and eternity will be too short to explore the unsearchable riches of grace and love contained in it.

The manner in which it was effected also deserves particular attention.

There was not one agent only in this transaction, but two; a destroying angel who went forth to execute judgment indiscriminately on one in every house; and God, who attended him, as it were, to intercept his stroke, and ward off the blow wherever the blood was sprinkled on the houses. This is clearly intimated in the text; and it is as clearly referred to by the Prophet Isaiah, who combines this image with that of a bird darting between her offspring and the bird of prey, in order to protect them from their voracious enemy, [Isaiah 31:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.5).

Indeed the very name given to the ordinance which was appointed to commemorate this event, was taken from the circumstance of God's leaping forward, and thus obliging the angel to pass over every house where the blood appeared.

In reflecting on this, we take comfort from the thought that whoever may threaten the Lord's people, God himself is their protector; and that, "while he is for them, none can be effectually against them." If all the angels in Heaven, yes and all the devils in Hell too—were employed to execute vengeance on the earth, we need not fear; since God is omniscient to discern, and almighty to protect, the least of his believing people!

We may learn from hence,

1. The use and excellence of faith.

It was "by faith that Moses kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the first-born should touch them, [Hebrews 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.28)." It is by faith also, and by faith alone, that we can obtain a saving interest in the Lord Jesus. In what other way can we present to God his sacrifice? In what other way can we sprinkle our hearts with his atoning blood? In what other way can we "abide in him until the morning" of the resurrection? This is not done by repentance, or love, or any other grace—but by faith alone. Other graces are good, and necessary in their place; but it is faith alone that apprehends Christ, and obtains for us all the benefits of his passion. Let us then "believe in him," and "live upon him," and "dwell in him"—as our sure and only deliverer from the wrath to come.

2. The importance of inquiring into our state before God.

The generality go to their rest as securely as the Egyptians did, unawed by the threatenings of Almighty God, and unconscious of the danger to which they were exposed. But how many wake in eternity, and find their error when it is too late! Let me then entreat you to inquire whether you have ever dreaded the stroke of God's avenging arm? whether you have been made sensible that God has appointed one way, and one way only, for your escape? whether you have regarded "Christ as your Passover that has been sacrificed for you?" whether you have fed upon him, with the bitter herbs of penitence and contrition? Have you dipped the hyssop, as it were, in his blood, and sprinkled your souls with it? And do you feel that it would be at the peril of your souls, if you were to venture for one moment from your place of refuge?

Make these inquiries; and be not satisfied until you are assured on scriptural grounds, that you are out of the reach of the destroying angel! Until then, adopt the prayer of David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!"

#78

REDEMPTION CELEBRATED

**[Exodus 12:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.41-42)**

"At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt. Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come."

[Delivered on Easter Sunday]

The Lord, for wise and gracious reasons, often delays the execution of his promises; until we, in our impatience, are almost ready to think he has forgotten them. But, however long he may appear to neglect us, "he is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness, 2 Peter 3:9." He has fixed a time, beyond which there shall be no delay, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3); and at the appointed hour he will show himself "mighty to save."

To Abraham and his seed, God promised to give the land of Canaan. But behold, no less than four hundred and thirty years were ordained by him to pass, and a great portion of that time in extreme suffering, before his seed were permitted to see the long-wished-for period. But at the time fixed from the beginning in the divine counsels, "even the self-same day it came to pass," that all the hosts of Israel were brought forth out of Egypt; and God's promises to them were fulfilled.

In like manner it was promised to Adam that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." But four thousand years were allowed to elapse before that promised Seed was sent into the world. "When, however, the fullness of time was come, God sent him, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4-5)." In effecting this great work, the Messiah was to die, [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15). But "he was not to see corruption, [Psalm 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.10)." On the third day he was to rise again, [Matthew 12:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.40). To prevent this, every expedient was resorted to, that human ingenuity could contrive. But at the appointed moment the Savior rose; and thus completed the deliverance of a ruined world.

These two events are referred to in the text—the one, historically; the other, typically.

To these events I will first call your attention.

Great was the **deliverance of Israel** from Egypt.

Sore, beyond conception, was the bondage of the children of Israel; insomuch that "God himself was grieved at it." But, through the judgments executed on their oppressors, Pharaoh was at last prevailed on to dismiss them. The last great judgment that was inflicted on their enemies was the destruction of their first-born throughout all the land of Egypt; from which the Israelites were protected by the blood of the paschal lamb sprinkled on their dwellings. This was altogether a wonderful deliverance, such as never had been given to any other nation under Heaven, [Deuteronomy 4:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.32-34).

The end of that deliverance rendered it yet more glorious; because they were now consecrated to the Lord as "a special people above all people upon the face of the earth;" and they were led forth under the immediate guidance and protection of God himself, to "a land flowing with milk and honey," "a land that was the glory of all lands."

This was a redemption which might well be remembered by them, in all future ages, with wonder, and gratitude, and praise.

But infinitely greater is the deliverance that has been given to **us**.

From how much sorer bondage are we rescued, even from the bonds of sin and Satan, death and Hell!

How much more wonderful is the means of our preservation, even the blood of God's only dear Son, once shed on Calvary, and now sprinkled on our souls!

To how much higher a state too are we raised—to be the sons of God, and the inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven!

What shall we say of this? It surpasses the utmost conception both of men and angels; and has a height and depth, and length and breadth, that is utterly incomprehensible.

Let me next commend to your special observance this day, on which these great events are commemorated. They deserve well to be commemorated by the whole human race.

The deliverance from Egypt will be a standing memorial of God's power and grace to the very end of time. But what shall we say of the redemption which that event typified? Should not that be held in remembrance by us? Should not that be annually commemorated with the devoutest acknowledgments? Truly, "it is a day much to be observed unto the Lord," even unto the latest generations.

And here I cannot but regret that the stated remembrance of these wonderful events is utterly disregarded by a great multitude of religious professors. Under an idea of avoiding Popish superstition, many have run to an opposite extreme, and cast off the very semblance of gratitude, and put from them the most effectual means of exciting it in the soul. That such memorials may degenerate into form, I readily acknowledge; but that they may be subservient to the greatest spiritual elevation, I have no doubt; and I cannot but lament, that, through a licentious zeal for what they call liberty, many deprive themselves of most invaluable blessings. To us of the Established Church, I thank God, these privileges are preserved; and I would recommend to every one of you a conscientious and devout improvement of them. Nor can I doubt, but that as the memorial of our Lord's death continued to us in the Sacramental Supper is found a blessing, so will the stated remembrance of our Lord's birth, and death, and resurrection, on the days on which they are commemorated, prove a blessing to all who will consecrate the time to a special consideration of those stupendous mercies.

The way in which they should be observed may be learned from the history before us.

The Israelites, to their last generations, were on that day to eat of the paschal lamb, and to renew their dedication of themselves to him as his peculiar people. And in this way should we employ this holy day.

Let us this day keep a feast unto the Lord. Let us eat of the Paschal Lamb, and feed on that adorable Savior who shed his blood for us, to redeem our souls from death. But let us "eat it with the bitter herbs" of penitential sorrow, and "with the unleavened bread" of sincerity and truth, with [Deuteronomy 16:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.1-4). Nor is this a suggestion of man; but of the Lord himself, who has given us this very command, [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7-8). Mark well, I beg you, these peculiar circumstances, which alone will ensure a favorable acceptance of your services before God; for without deep penitence and sincerity your services will be only an abomination to the Lord.

Let us also dedicate ourselves to him as his peculiar people, [Exodus 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.2) with [Numbers 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 8.17). We are not our own; we are bought with a price; we should therefore glorify our God with our bodies, and our spirits, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20).

Remember how entirely the people of Israel were now separated from the world, and how completely they were made dependent on their God.

Remember too, that they had but one object in view, namely, the attainment of the promised land.

Thus in spirit should we be; in spirit, I say; because we have offices to perform, which preclude a possibility of entire separation from the world. But if, while we fulfill the duties of our respective stations in the world, we attain in heart what the external situation of Israel was designed to represent, we shall do well. This should from henceforth be our one labor. Behold them, and God himself at their head. he theirs, and they his! So let us consecrate ourselves this day to him, that "we may be his people, and he our God, forever and ever."

#79

REDEMPTION OF THE FIRST-BORN

**[Exodus 13:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.14-16)**

"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."

The works of God deserve to be had in continual remembrance. His interpositions on behalf of our forefathers ought not to be forgotten by us; for we ourselves are greatly affected by them. The whole nation of the Jews at this day, and to the remotest period of time, are deeply interested in the mercy shown to their ancestors when the Egyptian firstborn were slain.

If we reckon that every Israelite had two sons, as well as daughters, (which, considering the care that had been taken to destroy all the male children, may be taken as a fair average,) and one out of those sons had been slain, we may calculate, that not above one third of that nation would ever have come into existence. On account of the distinguished greatness of that deliverance, God appointed that it should be kept in remembrance, by means of a variety of ordinances instituted for that purpose. Some of these institutions were to be annually observed, (as the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread,) and others were designed as daily memorials of it. Such was the redemption of the first-born, mentioned in our text.

In consequence of the preservation of the first-born, both of men and animals, among the Jews, God claimed all their future first-born, both of men and animals, as his property; the clean animals were to be sacrificed to him; the unclean were to be exchanged for a lamb, which was to be sacrificed; and the first-born children were to be redeemed at the price of five shekels, which sum was devoted to the service of the sanctuary. This ordinance the Jews, to the latest generations, were bound to observe,

I. As a memorial of God's mercy.

In this view, the end of the appointment is repeatedly mentioned in the text. Every time that the redemption-price was paid for the first-born, either of man or animal, it was to be like "a token upon their hands, or a frontlet, or memorial, between their eyes See," to bring this deliverance to their remembrance.

The deliverance given to us, infinitely exceeds theirs.

Theirs was great, whether we consider the state from which they were brought (a sore bondage), or the means by which they were delivered (the slaughter of the Egyptian first-born), or the state to which they were raised (the service and enjoyment of God, both in the wilderness and in the land of Canaan).

But compare our deliverance in these respects, the guilt and misery from which we are redeemed; the death, not of a few enemies, but of God's only dear Son, by which that redemption is effected; and the blessedness to which, both in this world and the next, we are brought forth; and all comparison fails; their mercy in comparison with ours, is only as the light of a glow-worm compared to the meridian sun.

Everything therefore should serve to bring it to our remembrance.

God has instituted some things for this express purpose, namely, baptism and the Lord's supper. But why should not the same improvement be made of other things?

Why may not the sight of a first-born, whether of man or animal, suggest the same reflections to our minds, that the redemption of them did to the Jews?

Why should not the revolutions of days, months, and years, remind us of the darkness and misery from which we are brought through the bright shining of the Sun of Righteousness?

What is a recovery from sickness, but an image of the mercy given to our souls?

As for the Scriptures, I had almost said that we should literally imitate the mistaken piety of the Jews, who wore certain portions of them as bracelets and frontlets; but, if not, we should have them so much in our hands and before our eyes, that the blessed subject of our redemption by Christ should never be long out of our minds.

But the redemption of the first-born was to be observed also,

II. As an acknowledgment of their duty.

God, in addition to the claim which he has over all his creatures as their Maker, has a peculiar claim to those whom he has redeemed. In this view he called upon the Jews, and he calls upon us also,

1. To consecrate ourselves to him.

The Jewish first-born of animals (as has been observed) were sacrificed to God; and his right to the first-born of men was acknowledged by a redemption-price paid for them, [Numbers 3:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 3.46-47). The same price too was paid by all (five shekels, or about twelve shillings), to show that every man's soul was of equal value in the sight of God.

With us, there are some important points of difference. All of us, whether male or female, and whether first or last in order of nativity, are accounted as the first-born, [Hebrews 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.23); nor can any price whatever exempt us from a personal consecration of ourselves to the service of the Lord. The Levites were afterwards substituted in the place of the first-born, [Numbers 3:44-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 3.44-50); but for us no substitute can be admitted. "We are not our own, we are bought with a price," says the Apostle; from whence his inference is, "Therefore we must glorify God with our body and our spirit, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20)." And in another place he expresses the same idea in terms still more accommodated to the language of our text, "I beseech you," says he, "by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

2. To serve him with the best of all that we have.

The poorest among the Israelites, whose cow had enlarged his little stock, must immediately devote that little acquisition in sacrifice to God. If it were a horse or a donkey that had produced him a foal, he must redeem the foal with a lamb, or "break its neck;" God having decreed, that his people shall derive no comfort or advantage from anything, with which they are unable, or unwilling, to honor him.

Thus are we bound to "honor God with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase." We must not stay until we have got in our harvest, and then spare to him a pittance out of our abundance; but we must devote to him a portion of what he has already bestowed, and trust him to supply our remaining wants. Strange will it be indeed, if, when "he has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all"—we can grudge him anything that is in the power of our hands to do.

ADDRESS.

1. Inquire into the nature and ends of God's ordinances.

The rites of baptism and the Lord's supper are very little understood among us; whereas, if we would inquire into the reason of these institutions, we would find them lead us immediately to the great work of redemption; in the former of them we are dedicated to Him who has redeemed us from the bondage of corruption; and in the latter, we renew to him, as it were, our baptismal vows, and derive strength from him for the performance of them. In the common ordinances of divine worship we should see the care which God has taken to make known to us the way of salvation, and to display to us the exceeding riches of his grace in Christ Jesus. If we duly considered God's design in appointing an order of men to minister in his sanctuary, we should not complain that we heard so much of Christ; but rather, we should go up to his house hungering and thirsting after him, as the bread of life and the water of life.

2. Devote yourselves to the service of your God.

The names of the first-born, and of them only, "are written in Heaven." If therefore we would partake of the heavenly inheritance, we must regard ourselves as "a holy nation, and a peculiar people." What the Levites were externally, that must we be in the inward devotion of our souls. We are not loaded, like them, with the observance of many burdensome ceremonies; but the sacrifices of prayer and praise we ought to offer unto God continually; and, in this respect, we are to emulate, as it were, the saints in Heaven, who rest not day and night in ascribing glory "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood." We should distinctly consider ourselves as "his purchased possession," and account it our highest happiness and honor to be in everything at his disposal, [Revelation 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.4). The redeemed are to "follow the Lamb wherever he goes!"

3. Endeavor to instruct others in the great work of redemption.

On all the different occasions it was appointed that children should make inquiries into the reasons of the various institutions which they saw, [Exodus 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.26); [Exodus 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.8), and [Joshua 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 4.6-7); and that such explanations should be given to them, as should tend to perpetuate divine knowledge to the remotest generations. Such inquiries we should encourage among our children; and we should cheerfully embrace every opportunity that is afforded us, of instructing them in the things belonging to their eternal peace.

If such catechetical instructions were given in our different families, to how much greater advantage would the word of life be dispensed! Our hearers then, being habituated to the consideration of divine truths, would enter more easily into the various subjects that are set before them. They would attend both with pleasure and profit, more especially when they were arrived at years of discretion; whereas now, the greater part of our auditories hear as if they heard not, and continue years under the ministry of the Gospel without ever understanding its fundamental truths.

Let this attention then be paid by all parents and masters to their respective families. Yes, let the ignorant in general, whether children or adults, be the objects of our affectionate regard; and let us all, in our respective spheres, contribute, as we are able, to impart the knowledge of Christ to others, that they also may behold the salvation of God.

#80

GOD'S CONDESCENSION TO HIS PEOPLE'S WEAKNESS

**[Exodus 13:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.17-18)**

"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle."

In whatever light we view God, whether as a God of power or of love, we are constrained to say, "Who is like unto you, O Lord!" Behold the outcome of his contest with the haughty Pharaoh; the very instant that the full time is arrived, the time predicted four hundred and thirty years before, the proud monarch not only consents to the departure of Israel, but urges them to go with all possible expedition; and the whole land of Egypt is become so anxious for their departure, that every person is glad to give his most valuable clothing, together with his jewels or vessels, of silver or of gold, to any Israelitish woman that asks them of him, [Exodus 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.21-22); [Exodus 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 11.2-3); [Exodus 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.35-36). The Israelites did not borrow them with any promise of returning them; but asked for them, and required them; and the people, partly through fear, and partly through a temporary willingness to compensate for the injuries they had sustained, hastily gave them whatever they desired.

Yet, though thrust out by the inhabitants, the Israelites do not go out as by night, but, in an orderly manner, "armed for battle." There were no less than six hundred thousand men, besides women and children. Yes, they left in a triumphant manner also, laden with the spoils of their vanquished enemies, "nor was there one feeble person among their tribes;" not one was left behind; nor was one single person unfit to undertake the journey. Thus was the power of Jehovah magnified in the completest victory that can possibly be imagined; a victory, not over their arms merely, but over their proud, obstinate, rebellious hearts.

But we are no less called to admire the kindness of God to his people—than his power over his enemies. He knew that his people were dispirited through their long and cruel bondage; and that, if he led them the near way to Canaan through the land of the Philistines, (which was at most only a journey of eight or ten days, [Genesis 43:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 43.2); [Genesis 43:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 43.10),) they would be intimidated by the hostile appearance of the Philistines, and be ready to return to Egypt, rather than enter on a warfare for which they were unprepared. He therefore condescended to their weakness, and led them another way. This may appear an unimportant circumstance in this astonishing history; but we think it will afford us some useful hints, while we call your attention to the following observations:

I. As long as we are in this world, successive trials must be expected.

The trials of the Israelites did not cease when they came out of Egypt; whichever way they had proceeded, they would have met with difficulties.

Just so it is with those who are redeemed from spiritual bondage; they come not into a state of rest, but of conflict. The bewitching state of the world cannot but place many difficulties in their way. And Satan, even if he knew that he could not finally prevail against them, would not cease to harass them to the utmost of his power. And their own hearts, if they had no other enemy to encounter, would afford them many occasions for labor and sorrow. To every person that is desirous of reaching the promised land, this life is a state of warfare; and if he would gain the victory, he must "put on the whole armor of God," and "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," and "fight the good fight of faith!"

For these conflicts God fits his people; but,

II. Whatever deliverances we may have experienced in past times, we are ever liable to faint under future trials.

One would have thought that people who had so recently seen the irresistible power of Jehovah engaged for them, would not have feared any enemies they might be called to encounter. But God knew that the appearance of new difficulties would soon efface from their minds the remembrance of past deliverances. How just his estimate of them was, appeared as soon as ever they knew that they were pursued by the Egyptian armies. They instantly murmured against Moses and against God for bringing them out of Egypt; and regretted that they had ever left the land of their captivity, [Exodus 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.11-12); [Exodus 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.3).

When they had actually reached the borders of the promised land, so terrified were they at the report of their spies respecting the stature of the Canaanites, and the strength of their fortresses, that they proposed even there to appoint a captain over them, to conduct them back again to the land of Egypt, [Numbers 14:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.2-4).

This principle of unbelief is so deeply rooted in our hearts, that even the most eminent saints have yielded to its influence under severe trials.

David, notwithstanding God had promised him the throne of Israel, thought he should one day perish by the hands of Saul 1 Samuel 27:1.

Elijah, who had so boldly withstood Ahab, fled from his post through fear of Jezebel, [1 Kings 19:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.1-3).

And the Apostles, who had seen on numberless occasions the almighty power of Jesus, expected nothing but death, even while He was in the vessel together with them, [Mark 4:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.38).

No wonder then if we find "our spirits fail" in seasons of extraordinary difficulty or danger. Who can say at all times, "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him! [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)," and that God will overrule these troubles for my eternal good! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

Under great temptations more especially, and under the hidings of God's face, it is not uncommon for truly upright people to doubt, whether they shall ever get safely to Canaan; and almost to regret, that they have ever turned their backs on Egypt.

Not that we shall be really and finally deserted; for,

III. God, in condescension to his people's weakness, proportions their trials to their strength.

What he did to the Israelites on this occasion, he did to the Christian Church in its infancy. The Apostles were screened from persecution until "they had received more power from on high;" and, for a considerable time after the day of Pentecost, they alone were noticed by the ruling powers. Opposition, until the death of Stephen, was limited almost exclusively to them; and very little affected the Church at large.

In the experience of individuals, the tender mercy of God is often very conspicuous at this day. While they are yet young and feeble, he is pleased to screen them from that fierce opposition, which, at a more advanced period, they will have to encounter; and oftentimes their very corruptions appear to be almost extinct, when, in fact, they are only dormant; their joys also in the Lord are made to abound in such a manner, that they are ready to think they shall never more be called to conflict with sin or sorrow. These are mercies to them from the Lord, to strengthen their resolution, and animate their exertions. God is graciously pleased to hide from them at the present the trials which they will hereafter sustain, well knowing that they would be too much discouraged by a sight of them, and perhaps be tempted to despair. "He does not put new wine into old bottles," but only into vessels capable of enduring the expansive efforts of fermentation, [Mark 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.22). He will not overdrive the lambs, lest they die of fatigue, [Genesis 33:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 33.13-14).

In the mean time he expressly assures us, that he will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it, 1 Corinthians 10:13, "and that as our day of temptation is, so shall also our strength be! [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)."

On these truths we would ground a word of **exhortation**.

1. Fear nothing in the way of duty.

Had the Israelites considered what God had already done for them, they would not have been afraid of any armies that could be brought against them; for, could not the angel that destroyed the Egyptian first-born, destroy them also?

What have we to fear when once we are enlisted under the banners of Christ? Is not "the Captain of our salvation" at hand to fight for us, [Joshua 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.14). "if God be for us, who can be against us! [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)." Let us not then be afraid, even though earth and Hell should combine against us, "let us not fear like other people; but sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself; and let him be our fear, and let him be our dread. [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13)." "The waves of the sea may rage horribly; but He who sits on high is mightier! [Psalm 93:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 93.3-4);" "therefore we should not fear, though the earth were removed, and the mountains cast into the depths of the sea, [Psalm 46:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.2-3)."

It is a fixed unalterable truth, sanctioned and confirmed by the experience of millions, that "none can harm us, if we are followers of that which is good, [1 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13)." If we are weak as "worms," yet shall we "thresh the mountains," and make them as the dust of the summer threshing-floor! [Isaiah 41:10-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10-16).

2. Commit yourselves to the divine guidance and direction.

God is the same now that he was in the days of old. What he did for Israel in a visible and external manner, he will do invisibly and internally for his Church at this time. Only "acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will direct your paths, [Proverbs 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.6)." We say not that he will guide you by visions, or voices, or revelations; but he will by his word and Spirit; in reference to them we may say, "You shall hear a voice behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it! [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)." If your situation is painful at the present, or even contrary to what you have expected, do not hastily conclude that God has forsaken you. The way in which the Israelites were led was circuitous; but it was "the right way, [Psalm 107:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.7)." Commit yourselves then to Him, and he shall accomplish for you that which shall ultimately be best for you, [Psalm 37:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.5). "He will lead you by a way that you know not; He will make darkness light before you, and crooked things straight. These things will he do unto you, and not forsake you! [Isaiah 42:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.16)." He will guide you by his counsel, "even to old age he will carry you [Isaiah 46:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.4);" and after that "receive you to glory! [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24)."

#81

THE PILLAR OF CLOUD BY DAY, AND THE PILLAR OF FIRE BY NIGHT

**[Exodus 13:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.21-22)**

"By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people."

In reading the Holy Scriptures, we cannot but be struck with the suitableness and seasonableness of the divine interpositions. It might be thought indeed that the Israelites at their departure out of Egypt, amounting to six hundred thousand fighting men, without one single invalid among them, would be irresistible; but if we consider, that they were without military training, without weapons, without stores either of clothing or provision, and without any knowledge of the way through "a great and terrible wilderness," and without any possibility of obtaining even so much as bread or water for their sustenance—we shall see that they needed only to be left to themselves, and they must all quickly perish in the wilderness.

But in the hour of need, God came down in a pillar of a cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to guide them in their way, and never left them until they arrived at the promised land. This mercy, and the continuance of it, are the two points to which at present we would call your attention.

I. The mercy given to them.

1. This mercy was most **signal**.

Never was there anything like it from the foundation of the world. God had revealed himself to several in dreams and visions, and under the appearances of men and angels; but never in a visible stationary form, like that before us.

By this cloud, he *guided* them in the way. Without such a direction they could not have found their way through that trackless desert; but by it they proceeded without fear of erring; and all their motions were regulated by it, whether by day or night, [Numbers 9:15-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 9.15-23).

By this cloud also they were *protected*. Though this use of the cloud is not noticed in the text, it is in other passages, [Numbers 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.34); [Numbers 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.14) and especially [Psalm 105:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.39). In that hot sandy desert, it would have been impossible for them to prosecute their journey under the rays of the meridian sun; indeed even without journeying, they could scarcely have endured the intense heat to which they would have been exposed. God therefore graciously protected them by the refreshing shadow of that cloud. And to this the prophet evidently alludes, when describing the superior privileges of the Christian Church, [Isaiah 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.5-6).

2. This mercy was most **significant**.

This cloud was, in the first place, a symbol of God's presence. After the Israelites had offended God in worshiping the molten calf, God threatened to leave them, and to commit the care of them to an angel; and on that occasion the cloud removed from the camp, in token that he was about to depart from them, [Exodus 33:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.2-3); [Exodus 33:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.7); [Exodus 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.9). And afterwards, when, in the same spirit of rebellion, they were going up against the Canaanites without the pillar and the cloud, Moses said to them, "Do not go up, for the Lord is not among you! [Numbers 14:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.42)."

This cloud was also a *seal of his covenant*. Though the covenant, afterwards made on Horeb, was not yet formally declared—yet it was considered as existing, not only because God had actually now taken the Israelites under his protection, but because he had, four hundred years before, engaged to Abraham that his posterity should be parties in the covenant already made with him. It is true, that circumcision was the rite by which all the descendants of Abraham were to be initiated into the bond of that covenant; but still this was a temporary seal of that relationship, which now existed between God and them; and therefore the Apostle compares it with baptism, by which we are admitted into the Christian covenant; and declares that they were "baptized unto Moses in that cloud," as we are "baptized by water unto Christ."

It was, moreover, *an emblem of yet richer mercies*. We cannot suppose that, under that typical dispensation, so important a circumstance as this was destitute of any spiritual meaning. Indeed it is manifest from a fore-cited passage, [Isaiah 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.5-6), that it was expressly designed to typify the guidance and protection which the Church of Christ would enjoy even to the remotest ages, through the influences of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot fail of observing, that Moses, in recording this mercy, lays great stress on,

II. The continuance of this mercy.

The cloud abode with them during the whole time of their sojourning in the wilderness. What a glorious view does this give us of our God! and how are we constrained to admire,

1. God's inexhaustible **patience**.

Truly the Israelites were "a rebellious and stiff-necked people." Nor could either mercies or judgments ever produce on them anything more than a mere transient effect. Every fresh trial called forth the same murmuring discontented spirit. On some occasions they seemed almost to have exhausted the patience of God himself. But God is slow to anger, though provoked every day; and if they had been less deserving of his wrath, we would never have known (unless perhaps by our own experience) how far the patience of God could extend. If it had not been ascertained by such an undeniable fact, we could not have conceived it possible for God himself to have "borne their manners in the wilderness during the long space of forty years." See this expatiated upon in a most feeling manner, [Nehemiah 9:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.16-19).

2. God's unbounded **kindness**.

In reading this history, one is astonished to find that God attended to that people, as if there had been no other creatures in the universe. He was incessantly occupied (if we may so speak) about their matters. He carried them through the wilderness, as a man would carry his infant son, [Deuteronomy 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 1.31). His conduct towards them is beautifully compared with that of the eagle, teaching its young to fly, and darting under them when flying, to bear them up again to their nest on her expanded wings, [Deuteronomy 32:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.11-12). But it is thus that God yet watches over his redeemed people, [Isaiah 46:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.3-4); [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.4). "Lo, I am with you always," says he, "even to the end of the world! [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20)."

3. God's inviolable **fidelity**.

It was from a regard to the promise which he had made to Abraham, and from a concern for his own honor, that God would not cast them off. He did indeed punish them oftentimes; but yet he continued to the last to acknowledge them as his people, "You were a God who forgave them," says the Psalmist, "though you punished their mis-deeds, [Psalm 99:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 99.8)." What a striking proof does this give us, that "God hates putting away," and that "he will not cast off his people, because it has pleased him to make us his people." "Faithful is He who has called us, who also will do it," that is, He will "finish in us the work he has begun," and "perfect that which concerns us."

We may **learn** from hence,

1. What reason we have for **gratitude**.

Let anyone who has been brought out of spiritual bondage, and led forward towards the heavenly Canaan, examine attentively his own experience. Let him see by what particular means he has been brought to enjoy the guidance and protection of God, and to advance in safety through this dreary wilderness; and he shall see as plain marks of a superintending and all-directing Providence, as are to be found in the history before us! Yes, he may see too as wonderful exhibitions of God's patience, kindness, and faithfulness. Let every such person then adore and magnify his God. We all feel how suitable such a frame of mind was for the cloud-directed Israelites; let us all seek to feel and manifest it in our own case.

2. What grounds we have for **faith**.

Has Jesus Christ come into the world to lessen the privileges of his people? Has he not rather extended and enlarged them? In the external manifestations of God's presence we are inferior to the Jews; but we have, what more than counterbalances that loss—the internal and spiritual communications of his grace. Yes, our God will, by his Spirit, "guide us into all truth," and lead us in the way wherein we should go. By the same Spirit also will he protect us from the burning heat of persecution and temptation, and from the assaults of all our spiritual enemies. Of this we may be assured; for he has said, that "he will keep his sheep, and give unto them eternal life; and that none shall ever pluck them out of his hands!"

#82

THE COMMAND GIVEN TO THE ISRAELITES IN THEIR STRAITS

**[Exodus 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.15)**

"Tell the people of Israel to go forward."

It is truly said by the prophet, "He who believes shall not make haste;" that is, he shall not yield to any fears, so as to be driven by them to adopt any hasty or improper measures for his deliverance. We may say on the other hand: He who believes shall not delay; he shall, in proportion to the degree in which his faith is exercised, discern the seasons for action, as well as for prayer; nor shall he be so occupied in one duty, as to overlook and neglect another.

That Moses believed God's gracious promises of deliverance, we can have no doubt; for he reported them to the Israelites with unshaken confidence; yet it would seem, by the continuance of his urgent petitions after he had received these promises from God, that he was almost afraid that his enemies would be upon him, before the promises could be fulfilled. Doubtless God was pleased with his fervent prayers at other times; but here he gently reproves Moses for remaining occupied in one duty, when there was another which the immediate occasion more urgently required, "Why do you cry unto me?" Go and give the proper directions to the people; go and execute your office as their leader, and command them to "Go forward."

Though this command was given under peculiar circumstances in which it cannot literally be applied to us—yet, in the spirit of it, it is applicable to all the Lord's people when reduced to difficulties in the way of their duty. And it may, not improperly, suggest to us the following reflections:

I. Difficulties in the way of our duty may be **expected**.

God is pleased sometimes to screen his people from trials, so as scarcely to let them suffer at all from persecutions, and very little even from internal conflicts. As he led not the Israelites the near way to Canaan, lest they should, in their unprepared state, be discouraged by entering into immediate contests with the warlike Philistines, [Exodus 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.17), so he sometimes leads his people now in a comparatively safe and easy path. But generally speaking we must expect difficulties.

It cannot be thought that Satan will relinquish his vassals without making repeated efforts to reduce them to their former bondage. When commanded to depart from the youth whom he had so long possessed, he cast him down, and tare him in such a manner, that the spectators conceived him to be dead! [Mark 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.26).

Thus does he also at this time frequently deal with those, whom by the superior strength of Jesus he is compelled to relinquish, [Luke 11:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21-22); he endeavors to shut them up in despondency, or perhaps even to drive them to suicide. And when he has not prevailed in the first instance, he departs from them (as he did even from our Lord himself), only "for a season." Methinks he is in this the very archetype of Pharaoh; who, having liberated the Israelites only by compulsion, rejoiced in a prospect of wreaking his vengeance on them, and collected all his forces to bring them back again to his dominion. To the last hour of their lives, he will avail himself of every opportunity to assault them, and will use all his wiles, and all his devices to harass them, if he cannot finally destroy them.

Nor is it to be supposed that the world will sit contented with the loss of their former companions. It is said of Noah, that in building the ark, "he condemned the world, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7);" so, in turning from sin to God, we, in fact, condemn the world.

Our faith condemns their unbelief.

Our fear of God condemns their security.

Our obedience condemns their disobedience.

This is clearly declared by Solomon, "Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law resist them, [Proverbs 28:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.4)." Our actions speak, though our lips should be silent; and the more brightly our light shines, the more visible must be the surrounding darkness. The world are driven to the alternative of condemning either themselves or us, seeing that it is impossible that such opposite lines of conduct should both be right; we must not wonder therefore if they load us with reproach and ignominy, and if "those especially who are of our own household become our greatest foes." This is the natural result of their self-love; I may add too, of their love for us.

Neither can we hope that all our former bad habits should be at once changed, so that we should feel no difficulty in mortifying our deep-rooted lusts, or in exercising graces, to which until lately we were utter strangers. Old passions will revive; old temptations will recur; and our natural indisposition to holy exercises will show itself; however much we are on our guard, and however diligently we address ourselves to the great work that is before us.

If even the Apostle Paul, after so many years spent in the service of his God, had reason to complain of "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind," so that "the things which he would do, he did not; and the things that he would not do, those he did." We cannot expect such an entire exemption from conflicts, but that we must sometimes have to cry out with him, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?"

Thus may all of us take to ourselves the advice that is given in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, "My son, if you set your heart to seek the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation."

It is well to be aware of the difficulties that are in our way:

II. Difficulties in the way of our duty must be **encountered**.

We must not dream of neutrality. It is indeed said by our Lord on one occasion, "He who is not with me is against me; and he who gathers not with me, scatters abroad [Matthew 12:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.30);" and this was to inform us that His cause admits of no neutrality; we must take a determined part against sin and Satan; and even to deliberate, in such a case, is to be guilty of treason and revolt.

Nor must we give way to fear. Let the trials that threaten us be ever so severe, we must not shrink back, as though we had not counted the cost. We must be prepared to "deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow Christ;" we must "be ready not only to be bound, but even to die for him," at any time and in any manner that he shall see fit. If we saw the furnace now before us, and burning with seven times its accustomed fury, and men ready to cast us into it, we must take the same decided part that the Hebrew youths did, "Be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up! [Daniel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.18)."

Nor must we be discouraged by difficulties. To what purpose is there a complete set of armor provided for us, and a victorious outcome assured to us, if we are to faint as soon as difficulties press upon us? We should rather rise to the occasion. "If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, [Ecclesiastes 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 10.10)." As soldiers of Jesus Christ, it is our very profession to endure hardships, 2 Timothy 2:3. If at any time we find our strength decay, we must go to Him, who has promised to "renew" it to such a degree, that we may "mount up with wings, as eagles" after their plumage is restored, and pursue our course as racers, without weariness or fainting! [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-31).

Whatever be our trials, it is at our peril to draw back from the encounter, [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39). "We must not even look back, after having put our hands to the plough." It is "he only that overcomes," who shall possess the crown of victory! [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

To meet all difficulties thus, we are encouraged by an assurance, that:

III. Difficulties in the way of our duty shall be **vanquished**.

Consult the promises of God, and see what they say; are they not as extensive as our necessities? What is there that arrests your progress, or obstructs your way?

Is it a mountain? You may say to it, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)."

Is it a sea? God will "make even the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over! [Isaiah 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10)."

Is it your own weakness that disheartens you? Behold, "one of you shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight! [Joshua 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.10) with [Deuteronomy 32:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.30)."

Is it rather your unworthiness? "It was for his own name's sake that he made you his people; and for his own name's sake he will not cast you off! [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22)."

You will not suppose that there was any great worthiness in the Chaldeans; but see how assured they were of victory when God was on their side, [Jeremiah 37:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 37.10). And shall your weakness or unworthiness be any effectual obstruction, if your God fights for you? You would not think there was any great cause for a lion to despair when contending with the defenseless lamb; yet that is the very image by which God has been pleased to designate the contest in which you are engaged, and the victory that awaits you! [Micah 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.7-8).

If you need anything else to encourage you, look at "the cloud of witnesses" that are now in Heaven, with palms in their hands, and crowns on their heads, and everlasting songs of triumph in their mouths; were not they once in your state, conflicting with the same enemies, and complaining of the same discouragements? Do you not find among them many whose trials were far more severe than you ever experienced? And yet were they not crowned at last? Did not their difficulties yield to their repeated efforts; and was not "the grace of Christ sufficient for them?"

Why then should not you also triumph? "Is God's arm shortened that he cannot save; or his ear heavy that he cannot hear?" Doubt not then but that you also shall see your enemies dead upon the sea-shore, and that, "through the strength of Christ you shall be more than conquerors!"

To you then who have escaped from bondage, and are going under the guidance of your God towards the heavenly Canaan, we say, "Go forward!" But, that we may not leave you without some more particular directions, we say:

1. Go forward, **carefully**.

Your way is not so clear, but that you need to explore it with continual care. You have indeed the pillar and the cloud; but it is visible only in the Holy Scriptures; it is to be found only in the precepts of the Gospel, and in the example of our Lord. If, because your views of Christian doctrines are clear, you suppose that you are not liable to err materially in your practice, you are greatly mistaken. The Apostle tells us, that "they who strove in the games were not crowned, unless they strove lawfully, [2 Timothy 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.5)," that is, according to the rules prescribed to them. So neither shall we be approved by our Judge, if we do not regulate our spirit and conduct altogether by the rules contained in the inspired volume. Hence we need:

"to walk wisely, [Exodus 23:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.13); [Ephesians 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.15);"

to look well to our ways;

to consult the Scriptures;

to mark the footsteps of our blessed Lord;

and, above all, to pray, with the Psalmist, "Lead me, O Lord, in the right way, because of my enemies! [Psalm 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.11)."

2. Go forward, steadfastly.

It is not on some particular occasions only that you are to serve the Lord, but at all times, and on all occasions.

Whatever advances you have made, we still say, "Go forward!"

Whatever obstacles are in your way, we repeat the word, "Go forward!"

Yes, whatever sufferings await you, we say again, "Be not discouraged because of the way, [Numbers 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.4)," but "Go forward!"

Only be sure that you are in the way of duty; that you are following the Lord's will, and not your own; and then go forward with all patience and perseverance. You must "know no man after the flesh;" you must, as our Lord says, "hate father and mother, and your own life also [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)," in comparison with him. Having nothing in view but the glory of your God, you must "forget what is behind, and press forward towards that which is ahead." You must "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord—and then your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

3. Go forward, **triumphantly**.

In every other contest, men exert themselves with a degree of uncertainty respecting the outcome; and to "boast, when girding on their armor, as though they had put it off, [1 Kings 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.11)," would be only a mark of folly and presumption. But things are far otherwise with you. Your victory depends, not on an arm of flesh, but on the power and veracity of God. While therefore you are yet on the field of battle, you may advance with David's confidence against Goliath, even though you are only "a stripling with a sling," and your enemies are deemed invincible. It was thus that Paul triumphed, and hurled defiance against all the foes that could assault him, whether on earth or in Hell, [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39). Thus also may you anticipate the shouts of victory, and say, "Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up! [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9)."

#83

ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE AT THE RED SEA

**[Exodus 14:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.31)**

"When the Israelites saw the great work the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant."

The state of man on earth is diversified with trials and deliverances, more or less, to the last hour of his life. Even when we have the clearest evidence that we are in the Lord's way, we shall yet meet with many things which will involve us in trouble and perplexity.

The disciples were ordered by their Lord to cross the sea of Tiberias; but in passing it, they were overtaken with a storm, which threatened them with destruction. It was not possible for the Israelites to doubt, but that they were precisely in the place where God would have them; yet were they threatened with instant death by the proud vindictive monarch, from whose tyranny they had just escaped. But this grievous affliction was only introductory to a signal deliverance. God now interposed on their behalf, and wrought for them a "great work."

That we may make a profitable use of this part of scripture history, let us consider,

I. The work referred to.

This is justly called "great;" for it was no less than the destruction of all the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. But that we may view it distinctly in all its parts, we observe that it was:

1. A **discriminating** work.

The pillar which had hitherto gone before the Israelites, to lead them in the way, moved, and stood behind them, as soon as their enemies had come within sight of their camp. But to the Egyptians it presented only a dark side, increasing thereby the natural darkness of the night, and preventing them from continuing their march; while to the Israelites it was a light of fire, enabling them to do whatever their situation and safety required.

Again, the sea which was divided by the east wind, opened a secure retreat for all the hosts of Israel; but as soon as the Egyptians attempted to follow them, it resumed its usual state, and overwhelmed them utterly; thus affording a passage to Israel, but only a grave to Egypt.

Now this manifest distinction which God made between the Israelites and the Egyptians, might well exalt the work in the eyes of those who were so greatly benefitted by it.

2. A **judicial** work.

Pharaoh and his courtiers had hardened their hearts against him, so that all the successive plagues could not bring them to submit to his will. Now therefore God gave them an opportunity to harden their hearts yet more against him. Instead of leading the Israelites at once into the wilderness, he led them aside to a situation, from whence apparently there was no escape. Rocks and morasses were on either side, and the Red Sea before them. This seemed a favorable opportunity for Pharaoh to overtake them, and to wreak his vengeance upon them; and Pharaoh, instigated by his resentment, determined not to lose the opportunity; he instantly collected all the chariots and horsemen in his army, and pursued them; and he rushed into the very snare which God had predicted he would fall into.

Again, Pharaoh had destroyed the male children of the Israelites in the Nile river; and now God visited this iniquity on him, and on all his army, in the Red Sea. Who does not see in these things a judicial blinding, and a judicial sentence; both of which, when contemplated by the Israelites, must raise this work yet higher in their estimation?

3. A **glorious** work.

God had said that he would get glory from Pharaoh and all his subjects; and that the Egyptians would at last be constrained to acknowledge Him as the one supreme God of all the earth. And truly this work did bring glory to God, [Isaiah 63:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.12-14); for it displayed and magnified everyone of his perfections:

his wisdom in so accomplishing his own will, while no restraint whatever was imposed on the will of Pharaoh:

his power, in dividing the sea, and making the waters to stand as a wall, while the Israelites passed through "dry-shod;"

his justice, in allowing the Egyptians to proceed so far, as that, when enclosed in his net, they might all be destroyed;

his truth and faithfulness, in accomplishing to the posterity of Abraham the deliverance which he had promised four hundred years before.

This work did indeed manifest to Egypt and to Israel, that Jehovah "is the Most High over all the earth," "a God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!"

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. The effect this work produced.

As stupid and insensible as that nation had shown themselves in the midst of all the mercies given to them in Egypt, they could not but be affected with this. Accordingly we find that, on seeing the hand of God thus stretched out against them, they began to feel:

1. A regard for God's **authority**.

Fear is of two kinds, filial and servile; and it is probable that in some of the people the former predominated, and in others the latter. On an occasion somewhat similar, where God, in testimony of his displeasure against his people for desiring a king, sent a tremendous storm of thunder and lightning, we are told that "the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel, [1 Samuel 12:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.18)." This was certainly a servile fear; and it would seem that the greatest part of the Israelites at the Red Sea were affected with no higher principle; because they even "within a few days forgot this work, [Psalm 106:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.12-13)," and all the others that God had wrought for them. Indeed temporal deliverances, however great, will produce only transient impressions, if not accompanied with the saving grace of God. But a view of that redemption which we have in Christ Jesus—what will not that effect! That will implant a fear in the heart, a fear that shall be mighty and uniform in its operation, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15), a fear that shall expel all other fear, and "bring the whole soul into a willing captivity to the obedience of Christ".

2. Confidence in God's **protection**.

As fear, so faith also, is of different kinds. We read of many who, when they saw the miracles of Jesus, believed in him; and yet he would not commit himself to them, because he knew that their hearts were yet unrenewed, [John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.11); [John 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.23-24). And Simon Magus is said to have believed, [Acts 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.13), while yet he remained "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." Such in too great a measure, we fear, was the faith which the Israelites now reposed in God, and in his servant Moses. They were struck with an irresistible conviction, that God was all-sufficient for them, and that Moses was infallibly directed by him to manage everything for their good. In the very next trial, however, they lost the remembrance of their present convictions, and began to doubt and murmur as before.

Not so the people whose faith is truly spiritual; who, being united to Christ, are partakers of his redemption; they "know in whom they have believed;" and, whatever difficulties occur, they "hold fast their confidence," saying with the Apostle, "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Improvement.

1. Let us take care that our pious affections are sincere and permanent.

Many good feelings may be excited in the heart by some particular occurrence, or some moving discourse. But "our goodness is apt to be like the morning dew, or the early cloud that passes away." Such affections however will afford us no support in a trying hour; much less will they benefit us at the bar of judgment. Let us see to it therefore that we obtain, not merely some transient feelings of good, but a new nature; so that our fear of God be such as to make us obedient to his will, and our faith such as shall enable us to commit ourselves entirely to his disposal.

2. Let us, for the purpose of generating those affections in our hearts, contemplate deeply the great work of Redemption.

We never improve aright a typical deliverance, unless we turn our thoughts to the deliverance which it prefigured. What was intended by that before us, we can be at no loss to determine, since God himself has declared it to us in [Isaiah 51:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10-11). Our redemption by Christ's obedience unto death, and our consequent deliverance from Hell, should never be far from our thoughts. It is so stupendous a work, that it has filled all Heaven with wonder; and the "riches" of divine grace contained in it are absolutely "unsearchable." To know this, to feel this, to be savingly interested in this, will produce a change in our hearts, which shall last forever! The conversion of the soul is spoken of in terms directly referring to this event in [Isaiah 11:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.15-16). And when we shall see our enemies dead upon the sea-shore, and ourselves placed beyond the reach of harm, it will furnish us with an inexhaustible subject of gratitude and thanksgiving.

#84

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

**[Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11)**

"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

Exalted favors from God may well be repaid in devout thanksgivings to God; they are the least returns that we can make to our heavenly Benefactor; and so reasonable is this tribute, that people who are far enough removed from solid piety, will, under a sense of recent obligations, often cordially unite in paying it to the God of their salvation.

The hymn before us was composed by Moses, on occasion of the deliverance given to Israel at the Red Sea; and it was sung by all the Israelites, probably by the men and women in an alternate and responsive manner, Miriam leading the women, and, together with them, accompanying the song with timbrels and dances, verses 20-21. It is the most ancient composition of the kind, that is extant in the world. The two first verses are a kind of preface, declaring the occasion, and the inspired penman's determination to celebrate it; somewhat like that in [Psalm 45:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.1). The mercy then is stated in a most animated manner; and afterwards, its effects, both immediate and remote, are circumstantially predicted. But, between the statement of the mercy and its effects, is introduced an apostrophe, addressed to God himself, and ascribing to him the glory due unto his name. To this portion of the hymn we would now direct your more particular attention. It declares that:

I. God is to be **admired for his holiness**.

God is essentially and supremely holy!

He is not only called, by way of eminence, "The Holy One," but this attribute is said exclusively to belong to him, "You alone are holy." As for the gods of the heathen, many of them were no other than deified monsters, patrons of lewdness, of theft, of drunkenness, and every kind of iniquity; and among the rest there was not found even the smallest semblance of real universal holiness. Well therefore might the challenge be made in reference to this, "Who among the gods is like unto you, O Lord?" This attribute of holiness is, in fact, the crown of all the other attributes of God; for, without it, no other perfection could be either amiable in itself or worthy of the Supreme Being.

But, without entering into the general view of this subject, we need only look at the "wonders done" on this occasion; and there we shall see a display of this attribute in its most striking colors. Behold his indignation against sin, how it burned against the oppressors of his people, and the despisers of his authority! The very elements themselves were made to rise against the proud associates in iniquity, and to execute upon them the vengeance they deserved. For this he is greatly to be admired and glorified.

No other perfection more attracts the attention of all the glorified saints and angels in Heaven, than holiness. Compare [Isaiah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.3) with [Revelation 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 4.8). And, notwithstanding it is hateful and dreadful to impenitent sinners, God's holiness is an object of the highest admiration among those who have learned to appreciate it aright. David was altogether enraptured with God's holiness, [Psalm 99:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 99.3); [Psalm 99:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 99.5); [Psalm 99:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 99.9); and every real saint will "give thanks at the remembrance of it, [Psalm 30:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.4)."

While he is thus admired for his unspotted holiness,

II. God is to be **feared for his power**.

God is a God of unrivaled power!

The gods of the heathen cannot hear, or see, or move; but the power of Jehovah is infinite. What less than omnipotence could have performed the "wonders" which are here celebrated? See how easily the expectations of his enemies were disappointed, and their bloody purposes were frustrated, by one blast of his displeasure! The picture here is highly finished. The amplification in the former verse, and the conciseness of the latter, form a beautiful contract; while the image that closes the description, strongly marks the completeness of the judgment executed.

For his omnipotence God is greatly to be feared.

For this exercise of his power indeed he was praised; as well he might be, for such a merciful and complete deliverance. But it may truly be said, that he is "fearful in praises, for this display of his power clearly shows, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Accordingly we find, that the inspired writers generally make this improvement of God's omnipotence, and suggest it as a motive:

to reverence his majesty,

to regard his will, and

to tremble at his displeasure,

[Psalm 89:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.6-8); [Hebrews 12:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.28-29); [Deuteronomy 28:58-59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.58-59).

We may learn from hence,

1. How the mercies of God are to be improved.

All of us have experienced mercies in abundance; and from them we may obtain the brightest discoveries of our God. O what displays of power, of goodness, and of truth, might all of us behold, if we called to mind the various deliverances which God has wrought out for us, and especially that redemption which was prefigured by the history before us!

The connection between the two is expressly marked by God himself; and we are told, what a mixture of admiration and reverence, of love and fear, a just view of these miracles of mercy will assuredly create, [Revelation 15:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 15.3-4). Let them then produce these effects on us; and let us now begin, what we hope to continue to all eternity, "the song of Moses and the Lamb!"

2. How every attempt against him or his people shall surely end.

Here we see a lively representation of the final outcome of every contest which man shall enter into with his Maker. The forbearance of God may be long exercised; and his enemies may appear for a time to have gained their point. But in due time, Hell shall open wide its jaws to swallow them up, and they shall become the wretched victims of their own impiety! Against God and his Church, there is no device, no counsel that shall stand.

His Church is founded on a rock, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. The enemies of our souls may follow us even to the last moment of our lives; but when the appointed moment is arrived for the completion of all God's promises to us, our souls shall be freed from every assault, and "death and Hell, with all their adherents, be cast into the lake of fire! [Revelation 20:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.14)."

#85

THE WATERS OF MARAH SWEETENED

**[Exodus 15:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.23-25)**

"When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them."

Great are the vicissitudes of human life; nor is there any person exempt from them. Even the most favored servants of God, when moving expressly in the way that he has appointed for them, may be reduced as it were in an instant from the highest pinnacle of earthly prosperity, to a state of the deepest distress and anguish.

Not to mention an imprisoned Joseph, a dethroned David, an incarcerated Daniel—we notice the whole nation of Israel exulting in the completest deliverance that ever was given to any people in the world, and within three days brought down to utter despondency. But from this we may derive much profitable instruction; while we notice,

I. Their trial.

This was indeed severe.

We have no idea in general how much our happiness, and even our very lives, depend on the common mercies of Providence. We acknowledge this indeed in words; but we have by no means a proportionate sense of our obligations to God for even a regular supply of water.

The Israelites had traveled three days, and had found no water; until at last, coming to Marah, they found an abundant supply; but, behold, the water was so bitter, as to be incapable of being turned to any good use. When the Israelites, in addition to their want, were made to experience this painful disappointment, they broke out into murmuring and complaints.

But their murmuring was wrong.

Had the question they put to Moses, been nothing more than a simple interrogation, it had been innocent enough; but it was an unbelieving, passionate complaint. (Just so, how often are our words also, or our actions, inoffensive perhaps as to their external form, while, on account of the spirit with which they are blended, they are most hateful and detestable in the sight of God!) But why should they murmur against Moses? He had not conducted them there of his own mind, but by God's command. Their displeasure against him was, in fact, directed against God himself. (Just so, it will be well for us to remember, that in venting our wrath, and indignation against the instruments by whom God at any time afflicts us, we vent it in reality against the God who uses them!) And why should they murmur against God?

Had God committed an oversight in leading them into that situation?

Had God forgotten to be gracious?

Was God so changed within the space of three days, that he could no longer devise a way for their relief?

Or was his ear become so heavy that he could not hear, or his hand so shortened that he could not save?

Should they not rather have concluded, that now, as on many recent occasions, God had permitted their trial to be great, in order that he might the more abundantly magnify his own power and mercy in their deliverance?

Doubtless this would have befit them who had seen so many and such stupendous miracles wrought in their behalf.

We next fix our attention upon,

II. Their deliverance.

Some have thought that the healing of the waters by casting a piece of wood into them, was intended to typify the sweetening of all our afflictions, and the removing of all our sorrows, by the cross of Christ. It might be so; but we are afraid to venture upon any ground not expressly trodden by the inspired writers. We therefore rather content ourselves with showing what God indisputably declared by this singular interposition:

1. That God is never at a loss for means whereby to effect his purposes.

If we cannot see some opening whereby God can come to our relief, then we are ready to think that he is quite excluded from us. But what need has he of any means at all? What means did he employ in constructing the universe? Indeed the very means he does use, are generally such as tend only to evince by their utter inadequacy, the mighty working of his own power. It was thus when he healed the deleterious waters of a spring, and the barrenness of the land through which they ran, by a single cruse of salt, [2 Kings 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.21); and thus also when he restored the serpent-bitten Israelites by the mere sight of a brazen serpent.

As to the idea of the tree itself possessing qualities calculated to produce the effect, it cannot for one moment be admitted; because the waters were sufficient for the supply of two million people, besides all their cattle; and because the effect was instantaneously produced.

We therefore say again, that the insufficiency of the means he used, displayed only the more clearly the all-sufficiency of his own power, precisely as when by the voice of a feeble worm he awakens men from their death in trespasses and sins! [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7).

2. That he will put honor upon humble and believing prayer.

There is such "efficacy in the fervent prayer of a righteous man," that God, if we may be permitted so to speak, is not able to withstand it. See people in any circumstances whatever, and you are sure to find them extricated from their difficulties, and made victorious over their enemies, when once they begin to pray. Even if the people themselves be ever so unworthy—yet, if they have an Advocate and Intercessor for them at the throne of grace, they almost invariably escape the judgments which God had denounced against them; so cordially does "God delight in the prayer of the upright," and so desirous is he to encourage all people to pray for themselves.

The murmuring spirit of the people might well have provoked God to decline all further communication with them; but Moses prayed; and his cry entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts.

But both the trial and deliverance were sent with a view to some ulterior good; let us consider,

III. God's design in both the trial and deliverance.

Among other objects which God designed to accomplish, the two following seem to be peculiarly prominent. He sought to bring them to a sense of,

1. He sought to bring them to a sense of **their duty**.

What particular statutes and ordinances God promulgated to them at this time, we are not informed. But there is one thing which he certainly made known to them; namely, the conditional nature of the covenant which he was about to make with them, and the suspension of his favors upon their disobedience. They had hitherto dwelt only on their privileges, without at all considering their duties; they thought of what God was to be to them; but not of what they were to be to God. Now God, having softened their minds by a heavy trial, and conciliated their regards by a miraculous interposition, opens to them the connection between duty and privilege; and thereby prepares them for becoming "a holy and peculiar people, zealous for good works."

2. He sought to bring them to a sense of **their sinfulness**.

This mixture of judgment and mercy was well calculated to bring them to a knowledge of themselves. The trial alone would only irritate and inflame their minds; but the deliverance applied a balm to their wounded spirits. By the union of them they would be humbled, and led to acknowledge the heinousness of their ingratitude, their unbelief, their murmuring, and rebellion. This is expressly declared to have been a very principal end of all the dispensations of God towards them in the wilderness [Deuteronomy 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.2); and it is a main object of his diversified dealings with his people at this day.

Application:

1. Let us learn to mark the effect of trials and deliverances on our own minds.

If trials always, instead of humbling, disquiet us; and if deliverances produce only a temporary impression, and not a lasting change on our hearts—then can we be right before God? They ought to "work patience, experience, and hope;" and by means of them our faith ought to be so purified, as to tend "to the praise and honor and glory of our God at the appearing of Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7)." By examining into this point we may "prove our own selves," and ascertain with considerable precision our true character.

2. Let us learn to distrust our religious feelings.

We may be moved under a sermon or any particular occurrence; we may sometimes be dissolved in tears, and at other times be elevated with joy; and yet have no root in ourselves, nor any inheritance with the saints in light. Who that had heard the devout songs of Israel at the Red Sea, would have thought that in three days they could so totally forget their mercies, and indulge such a rebellious spirit? But look within; and see whether, after an occasional exercise of religious affections, you have not, within a still shorter space of time, been hurried into the indulgence of the most unhallowed tempers, and the gratification of a spirit that is earthly, sensual, and devilish!

Ah! think of "the stony-ground hearers, who received the word with joy, and yet in time of temptation fell away." Lay not then too great a stress on some transient emotions; but judge yourselves by the more certain test of a willing and unreserved obedience.

3. Let us learn to place an entire and uniform dependence on God.

God may see fit to try us, and to delay the relief that we implore. But let us not entertain hard thoughts of him. From the time of Abraham it has passed into a proverb, that "in the mount, the Lord shall be seen." Our Isaac may be bound, and the knife actually lifted up to inflict the fatal blow, and all who might interpose to rescue the victim may be at a great distance; but, in the moment of need, God's voice from Heaven shall arrest the murderous hand, and deliver us from the impending stroke. "The vision is yet for an appointed time; therefore, though it tarries, wait for it; for at the appointed season it shall come, and not tarry, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)." Whether our afflictions be of a temporal or spiritual nature, we may rest assured of this blessed truth, that "they who wait on him shall never be confounded."

#86

CHRIST, THE HEALER OF HIS PEOPLE

**[Exodus 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.26)**

"I am the Lord who heals you."

Scarcely had the Jews passed the Red Sea before they began to murmur; as the Psalmist has said, "They provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea, [Psalm 106:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.7)." True it was that they must have suffered greatly, both they and their cattle, when they were three days without water; and when, on finding water, it was so bitter that they could not drink it. But, when they had been conducted there by God himself, (for the pillar and the cloud never left them day or night, [Exodus 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.22),) they might be assured that He, who had so miraculously delivered them hitherto, would, if they cried unto him, supply their needs. They should have had recourse to prayer therefore, and not to murmuring.

But this conduct of theirs gave occasion for a rich display of God's mercy towards them, and for an explicit declaration on his part what the rule of his procedure towards them in the future should be. They were delivered from the Egyptian yoke; but they were not to cast off obedience to their God. They were, as his redeemed people, to consecrate themselves to him, and to obey his voice in all things; and, according as they performed or neglected their duty to him, he would extend to them his favor, or visit them with his displeasure; either loading them with, or exempting them from, the diseases with which the Egyptians had been visited, and which they greatly dreaded, verse 6 with [Deuteronomy 28:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.27); [Deuteronomy 28:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.60).

This declaration of God to them was so important, that the Prophet Jeremiah, a thousand years afterwards, referred to it, to show that, from the very first moment of the people having been taken into covenant with God, their sacrifices had been held as of no account in comparison with their obedience. "I spoke not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices. But this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you, [Jeremiah 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.22-23)." Nor is it less important to us at this day; for God will still deal with us according as we conduct ourselves towards him. The retribution indeed may not now be so visibly marked by external dispensations; but it shall be maintained in reference to our souls, God either healing our spiritual maladies, or giving us up to the power of them, according as we approve ourselves to him, or walk contrary to his commands. If we offend him by a willful and habitual disobedience to his will, none shall be able to protect us; but, if we surrender up ourselves sincerely to him, "none shall be able to harm us;" whatever we may either feel or fear, we may assure ourselves of his favor; for he is, and ever will be, "The Lord who heals us."

In further discoursing on these words, we shall be led to point out,

I. The office which God executes in behalf of his people.

As God inflicts judgments on his enemies, so does he administer healing to his people; and this he does:

1. In a way of gracious exemption.

The Hebrews were exempted from the various calamities with which Egypt was overwhelmed. And this is particularly noticed in the words preceding my text, "I will put none of these diseases upon you which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you." In like manner, if we are exempt from many diseases under which others labor, and by which their whole lives are embittered, we should acknowledge God as the Author of this distinction, and receive it as a special mercy at his hands.

We know that even under the Christian dispensation, bodily diseases are often sent by God, as the punishment of sin, 1 Corinthians 11:30 and [James 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.14-15); and we cannot but feel that we have merited, on many occasions, such tokens of his displeasure. If therefore we, like the Hebrews, have been more highly favored than others—then we must, like them, be instructed that it is God alone who has healed us.

But in this general description of Jehovah we must not overlook that which, after all, was chiefly intended: his special favor towards his redeemed people, in reference to spiritual disorders. Thousands are given up, like Judas, to an obdurate heart and a reprobate mind; while some, like David and Peter, are recovered from their falls. To whom must the recovery of these be ascribed? To themselves? They had in themselves no more strength or power than the unhappy Judas had. It was to sovereign grace alone that they owed their restoration to the divine favor, and their return to the paths of holiness and peace.

And have not we similar obligations to our heavenly Physician? How often have we indulged in our hearts propensities, to which if we had been given up to, we would have fallen a prey, and perished forever! The sins of the most abandoned of the human race were small in their beginning, and by repetition became inveterate. O! what do we owe to God, who, while he has left others to follow the wicked imaginations of their own hearts, has restrained us, "hedging up our way with thorns, and building a wall, that we might not be able to prosecute the paths" which our corrupt hearts so perversely sought! As far then as by his preventing grace he has kept us from evil, we have reason to adore him as "the healer" of our souls.

2. In a way of effectual interposition.

On many occasions did God visit his people with severe chastisements; which he as often removed at the intercession of Moses, or on the humiliation of their souls before him.

Just so, have there not been times when, by disease or accident, are have been brought low; and when, if the evil inflicted had been allowed to attain the same resistless power as it has acquired over others, we must have fallen a sacrifice to its assaults! Whence is it, I would ask, that we have been restored to health, while others have died under the influence of the same disease? Greatly do we err, if we ascribe our recovery to anything but the gracious favor of our God. He may have made use of medicine as the means; but whatever may have been the secondary cause, the one great primary cause of all has been the good pleasure of God, whose province alone it is "to kill and to make alive, to wound and to heal, [Deuteronomy 32:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.39)."

And what shall we say, if we have been healed of spiritual disorders? It is well known that man is altogether corrupt; so that we may apply to him that description which is given of the Jewish state, "from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in him, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores! [Isaiah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.6)."

In every faculty of our souls we are corrupted and debased by sin:

our understanding is darkened;

our will is rebellious;

our affections are sensual;

our very conscience is blind and partial.

Now, if God has dealt with us as he did with the springs of Jericho, [2 Kings 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.20-22)—if he has cast the salt of his grace into our souls, and healed us at the fountain-head, have we not cause to bless and magnify his name? It is expressly in reference to such a miracle as this that God assumes to himself the name contained in our text.

The waters of Marah being so bitter as to be unfit for use, God directed Moses to cast a certain tree into them, by means of which they were instantly made sweet.

And are not we also directed to "a tree, whose very leaves are for the healing of the nations, [Revelation 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.2)." Its virtue indeed is not known by thousands, in whose presence it stands; and therefore they continue ignorant of its healing efficacy. But was its virtue ever tried in vain? No! nor ever shall it be. Only let Christ be received into the heart by faith, and the whole man will be renewed:

the understanding will be enlightened,

the will will be subdued,

the affections will be purified, and

the whole soul will be "changed into the divine image in righteousness and true holiness.

Now, what if God has pointed out this tree to us? What if we have experienced its healing efficacy? Then have we in ourselves an evidence that our blessed Savior sustains the office claimed by him in our text; and then we are called to acknowledge it with gratitude, and to adore him for this stupendous exercise of his power and grace!

Such being the office of our blessed Lord as our Healer, let us consider,

II. The duty which we owe him in reference to it.

This, though already in a measure anticipated, may with great propriety be now more distinctly noticed.

1. We should acknowledge him in the mercies we have received at his hands.

I am sure that God's preventing goodness is by no means appreciated as it ought to be. We see others sick and dying; and little think to whom we owe it that their lot has not been given to us. We are restored after sickness; and how soon do we forget the hand that has delivered us.

Nor are we less insensible of our obligations to God for preservation from great and heinous sins; whereas, if we noticed the falls of others who were in every respect as likely to stand as ourselves, we would be filled with wonder and admiration at the distinguishing mercies given unto us.

Even converting grace, alas! how little gratitude does it excite in our hearts! We can see clearly enough the goodness of God to Israel in bringing them out of Egypt, and in making them a peculiar people to himself, while their Egyptian taskmasters were left to perish. But "that deliverance, though glorious, had no glory," in comparison with that which is given to us.

But I call on all to look at the mercies which they have experienced, and at the means by which they have been procured for a ruined world. The tree that heals us has been felled; the Savior has been "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; and by his stripes we are healed!" Yes, the Savior himself has died, that we may live! Compare [Isaiah 53:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5) with [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24).

Shall anyone, then, who has experienced the virtue of his blood and the efficacy of his grace, not bless him? O! let every soul stir himself up to praise his God, and break forth like David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgives all your sins, and heals all your diseases! [Psalm 103:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-3)."

2. We should apply to him for the mercies which we may yet stand in need of.

Why does the Savior proclaim to us his office as Healer, but that we may apply to him to execute it in our behalf? That you are all laboring under a mortal disease, is certain; and that there is but one remedy for all, is equally clear. That remedy is all-sufficient; none ever perished, who applied it to their souls.

See our Redeemer in the days of his flesh; was there any disease which he could not cure? Was not even a touch of his garment instantly effectual for one who had spent her all upon physicians, and to no purpose?

Methinks I hear one complaining, that sin and Satan have such an entire possession of his soul, as to render his state altogether hopeless. But "is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there?" Look at the demoniac in the Gospel; so entirely was he possessed by Satan, that no chains could bind him, no restraints prevent him from inflicting deadly wounds upon himself. But a single word from the Savior expels the fiend, and causes the maniac to sit at his feet, clothed, and in his right mind!

Fear not then, desponding sinner; for there is nothing impossible with him. And if you say, 'True; but he has already tried his hand upon me in vain, and given me up as incurable!' Hear then what he speaks to you by the Prophet Isaiah, "For his iniquity I was angry, and smote him; I hid, and was angry; and yet he went on forwardly in the way of his heart." (Here is your very case; and what says he to it? Does he say, 'I have therefore given him up as incurable?' No; but ("I have seen his ways, and will heal him." Heal him, does he say? Yes, "I will heal him, and will restore comforts to him, [Isaiah 57:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.17-18)." Go then to him, you desponding soul. Say to him, as David did, "Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you, [Psalm 41:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.4)."

If you reply, 'There is no hope for me, because I have once known the Lord, and have backslidden from him;' be it so; yet, as a backslider, hear what a gracious message he sends you by the Prophet Jeremiah, "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings! [Jeremiah 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.2)." One thing only would I guard you against, and that is, "the healing of your wounds slightly, [Jeremiah 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.14)." Let your wounds be probed to the very bottom; and then, as the waters of Marah were healed so as that the fountain itself was changed, so shall your soul be purified throughout, and "the waters flowing from you spring up unto everlasting life! [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14); [John 7:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.38)."

#87

SCRIPTURAL EQUALITY

**[Exodus 16:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.16-18)**

"This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed."

To exercise faith, in opposition to all the dictates of sense, is no easy attainment. For instance; the Jews in the wilderness soon found that they had no means of subsistence; and no prospect was before them, but that of speedily perishing by hunger and thirst. Yet they did not well to murmur against Moses and Aaron, who, as God's appointed agents, had brought them forth from Egypt; in fact, their murmuring was against God himself, to whom they should rather have applied themselves in earnest prayer for the relief of their necessities. The wonders which he had already wrought for them were abundantly sufficient to show them, that, while under his care, they had nothing to fear. Doubtless the pressure of hunger and of thirst rendered it difficult for them to believe that God would provide for them; and God therefore mercifully bore with their impatience, and relieved their needs; he gave them water out of a rock; and supplied them with bread from the clouds, even with bread sufficient for them from day to day.

In relation to the manna, which was rained every night round about their tents, and which they were commanded to gather for their daily use before the risen sun had caused it to melt away, there was this very peculiar circumstance daily occurring during the whole forty years of their sojourning in the wilderness, that, while the head of every family was to gather a certain portion (an omer, about five pints,) for every person dependent on him, "and when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed."

Now this circumstance being so very peculiar, I shall endeavor to unfold it to you in its proper bearings; in order to which I shall consider it,

I. As a historical record.

A more curious fact we can scarcely conceive; and it is the more curious, because it occurred, not occasionally in a few instances, but continually, for forty years, through the whole camp of Israel.

It arose, I apprehend,

1. From God's merciful disposition towards them.

A variety of circumstances might occur from time to time to prevent some heads of families from making the necessary exertion before the sun should have dissolved the manna, and have deprived them of the portion which they ought to have gathered. Illness, in themselves or their families, might incapacitate them for the discharge of their duty in this matter; or a pressure of urgent business cause them to delay it until it was too late. In this case, what must be done? God, in his mercy, took care that there should be in some a zeal beyond what their own necessities required, and that their abundance should he sufficient to counterbalance and supply the needs of others. In order to this, he needed only to leave men to the operation of their own minds. They did not collect the food by measure, but measured it after they had brought it home; so that they might apportion it to every member of their family, according to the divine command.

Hence it would often occur, that one who was young, active, vigorous, and disengaged, would exceed his quota; while another who was enfeebled by sickness, or depressed by sorrow, or occupied with some urgent business, as that of attending on his sick wife and family, might collect but little. Neither the one might think of administering relief, nor the other of receiving it; but in all cases where there was excess or lack found in the exertions of one, there was a corresponding lack or excess in another; so that, on measuring the whole, there was no excess or defect throughout the whole camp.

In fact, this, in some respect, obtains throughout the whole world; for though there is doubtless a great disparity in men's possessions, arising from different circumstances, the rich unwittingly supply the necessities of the poor, by dispersing their wealth in return for the comforts or elegancies of life. And thus, to a much greater extent than men in general are aware, is equality produced among them; all having necessary food and clothing.

2. From their bountiful disposition towards each other.

In this view Paul quotes the very words of my text. He is exhorting the Corinthians to liberality in supplying the needs of their poorer brethren; he tells them, however, that he did not mean to burden them for the purpose of easing others; but only that, by an equality, their present abundance might be a supply for the needs of others; who, in return, might supply Their needs, in case circumstances should arise to admit of it and require it; so that there might be, under all circumstances, an equality; as it is written, "He who had gathered much had no excess; and he who had gathered little had no lack, [2 Corinthians 8:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.13-15)."

This sense does not at all oppose that which I have before given; on the contrary, it rather confirms the former sense; for it supposes that the excess was collected accidentally, as it were, in the first instance, and without any express intention to dispose of it to others; but on its being found to exceed their own needs, they liberally dispensed it to supply the needs of others; the donors at one time being the recipients at another; and the obligations conferred being mutual, as occasion required.

This, too, is still agreeable to the order of God's providence in the world. No one can tell what change of circumstances may arise, to elevate or depress any man; but events continually occur to render a reciprocation of friendly offices both practical and necessary, and to call forth among ourselves the dispositions that were exercised among the people spoken of in our text.

But, to enter more fully into the design of God in this fact, we must notice it,

II. As a mystical ordinance or appointment.

That the manna was a type of Christ, is beyond a doubt; our blessed Lord himself drew the parallel, in the most minute particulars, [John 6:31-58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.31-58); On this account the manna is called "spiritual food, 1 Corinthians 10:3;" and when, in the bestowment of it, there was so remarkable a circumstance perpetuated throughout the whole camp for forty years, we cannot doubt but that it was intended to convey some particular and very important instruction. Nor does the construction put upon it by Paul in one point of view, at all militate against a different construction of it in another view. His interpretation refers to it only as a temporal ordinance; but, as it was a spiritual ordinance also, we must endeavor to derive from it the instruction which, in that view, it was intended to convey Matthew's explanation of [Isaiah 53:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4-5). (See [Matthew 8:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.16-17).) This does not invalidate the construction put upon it by Peter, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24). Both senses were true; but the spiritual sense was the more important; I think, then, that we may see in it,

1. Our **privilege**, as believers.

Believers now feed on Christ, as the whole Jewish nation fed upon the manna; and from day to day it is found, that "those who gather much have no excess; and those who gather little have no lack."

In the Church of God at this day people are very differently circumstanced; some having much leisure, and deep learning, and many opportunities of attending ordinances in public, and of acquiring information in private; while others are so entirely occupied with temporal concerns, or so remote from opportunities of instruction, that they can gather but little comparatively of the heavenly bread. But have the one therefore any excess, or the other any lack? No. We will ask of those who are most devoted to the Word of God and prayer, whether they find their attainments in knowledge and in grace so abundant, that they have more than their necessities require? No. You know, that if your attainments were a hundredfold more than they are, there were scope enough for the employment of them, without overburdening your souls; you would still "forget all that was behind, and be reaching forward for that which was before, if by any means you might obtain the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14)."

On the other hand, I will ask of those whose attainments are more contracted; Do you not find that your more slender portion is sufficient for you? You feed on the Lord Jesus Christ as the bread of life; and do you not find that he nourishes your souls; and that pardon, and peace, and holiness, are the fruits of your communion with him? Yes! It is said, "He who believes" (not he who is very strong in faith) "shall be saved;" yes, and that "all who believe (whatever be their stature or growth in grace) are justified from all things."

If you are but a child in the faith, incapable of digesting strong meat, you find that "the sincere milk of the word" is sufficient to nourish and support you. If you be but a lamb in Christ's flock, "he carries the lambs in his bosom," because "it is not the will of your Father that one of his little ones should perish." This is no reason for your neglecting to exert yourselves to the uttermost; but it is a comfort to you to know, that, though from the peculiarity of your circumstances you have been able to gather but little, you neither have, nor shall have, any occasion to complain that you have "lacked" what was needful for you. If you have had no superabundance of grace, "your strength has been according to your day."

2. Our **duty**, as saints.

All, while they judged their first offices due to those who were immediately dependent on them, considered themselves as members of one great family, and bound to administer help to all whose necessities should require it. Thus should the whole collective mass of believers consider themselves bound to render every possible assistance to every part of Christ's mystical body. Every joint is to supply a measure of nutriment according to its capacity, for the good of the whole body; so that the whole may be strengthened, and edified in love, [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16). The command is plain, "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; say unto those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong; fear not; your God will come and save you! Compare [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4) with [Hebrews 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.12-13)."

With whatever we are enriched, we should be ready to impart of our stores liberally and without grudging; considering that we are but stewards of all that we possess, and that in dispensing to others the benefits we have received, whether they are of a temporal or spiritual nature, we most resemble our Heavenly Father, and best answer the ends for which those blessings have been committed to us.

True, indeed, we have not anything of our own, which we can impart to others; (we have no more oil in our lamps than is needed for ourselves [Matthew 25:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.8-9);) nor can any diligence in the head of a family supersede the necessity of every member gathering for himself; (for "every man must bear his own burden [Galatians 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.5);") but still, as instruments in God's hands, we may be serviceable to many, [James 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.19-20), and may, as golden pipes, convey the golden oil, for the enlightening and edifying of the Church of God, [Zechariah 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.12) with [1 Thessalonians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.11); [1 Thessalonians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.14).

Having thus marked the distinct views in which I conceive the fact before us ought to be regarded, I will now, in conclusion, suggest the instruction to be derived from it in a collective view.

We may learn from it:

1. Contentment.

The whole people of Israel had but this food for forty years; nor, except for use on the Sabbath-day, was any of it to be treasured up, even for a single day. The whole people of Israel were to exist on God's providence, exactly as the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. Nor was anything more than food and clothing to be the portion of so much as one among them; with this they were to be content; and with a similar portion should we also be content, [1 Timothy 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.8).

Hear Paul's experience on this subject, "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in need, [Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12)."

Precisely such should be the frame of our minds also. We should offer continually, and from our inmost souls, that prayer which our Lord has taught us, "Give us day by day our daily bread;" and we should be willing to live dependent on our God for every blessing, whether for body or for soul, whether for time or for eternity.

2. Confidence.

In parting with any excess which they might have attained, the whole people of Israel showed that they looked to God alone for a supply of their necessities, and that they had no doubt of his continued care even to the end.

The same lesson should we also learn. "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. [Matthew 6:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.31-34)."

We should regard God as our Parent; who, if he does not neglect the birds of the air, or the lowest worm of the earth, will surely not neglect his own children, but will rather feed them with bread from Heaven, and cause that bread to follow them in all their journeys, than leave them one day without the supply that is needful for them.

3. Liberality.

Certainly, to give away the excess which they had gathered, when they had not anything in hand for their subsistence on the morrow, was a bright example of generosity. I am far from saying that we, under our dispensation, should carry our liberality to the same extent; but I have no doubt but that the spirit which they manifested should be cultivated by us also, and that to a much greater extent than is generally imagined.

The instruction given by John the Baptist to the people of his day was, "He who has two coats, let him give to him that has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise, [Luke 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.11)."

If it is thought that this was nothing but an Eastern proverb, I answer, that Paul, in the very place where he quotes the words of my text, proposes to our imitation the example of the Macedonians, "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. [2 Corinthians 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.1-4)."

Nay more, he proposes to us the example of our blessed Lord himself, who "though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)."

Let this mind then be in you, my beloved brethren; and account yourselves rich—not in proportion to what you can consume upon yourselves, but according to what you are able to administer for the benefit of others. "In bearing one another's burdens, you shall best fulfill the law of Christ! [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

#88

SENDING OF THE MANNA

**[Exodus 16:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.35)**

"The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan."

The history of the Israelites in the wilderness contains an uninterrupted series of miracles. It might be well expected, that two million people encamped in a barren desert would soon begin to need fresh supplies of food. And so it happened. In a month after their first departure from Egypt, they had exhausted the store that they had brought with them. But God, who had brought them thus far, would not allow them to remain destitute any longer than was necessary to try their faith and patience. He therefore gave them from the clouds a peculiar kind of food, (such as had never been seen before,) a small white substance, like coriander-seed, which, when ground in a mill and baked or seethed in water, was extremely palatable.

We propose to make some observations upon,

I. The provision God gave **the Israelites**.

Let the **occasion** on which he gave the manna be first considered.

Instead of confiding in that God who had so often, and so wonderfully interposed for them, they murmured against him in a most impious manner, wishing that he had involved them in the judgments which had desolated Egypt, rather than that he should have brought them into their present difficulties. And though their complaints were directed professedly only against Moses and Aaron, they were, in fact, against God himself, by whose direction alone every step had been taken.

How astonishing was it that God should take occasion from such a grievous act of impiety to give them such tokens of his love and mercy! Might we not have expected rather that he should execute upon them his severest judgments? But thus he has done in all ages, in order to display the sovereignty and the riches of his grace!

To Adam, [Genesis 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.6); [Genesis 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.12); [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15).

To Saul, [Acts 26:10-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.10-16).

To ourselves in unnumbered instances, making our sins the occasion of deeper humiliation.

Next, let us notice the **directions** he gave respecting the manna.

They before to gather the manna from day to day, reserving none of it for the morrow, verse 19. This was to teach them their entire dependence upon God, and impress them with a sense of God's continued care of them. And though we are not forbidden, yes rather are commanded, to make suitable provision for our families—yet in the habit of our minds we are to be continually dependent on God, and free from all anxious care or distrust.

They were not to gather any on the Sabbath, but to provide a double portion on the day preceding it. How early was the observance of the Sabbath inculcated! The law was not yet given; therefore the observance of the Sabbath was not a mere ceremonial commandment. Nor was the injunction relative to it either given by Moses, or received by Israel, as a new thing. It doubtless had been enforced from the beginning of the world; and consequently we, no less than the Jews, are bound to lay aside all temporal concerns, as much as possible, on that day, and to consecrate it wholly to the service of our God.

They were to preserve some of it in a pot, and lay it up before the Lord as a memorial for future generations, verse 33. They were not to forget the mercies given to them; but rather to transmit to their last posterity the remembrance of them; in order that they also might be led to serve and trust in the living God.

And have not we also memorials of the love of God to us? Search the records of our national history, or let every one consult his own personal experience; and we shall find abundant reason to adore that God, who has interposed for us in ten thousand dangers, and supplied our continually returning needs.

The **peculiar interposition of God** in relation to the manna deserves also particular notice.

It was so ordered by his providence, that, when the members of the different families had put together the portions which they had severally collected, and measured it out again for the purpose of distributing to each his regular portion, there never was found any excess, or any lack, verses 6–18. What this was designed to teach us, we are at no loss to determine; since God himself has suggested the proper improvement of it.

We all are members of one great family. Some, by God's blessing on their diligence, or by some other means, possess much; while others, through a variety of circumstances, possess but little; we ought therefore (not indeed to make one common stock, but) to "lay put aside something for the poor, according as God has prospered us, "that, as far at least as the enjoyment of the necessities of life are concerned, there may be an equality; the abundance of the rich supplying the necessities of their less-favored brethren, [2 Corinthians 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.14-15). O that there were in all of us such a heart, and that, instead of scraping together all that we can save, for the purpose of enriching our families, we found our happiness in doing good, being "glad to distribute, and willing to share!"

From viewing the mercies God given to the Israelites, let us turn our attention to,

II. The corresponding provision he has given **us**.

The apostle Paul tells us, that the manna of which we have been speaking, was "spiritual food [1 Corinthians 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.3)." It was carnal indeed in its immediate use; but it typically shadowed forth the food on which our souls must live; and, to those who partook of it in faith, it was a source of spiritual and eternal blessings.

The Lord Jesus Christ has fully explained the subject to us; and drawn a parallel between the manna on which the Israelites subsisted, and himself as the life of our souls, [John 6:32-58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.32-58). We shall not trace that parallel here, but consider the subject in a more appropriate view.

Three things then we wish you to remark:

1. The **freeness** of this provision.

What have we done to merit the gift of God's dear Son? We were rebels against the Majesty of Heaven, and deserved nothing but "wrath and fiery indignation to consume us!" The manna rained around the tents of the murmuring Israelites was not more freely given, than Christ is sent to us, and salvation by him is offered to us in the Gospel! [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1).

2. The **suitableness** of this provision.

The manna was adapted to nourish equally the infant and adult. And to whom is not Christ suited? The great sinner will find in him precisely such a Savior as his necessities require. The weak, the timid, the disconsolate, yes, all people in all possible circumstances, shall find that he is as much suited to their individual cases, as if God had sent him for them alone; and to their palate, as though they themselves had chosen what kind of a Savior they would have.

3. The **sufficiency** of this provision.

The vigor of all was renewed from day to day by means of the food provided for them; and they were enabled to march or fight, as occasion required.

What cannot he do who feeds upon the Lord Jesus Christ? What conflicts shall not he support; what victories shall not he gain? "The grace of Christ will be sufficient for him;" and he will be "able to do all things through Christ who strengthens him"

He who gathers most of this heavenly manna, will indeed have no excess; but he who gathers ever so little, shall have no lack"; Twice is it repeated in our text, that they ate of the manna until they arrived at the promised land; never did it fail them; nor did they ever need any other food. And thus assuredly shall Christ continue to the end, as the support of all who feed upon him; and, in possessing "that hidden manna," they shall have all that they can need in this dreary wilderness; they shall have a pledge and foretaste of Heaven itself! [Revelation 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.17).

#89

MOSES STRIKING THE ROCK

**[Exodus 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.5-6)**

"The LORD answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel."

The whole of man's pilgrimage on earth is but a succession of trials and deliverances. And God so ordains it to be, because it is for our greatest good, "Trials work patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." The frequent recurrence of difficulties to the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness may serve as a looking-glass wherein to view the state of the Church in this world, and, more or less, of all the individuals that are in the world; and the interpositions of God on their behalf show what is the real, though less visible, course of his providence at this time.

Scarcely had the waters at Marah been sweetened for their use, and manna been given them for their support, than they again experienced a most afflictive pressure (a lack of water for themselves and their livestock); and again a miraculous deliverance, at Massah or Meribah.

We propose to notice in our present discourse,

I. The circumstances of this miracle.

And here there are two things to which we would call your attention:

1. The **time** of the miracle.

The Israelites had renewed their murmurs against God; and were so incensed at a renewal of their difficulties, that they were ready to stone Moses for having brought them into their present trying situation! As for their Divine Benefactor, they even questioned whether he were with them in the camp or not; assured that, if he was, he was unmindful of their necessities, or unable to relieve them.

Yet at the very moment that they were so offending the Divine Majesty, did God interpose for their relief. What an exalted idea does this convey to us of the patience and long-suffering of God! And, if we were to mark the seasons of God's interpositions in our behalf, we would find abundant matter for admiration and gratitude.

2. The **manner** of the miracle.

This singularly displays the grace of God. God makes Moses, whom they were ready to kill as their enemy, the instrument of their deliverance. He orders the rod, which had wrought such wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea, to be used, not for their destruction (as might have been expected), but for the supplying of their necessities. He himself, whose very existence they had questioned, went to preside visibly on the occasion; and the elders, who had so unreasonably doubted his power and love, were allowed to be eye-witnesses of the miracle wrought for their preservation.

How remarkably does this illustrate the precept which God has given us, "not to be overcome with evil, but to overcome evil with good!" And what convincing evidence does it afford us, that, "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound!"

But though these circumstances are instructive, the chief thing to he noticed in the miracle, is,

II. The hidden mystery contained in this miracle.

We can have no doubt but that this part of sacred history was intended to typify and prefigure Christ as a source of all spiritual blessings to the world, [1 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.4).

1. Divinely appointed.

No one would have conceived the idea of looking for water in that rock, any more than in any other spot throughout the plain whereon it stood; nor would it have entered into the mind of man to bring water out of it by the stroke of a rod. But God appointed both the rock and the rod to be means and instruments of communication between himself and his distressed people.

Just so, who would ever have thought that God's only dear Son would be given unto us; and that blessings should be made to flow down to us through the wounds inflicted on him both by God and man? Yet "all this was done according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." "He was smitten, stricken by God and afflicted," that our souls might be redeemed from death, "He was wounded for our transgressions, that by his stripes we might be healed." Yes, it is a faithful saying, that "the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." "It pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell;" and that "we should receive out of his fullness" "everything that pertains to life and godliness."

2. All-sufficient.

"The water gushed out of the stricken rock, and flowed like a river; so that it abundantly supplied the whole camp of Israel, (both men and animals,) following them in all their journeyings for the space of eight and thirty years.

Just so, who ever lacked, who has once drunk of the water that Christ gives to his Church and people? Never did any of them, never shall any, thirst again; for "the water that Christ gives them shall be in them a well of water springing up unto everlasting life! [John 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.13-14). "

3. Universally accessible.

The water from the rock flowed to every quarter of the camp; and the people instantly dug pools for its reception, so that men and cattle were supplied without the least difficulty, [Numbers 21:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.16-18).

Just so, how free is our access to Christ; free to all people, and at all times! Hear his own invitation, and the invitation of his Spirit, of his Church, and of all that know the value of those living waters, [Revelation 21:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.6-7). As the vilest murmurers in the camp drank of that stream, so may even the most flagrant rebels in the universe drink of these living waters, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18), Christ has within him the fullness of the Spirit, and "pours out that Spirit abundantly, [Titus 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.6). " upon all who call upon him; upon all, without price, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1), without stint, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39), and without upbraiding, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5).

We may **learn** from hence.

1. The experience of real penitents.

Their thirst after the Savior is urgent and insatiable, [Matthew 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.6); What a blessed sight would it be to behold a whole congregation as eager in their desires after Christ, as the Israelites were after a supply of water for their bodies! May the Lord hasten the season when this thirst shall prevail throughout all the world!

2. The mercy reserved for them.

They may feel many painful sensations, and be greatly disquieted for a season; but the promise which God has given them shall surely be realized by all! [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18); [Isaiah 43:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.20).

#90

THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS, TYPICAL OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

**[Exodus 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.11)**

"As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning."

It pleases God, in general, to effect his purposes by certain means; yet the very means he uses are, for the most part, such as tend only to illustrate his power, and to lead our minds up to him as the first great Cause of all. But on no occasion has the truth of this observation more manifestly appeared, than in the history now before us, wherein we are informed, that the success of the Israelites in an engagement with Amalek was made to depend, not on the bravery of the soldiers, or the skill of their commander, but on the holding up of the hands of Moses at a distance from the field of battle.

In discoursing on this remarkable event, we shall consider it as,

I. A typical history.

The whole history of the Israelites, from their deliverance out of Egypt to their establishment in the land of Canaan, was altogether of a typical nature; but we shall limit our observations to the circumstances now under our consideration.

1. We may notice a typical reference, in the conflicts which the Israelites maintained.

The Israelites had scarcely come out of Egypt, before they were attacked by the Amalekites, though no provocation had been given on their part. This represented the opposition which the world and Satan make to the true Israelites, as soon as ever they separate themselves from the ungodly, and set their faces towards the promised land. Though they do nothing to merit persecution, yes, though, in every point of view, they are become more excellent and praiseworthy, and desire nothing but to prosecute their journey peaceably through this dreary wilderness—yet are they hated, reviled, persecuted; nor can they obtain the inheritance prepared for them, without arming themselves for the combat, and "warring a good warfare."

2. We may notice a typical reference, in the commander under whom they fought.

Joshua was appointed to set the army in array, and lead them out to battle. Now the very name of Joshua is precisely the same with that of Jesus, [Acts 7:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.45); [Hebrews 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.8), who is "given to us by God to be our leader and commander [Isaiah 55:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.4)." He is "the Captain of our salvation," under whom we are enlisted, and under whose banners we fight. Whether we bear more or less the brunt of the battle, it is he who appoints us our respective stations; and it is to him that we must look for direction and support. And while, "as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we endure hardness" at his command, we may depend on him for all necessary provision, and for an abundant share of the spoils of victory.

3. We may notice a typical reference, in the means by which they obtained the victory.

The rod of Moses was that with which he had wrought his wonders in Egypt; and it was a special emblem of the divine power. This he was to hold up in the sight of Israel on an adjacent hill; and, while he held it up, they prospered; but when, through weakness, he let it down, their enemies prevailed against them.

Now it is thus that we are to obtain the victory against our enemies; we must have our eyes fixed on the power of God exerted in our behalf; as long as we have clear views of this, we shall vanquish every adversary; but, if at any time this ceasees to be exalted in our eyes, we shall surely faint and fail.

4. The lifting up of the hands of Moses may further denote the efficacy of prayer. And it is certain that our success will fluctuate, according as our applications at the throne of grace are continued or relaxed.

But this history may further be considered as affording us,

II. An instructive lesson.

1. It may well teach us that whatever mercies we have received, we must still expect conflicts.

The Israelites had been brought through the Red Sea, and fed both with manna from Heaven, and water from the solid rock; and they might have fondly dreamed of nothing but security and peace; but they were rather called to scenes of difficulty and danger.

Thus it is with us, when we commit ourselves to the guidance of the pillar and the cloud. We may think perhaps that, because we are reconciled to God, and made heirs of his kingdom, we are henceforth to enjoy uninterrupted tranquility; but we shall soon find that we have to "wrestle; and that too, not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers." We may indeed be screened for a season by the good providence of God; as the Israelites were kept from going through the territory of the Philistines, lest they should be discouraged by the opposition that they would have met with from that warlike people, [Exodus 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.17); but we are men of war by our very profession; and, sooner or later, our courage and fidelity will be put to the test. It is through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom; and we must "fight the good fight of faith, before we can receive the crown of righteousness from the hands of our righteous Judge."

2. It may well teach us that we must not despond, though our success for a time would appear doubtful.

The Israelites in this very first encounter were at times repulsed; and victory was long held in suspense, before it was finally declared in their favor. Thus we must expect, that our enemies, though frequently beaten, will return to the charge, and often threaten our very destruction.

If wounded, we must apply to Christ for healing.

If faint, we must beg him to renew our strength.

If driven before our enemies, we must rally, and resume the contest, ever remembering under whom we fight, and how much depends upon a victorious outcome.

We must also, like Aaron and Hur, assist each other; holding up each other's hands, and encouraging each other's hearts; nor ever terminate our exertions, until God shall scatter all our enemies, and bruise under our feet the vanquished foe.

3. It may well teach us that a believing use of the appointed means, however inadequate, or even useless, they may appear, will be crowned with success at last.

Nothing can be conceived less connected with the outcome, than the means which were used by Moses; yet were they necessary; for if, when through infirmity the use of them was intermitted, the scale of victory was instantly turned in favor of the Amalekites, much more, if he had disregarded them altogether, would the most fatal effects have followed; but the persevering use of them procured at last the desired success.

Thus the attending of public ordinances, and waiting upon God in secret, may seem but ill-calculated to produce such great effects as are said to depend upon them; but, as the occasional and unallowed neglect of these duties is attended with many painful consequences, so a willful contempt of them would infallibly terminate in our destruction.

On the other hand, a diligent and continued attention to them will and must prevail; our prayer shall go up with acceptance before God, and the word we hear shall prove "the power of God to the salvation of our souls." Only let us "lift up holy hands without doubting," until the evening of life, and we shall be "more than conquerors through him that loved us!"

Address,

1. Those who know nothing of spiritual conflicts.

If those who are at ease in Zion, and experience no spiritual conflicts, were real Christians, there would be no resemblance at all between them and the Israelites, by whom they were typically represented; and all that is spoken about the Christian warfare, the armor provided for us, and the General under whom we fight, would be altogether without a meaning. But in vain shall the true Israelites expect peace, as long as there are any Amalekites in the world! Our Lord "came not to send peace on earth, but a sword;" and though he may, in some instances, cause our enemies to be at peace with us—yet will they never be so much at peace, but that we shall have many to contend with. Or, if men should cease from troubling us, we shall have enough, both from Satan and our own lusts, to call forth all our exertions, and to make us fervent in imploring help from God. Let those, then, who feel not these conflicts, inquire whether their peace be not the consequence of a captivity to their enemies, instead of a victory over them; nor let them ever expect to reign with Christ, unless they first enlist under his banners, and fight after his example.

2. Those who are ready to faint by reason of their conflicts.

Your insufficiency to withstand your enemies often discourages and disquiets you; but the Israelites prevailed, notwithstanding their inexperience in the art of war, because they had God on their side. Fear not then, you "whose hands are weak, whose knees are feeble, and whose hearts are faint; for, behold, your God shall come and save you! [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4)." Behold, his power is now exalted in your sight; look at it; remember what it has effected in the days of old; and know, that it shall be exerted in your behalf, if you do but trust in it.

Nor forget what a Captain you are fighting under! The world which molests you, has been overcome by him; and "the prince of this world has been judged" by him. Fight on then a little longer, assured that you shall before long put your feet upon the necks of your enemies, and enjoy the fruits of victory forever and ever!

#91

MOSES' MESSAGE TO THE ISRAELITES

**[Exodus 19:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.3-6)**

"Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

We cannot but admire God's condescension in noticing our fallen race. When we see him renewing to them his acts of kindness after repeated instances of ingratitude, we are yet more amazed. And when we behold him entering into covenant with the most rebellious of his creatures, and binding himself by promises and oaths to load them with his richest benefits, we are altogether lost in wonder.

Since the time that Israel were liberated from their bondage in Egypt, about six weeks had now elapsed; during which time every successive trial had evinced that they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people. But, instead of casting them off, God commissioned Moses to propose to them a covenant, wherein they should engage to be obedient to his will, and he would engage to make them truly prosperous and happy.

The same condescension does God manifest to us; as will appear if we consider,

I. The mercies which God has already given us.

Those enumerated in the text were distinguishing mercies.

God had inflicted the heaviest judgments on the Egyptians; but had brought out his people safely and triumphantly. The eagle, to rescue her young from impending danger, will bear them upon her pinions to a place of safety, to the mountain, which he had long before marked as the place where they should worship him and enjoy his presence, [Deuteronomy 32:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.11). [Exodus 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.12). This "they saw;" and therefore could not question the goodness of God towards them.

And have we no distinguishing mercies to call forth our gratitude?

What though we have never experienced such miraculous interpositions; have we not, both individually and collectively, unbounded reason for thankfulness on account of the peculiar favors conferred on us?

Think how many millions of the human race are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, without the smallest knowledge of the Savior, or even of the one true God! But we are favored with the light of Scripture revelation, and, we hope we may say too, a faithful ministration of the word of life.

Reflect further, how many, under distress of mind, or body, or estate, are sinking under the insupportable load of their afflictions, while we have experienced but little trouble, perhaps so much only as to display more clearly the goodness of God in our repeated deliverances.

Consider also, how many have within a few months or years been summoned into the presence of their God, while we have yet our lives prolonged, and further space given us for repentance.

Could we but realize these thoughts, we should see that not even the Israelites themselves had more reason for gratitude than ourselves.

Let us from the consideration of God's past mercies extend our views to,

II. Those mercies which he has yet in reserve for us.

Those which he promised to the Israelites were exceeding great.

"All the earth was the Lord's;" and therefore he might have taken any other people in preference to them. This is evidently the meaning of the text; and it should not be overlooked; but he had chosen them in preference to all others, [Deuteronomy 7:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6-8); and promised to exalt them above all others in national honor, and individual happiness.

What an unspeakable honor was it to them to be made "a holy nation," consecrated in a peculiar manner to the service of their God! To be "a kingdom of priests," all having access to God, to offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise! and to be regarded by God as "his peculiar treasure," which he prized above all, and would secure to himself forever!

What a happiness too to all of them, as far as worldly prosperity could make them happy; and, to those who could discern the spiritual import of these promises, what a source it was of unutterable peace and joy!

But the mercies promised to them were only shadows of those which are reserved for us.

These promises have their chief accomplishment under the Gospel dispensation, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9). And O! how inconceivably "great and precious" are they! Believers are at this time amidst the ungodly world, what the Israelites were in Egypt: "a chosen generation," objects of God's sovereign and eternal choice. They are "a royal priesthood," even "kings and priests unto their! God [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6)," having dominion over sin and Satan, and "yielding up themselves to him as a living sacrifice, acceptable to him through Jesus Christ." As embodied under one head (the Lord Jesus), and living under the same laws, and enjoying the same privileges—they are also "a holy nation;" and as differing from all others in their views and principles, their spirit and conduct, they are "a peculiar people zealous of good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)."

These are the blessings promised to men under the Gospel; and it will be utterly our own fault if we are not partakers of them.

But these blessings must be sought for in God's appointed way. Let us therefore consider,

III. The **terms** upon which he will bestow them upon us.

The promises of God to Israel were altogether **conditional**.

We have seen what he engaged to do for them; but it was upon the express condition, that they "obeyed his voice, and kept his covenant." They must take him for their God and devote themselves to his service. And then he would make them his people, and give them incessant and increasing tokens of his love and favor.

This covenant was not wholly legal, nor wholly evangelical, but a mixture of both. Inasmuch as it prescribed conditions, it was legal; and inasmuch as it secured to them a remission of sins upon their returning unto God, it was evangelical. But on the whole the legal part was far the more prominent; and the promises were made void by their neglecting to perform the stipulated conditions.

Those promises made to us, though absolute in some respects, are conditional in others.

Under the Christian dispensation, all is of grace. Grace is not only the predominant feature, but the sum and substance of the New Covenant. Repentance, faith, and holiness, are not merely required, but bestowed, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31); [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2); [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14); and that freely unto all who ask for them at the hands of God [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37). "By the grace of God we are what we are;" and "by grace are we saved" from first to last.

Yet faith and obedience are indispensably necessary to our eternal salvation; nor need we be afraid of speaking of them as conditions of our salvation, provided we be careful to divest them of all idea of merit, or of being a price whereby ulterior blessings are to be purchased.

God has given us a covenant of grace; and that covenant we must embrace; and it will be in vain to hope for acceptance with God, if we do not found all our hopes of happiness on Christ the Mediator of that Covenant.

God has also given us a revelation of his will; and that will we must do; nor will that "grace of God ever bring salvation unto us, if it does not lead us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world! [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12)."

These then are the terms on which we shall enjoy all the privileges of God's chosen people; and, though it is true that "without Christ we can do nothing," it is also true, that the only way in which we ever can attain eternal happiness, is, by repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is ready to save all; but he will ultimately prove a Savior to only those who obey him.

In applying this subject to ourselves, we shall,

1. Deliver God's message to you.

Observe how solemnly God's injunction to Moses respecting the delivery of this message is twice repeated in the text. In reference to this, God twice says by the prophet, that "he protested, yes protested earnestly," to this people, [Jeremiah 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 11.7). But you have already seen that the promises in our text refer principally to the dispensation under which we live. To you therefore must this message be addressed, in the name, and by the command, of God himself. And, as Moses "laid before the faces of that people the words which God commanded him," so also would we "use great plainness of speech," while we are delivering to you the message of the Most High God.

The terms on which alone you can be saved have been already stated to you. We ask you then, is there anything unreasonable in them? Are you not rather so convinced of their reasonableness, that, if we were to tell you that you were at liberty to disregard God's covenant, and to violate his will, then you would cry out against us as impious blasphemers? Behold, then, we have a testimony in your own consciences in favor of the message which we have delivered to you; and, if you continue to expect Heaven on any other terms, you will be self-condemned to all eternity! See [Jeremiah 11:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 11.1-5).

2. Inquire what answer we must return to God.

Moses received the people's answer, and reported it to God. And O that we could near the same answer from you all, "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do!" It is true, they spoke in their own strength, and therefore failed to execute their promises; but surely it was good to form the determination; it showed that they saw the equity of God's commands; and, had they sought strength from God to fulfill his will, their resolution would have produced the best effects. But are not many of you disposed rather to reply, "As for the word that you have spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto you! [Jeremiah 44:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16)." Perhaps you are not yet hardened enough to make this reply in words; but is it not the language of your hearts and lives? Must we not carry this report to God? O that you would hearken to God's voice, before it be too late! [Jeremiah 13:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.15-17)!

But we trust there are some of a better mind among us, some who cordially assent to whatever God has been pleased to propose. On behalf of them we pray, that God may fix this pious disposition abidingly in their hearts, [1 Chronicles 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.18). Happy are we to see the rising purpose to obey God! But we must caution all not to adopt the purpose lightly, or to carry it into execution in a partial or listless manner. The message of God in the text is, "If you will obey my voice indeed."

Our obedience must be sincere, habitual, and unreserved! We must not be satisfied with mere resolutions, but must carry them into effect; nothing must divert us, nothing must intimidate us, nothing must retard us. But let us hold fast the covenant of grace, and uniformly obey the commands of God, and then all. the blessings of grace and glory shall be ours!

#92

THE GIVING OF THE LAW

**[Exodus 20:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.18-19)**

"When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

The law of God was originally written on the heart of man; but by sin it was almost obliterated, so that scarcely any traces of it remained. When therefore it pleased God to separate to himself a peculiar people, who should know his will, and enjoy his presence, and subserve his glory, it was necessary, if we may so speak, that he should republish his law, and record it in some way, which might give it a permanent establishment in the world. This he was pleased to do on Mount Sinai, after having conducted his people there in safety, and shown, by the wonders he had wrought, that he was indeed the only true God. What were the particulars of that law, we do not now stop to inquire. See discussion on [Romans 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.20).

That to which we would draw your attention is, the manner of its promulgation. In the preceding chapter we are informed of all those particulars which are briefly recapitulated in our text. On contemplating that tremendous scene, we are naturally led to inquire, Why did God publish his law in that manner? The answer to this question is important; and will prove highly instructive to us all. He did it:

I. To impress their minds with a fear of his Majesty.

God is a great God, and greatly to be feared, [Deuteronomy 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.17). But though the Israelites had seen ample demonstrations of this in Egypt, they had a very inadequate sense of it upon their minds. Hence arose their murmurings and distrust as often as any fresh difficulty occurred. And what is at the root of all our disobedience? Is it not that "we do not fear that great and fearful name, The Lord our God! [Deuteronomy 28:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.58)."

To beget in the minds of those whom he was bringing into covenant with himself a just sense of his greatness, he appeared to them in a thick cloud, with thunderings, and lightnings, and the most terrific sound of a trumpet. The effect was produced, insomuch that Moses, though terrified beyond measure himself, was forced to administer comfort and encouragement to them.

We find somewhat of a similar effect upon ourselves in a violent tempest; and, if we could realize the scene that was exhibited on Sinai, we would say indeed, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

II. To show them the nature of that dispensation.

The dispensation of the law, though suited to the Jews at that time, and even glorious, as a type or figure of the Gospel dispensation, was yet in fact "a ministration of death, [2 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.7); 2 Corinthians 3:9." It required perfect obedience to the law, and denounced a curse for every instance of disobedience; and required all the people, not only to accept it, but to approve of it, in that particular view. Compare [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10) with [Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26).

Who can contemplate such a covenant, and not tremble to have his hopes founded on it? There was indeed much of the Gospel contained in the ceremonial law; and the penitent Israelite found refuge there. But the law published on Sinai was "a fiery law," "a ministration of condemnation;" and the terrors which were infused into the people by the thunders of Sinai, fitly represented the terrific nature of that covenant. Happy would it be for us, if we availed ourselves of these instructive intimations, to renounce that covenant which consigns us over unto death, and to embrace that better covenant which is revealed to us in the Gospel!

III. To make them feel their need of a Mediator.

The people, who but just before had been with difficulty restrained from breaking through the bounds that had been assigned them, were now so alarmed, that they fled from their station, and entreated that God would no more deliver his commands to them in that way, lest they should die. They desired that Moses might be appointed as a Mediator between God and them, and that all future intimations of God's will should be given them through him. Of the full meaning of their own request they themselves were not aware; for, inasmuch as Moses was a type of Christ, it was, in fact, a desire that Christ might be their Mediator, and that all their fellowship with the Deity might be through Him. This was the construction which God himself put upon it; and in this view he approved of. Compare [Deuteronomy 5:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.27-28); [Deuteronomy 18:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.15-18);

To the same effect also the Apostle speaks. He tells us that the law was not designed to give us life, but to show us our need of Christ, and to bring us unto him as our only hope, [Galatians 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.24).

Inferences:

1. How thankful should we be for the Christian covenant!

It is to this that we are come, if we have truly believed in Christ. And oh! how different is our state from those who are yet under the law, [Hebrews 12:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-24). Instead of being prohibited from drawing near to God, we are permitted and commanded to come unto him. Let us avail ourselves of the blessed privilege, and seek closer fellowship with our God, and brighter views of his glory.

2. How careful should we be not to revert to the Jewish covenant!

We do, in fact, revert to it, if we seek justification by the law of works. If we do anything in order to be justified by it, we instantly become debtors to do the whole law. Let it not then appear to us a light matter to indulge a self-righteous spirit; for if we do, we renounce all hope from the grace of the Gospel, and "Christ, with respect to us, has died in vain, [Galatians 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.1-4)."

3. How studiously should we cultivate the fear of God!

As terrible as the appearance and the voice of God were on that occasion, his appearance in the day of judgment will be infinitely more tremendous! "Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we would persuade you" to turn unto him, before it be too late. We wish however to produce in you, not a slavish fear, but a filial fear. A slavish fear will only drive you from God. But a filial fear will make you happy in the service and enjoyment of God; and therefore we add, "Let his fear be ever before your faces, that you sin not."

#93

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO ALL OF GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS

**[Exodus 23:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.13)**

"Pay close attention to all My instructions!"

If we were about to prosecute a journey through an extensive forest, where the path was exceeding intricate, where we were in hourly danger of treading upon serpents and scorpions, and where there were declivities so steep and slippery that it was almost impossible but that we must fall down some tremendous precipice—we would feel it necessary to get the best information, and to use the utmost caution in all our way.

Such is really our state. In our journey towards Heaven we may easily mistake the road; and, even when we are walking in it, we are encompassed with so many dangers, and obstructed by so many difficulties, that we need to exercise continual vigilance. Hence, in tender love to us, our heavenly Guide puts us on our guard, and says, "Pay close attention to all My instructions!"

In discoursing on these words we shall consider,

I. The injunction.

It is our duty and our happiness to have all our actions conformed to the mind and will of God; but, in order to this, we must attend diligently to the matter, the manner, and the end of our actions:

1. The **matter** of our actions.

Notwithstanding that we have the written word, which, when duly followed, will suffice to direct our conduct; yet we must have a very considerable knowledge of the Scriptures, and a well-regulated mind, in order to ascertain clearly the will of God. It frequently happens that one duty seems to interfere with another; as when a work of mercy calls for a violation of the Sabbath, or a command of an earthly parent militates against the command of God. In the former case we are to "prefer mercy before sacrifice;" in the latter, we must "obey God rather than man." But how to discriminate aright at all times, is very difficult; and a well-intentioned person may grievously err, if he does not bring his actions to the touch-stone of God's Word, and determine, through grace, to regulate them according to that standard, [Acts 26:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9-11); [Galatians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.13) and [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2).

2. The **manner** of our actions.

It is by no means sufficient that the matter of our actions is right, for they may be so debased by the manner of performing them, as to be rendered hateful in the sight of God. Prayer is a duty plainly enjoined; but if it is cold and formal, or offered with an unbelieving heart, it will find no acceptance with God; in vain do people worship God in such a manner, [Matthew 15:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-9); they shall receive nothing at his hands, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7).

Nothing could have been more pleasing to God than David's attempt to bring up the ark to Mount Zion, after it had been at least fifty years in a state of obscurity; but David was inattentive to the manner in which God had appointed the ark to be carried; he put it on a new cart, instead of ordering it to be borne upon the shoulders of the Levites; and therefore God manifested his displeasure against him, and against all the people, by striking Uzza dead upon the spot for presuming to touch the ark! [1 Chronicles 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 15.13).

We ourselves are not satisfied to have our commands obeyed, unless a due attention is paid also to the manner of executing our will. Much less therefore will God be pleased, if we be not as studious to "serve him acceptably," as to serve him at all.

3. The **end** or **motive** of our actions.

Our end or motive in acting determines more than anything the quality of our actions. Not that a good end will sanctify a bad action; but a bad end will vitiate every action connected with it. If, for instance, in our religious services we seek the applause of men, we must expect no reward from God. The gratification of our pride and vanity is all the reward that such polluted services can obtain, [Matthew 6:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.1-5); [Matthew 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.16).

In the account which is given us of Jehu, we find that the very same action, which was rewarded on account of its outward conformity with God's command, was punished on account of the evil principle by which he was influenced in performing it. He did well in extirpating the seed of Ahab, and was rewarded for it to the fourth generation, [2 Kings 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.30). But forasmuch as he was actuated by vanity and ambition, the blood which he shed was imputed to him as murder! [2 Kings 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.16) with [Hosea 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 1.4).

Nor is there anything more common than for even religious people to mistake the path of duty through an inattention to their own spirit. The disciples doubtless thought themselves under the influence of a commendable zeal, when they would have called fire from Heaven to consume a Samaritan village; as did Peter also, when he cut off the ear of Malchus. We should therefore be peculiarly cautious with respect to this, lest by the mixture of any selfish motive or base affection we offend Him, whom it is our desire and endeavor to please.

God having prescribed rules for a just ordering of our whole spirit and conduct, we must, "Pay close attention to all God's instructions!"

The importance of this injunction will appear, while we consider,

II. The reasons for God's command.

Surely it is a necessary injunction, and no less reasonable than necessary; for,

1. The same authority exists in each of God's commandments.

It is God who issued a prohibition of adultery and murder; and it is the same Almighty Being who forbids us to entertain a selfish wish or covetous desire! [James 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10-11). Shall we then acknowledge his authority in our actions, and disregard it in our principles? Shall we think ourselves at liberty to deviate from any part of his revealed will? If so, we cease to act as his creatures, and become a god unto ourselves.

2. Without close attention to all of God's instructions, we cannot perform any duty aright.

We cannot find out the real motives of our actions without daily self-examination, and earnest prayer to God for the teachings of his Spirit. However simple the path of duty may appear, there are ten thousand ways in which we may depart from it. And, as long as our hearts are so deceitful, and we have such a subtle adversary striving to mislead us, we shall be in perpetual danger of mistaking our way. If therefore we would serve God aright in anything, we must pay close attention to everything.

3. An inattention to smaller duties, will lead to a violation of the greatest duties.

Who shall say where we shall stop, if once we begin to trifle with God? Eve little thought to what she should be brought by only listening to the suggestions of the tempter; nor did David foresee what would result from the wanton look which he cast on Bathsheba. It was on account of the danger arising from the smallest approach to sin, that God, in the words following our text, forbade his people even to "mention the name" of a heathen deity; and on the same account he requires us to "abstain from the very appearance of evil!" And if we will not "watch in all things," we shall soon have to eat the bitter fruit of our negligence; yes, it will be well, if from walking in the counsel of the ungodly, we do not soon stand in the way of sinners, and at last sit in the seat of the scornful! [Psalm 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.1). Every word in this verse rises in a climax:

"walk, stand, sit;"

"counsel, way, seat;"

"ungodly, sinners, scornful."

4. The greater our attention to all of God's instructions, the more shall we adorn our holy profession.

There are multitudes on the watch to find out the smallest faults in those who profess religion; and to condemn religion itself on account of them. But an attentive, obedient walk "cuts off occasion from those who seek occasion;" and "by well-doing we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." It can scarcely be conceived what an effect the conduct of religious people has upon the world, either to recommend religion to them, or to harden them against it. Should we not be careful that we "give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully?" Should we not endeavor to "be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves?" Let us then "so make our light to shine before men, that they may be constrained to glorify our Father that is in Heaven."

5. The whole of our conduct will be reviewed in the day of judgment.

The most secret springs of action will be brought to light in that solemn day, and "the counsels of the heart be made manifest, [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5); [Ecclesiastes 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.14)." God will weigh, not our actions only, but our motives, [Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.2). "Men judge according to appearance; but He will judge righteous judgment." If this consideration will not make us attentive and obedient, then what can we hope to prove effectual? O that we could bear in mind the strictness of that scrutiny, and the awfulness of that decision!

Address,

1. Those who ridicule the preciseness of others.

To what end has God commanded us to be careful, if we are not to regard the injunction? Do you suppose that you are to annul his commands, and to establish rules of conduct that are contrary to his? Or, if you are presumptuous enough to do so in reference to yourselves, do you think that you are to prescribe for others also? You affect to pity the Lord's people as weak enthusiasts; but know that you are the true objects of pity, who can rush blindfold in such a manner to your own destruction. Yes, over such as you the Savior wept; and if you knew your guilt and danger, you would weep for yourselves! Repent, before it is too late; for, however wise you may imagine yourselves to be, the time is coming when you will change your voice, and say, "We fools counted our life madness!" Take care that you yourselves be righteous enough, before you ridicule others as "righteous over-much."

2. Those who, in spite of scoffers, are endeavoring to please their God.

Blessed be God, who enables you to stem the torrent, and to serve him in the midst of a wicked world! But, be on your guard against that scrupulosity, which makes those things to be sins which are no sins; and that superstition, which makes things to be duties which are no duties. Be as careful of adding to the Word of God as of detracting from it. Let the different parts of Scripture be compared with each other; and learn your duty not so much from any detached passage, as from a collective view of all those passages which may reflect light upon it. Nevertheless in doubtful matters, you will do well to lean to the safer side.

Yet while you are thus circumspect yourselves, do not presume to judge others. Things may be right in others, which would be wrong in you; and right in you under some circumstances, which under different circumstances would be highly improper. Do not then bring others to your standard, or try them at your bar, "it is to their own Master that they must stand or fall."

Lastly, let not your preciseness fill you with self-preference and self-esteem. However accurately you may walk, there will be still enough to humble you in the dust. You must to your last hour go to Jesus as the chief of sinners, and seek acceptance with God through his blood and righteousness!

#94

THE DANGER OF WILLFUL AND OBSTINATE DISOBEDIENCE

**[Exodus 23:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.20-22)**

"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you."

It is but too common for men to cast the blame of their own negligence on God. But they who labor so much to exculpate themselves now, will one day be silent; and God will finally be justified in every sentence that he shall pass. His kindness to the church of old may show us what his conduct is towards us. And they who are thus guided, warned, and encouraged, must, if they perish, ascribe their condemnation to themselves alone. The words before us contain,

I. The work and office of Christ.

Christ is here called an angel or messenger.

He is often called by this name in the Holy Scriptures. He is the angel that was in the pillar and the cloud, [Exodus 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.19). That angel was Jehovah, [Exodus 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.21). That Jehovah was Christ, [1 Corinthians 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.9). See also [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1). Nor does he disdain to assume it himself [John 12:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.49). In his essential nature indeed Jesus is equal with the Father. But in his mediatorial capacity he sustains the office of a servant.

As the angel of the covenant, Jesus leads and keeps his people.

He is represented as a leader and commander, like Joshua, his type, [Isaiah 55:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.4). He went before them in the wilderness in the pillar and the cloud. And still, though invisible, Jesus guides them in their way to Heaven, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9); [Psalm 32:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.8).

Nor does he leave them until he brings them safely to glory.

He did not forsake the Israelites, until he had accomplished all his promises, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14). Having "prepared the land for them," he preserved them for it. Thus has he "prepared mansions for us" also, [John 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2); and will surely bring us to the full possession of them! 1 Peter 1:4-5.

But as this office of Christ implies a correspondent duty in us, God suggests,

II. A caution against neglecting him.

We are much in danger of displeasing him.

As our guide, he expects implicit obedience. Nor can we rebel against him without "provoking" his indignation, [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10). Hence we need continual circumspection.

The consequence of displeasing him will be terrible.

Doubtless to penitents he is full of mercy and compassion. But to impenitent offenders he will manifest his wrath, [Psalm 7:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.11-13). Nor will he allow any to continue in their sins with impunity, [Ezekiel 24:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 24.13-14).

His power and dignity are a certain pledge to us that he will avenge the insults that are offered him.

By "the name of God" we understand not his authority only, but his very nature, [John 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.10-11); [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30). And this union with the Father is a pledge to us, that he will act as befits the divine character. Nor will any consideration of mercy ever tempt him again to sacrifice the honor of the Deity to the interests of man.

It is not however by terror only that God would persuade us; for he adds,

III. An encouragement to obey him.

Obedience is in one sense, the condition of God's favor.

We know that there is nothing meritorious in man's obedience. Yet is there an inseparable connection between that and the divine favor. Nor is it a partial obedience only that he requires at our hands. Obedience must be earnest, unwearied, uniform, and unreserved.

And to those who yield him this obedience he will show himself an active friend, and an almighty protector.

His favor consists not in a mere inactive delight. It will manifest itself in a constant and powerful interposition on their behalf, [2 Chronicles 32:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.8); [Isaiah 49:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.25). He will not fail to secure them the victory over all their enemies.

Address,

1. Those who disregard the voice of this divine Messenger.

From what is spoken of his mercy you are ready to think him destitute of justice. And from the depth of his condescension you conclude he will not vindicate his own honor. But where God most fully proclaims his mercy, he declares his justice also, [Exodus 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.7). Do not make him your enemy, who came from Heaven to save you.

Consider what means he has used to guide you to the promised land.

Consider what great things he would do for you, if you would obey his voice.

Consider what certain and terrible destruction your rejection of his mercy will bring upon you, [Hebrews 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.25). And instantly surrender up yourselves to his direction and government.

2. Those who, though they submit to his government, are doubtful of success.

The Israelites, notwithstanding all the miracles they had seen, were afraid they should not finally attain the object of their desires.

Thus among ourselves, many tremble lest their expectations should never be realized. But is not God able to beat down your enemies before you? Or will he forget the promise he has so often renewed? If he is incensed against you, it is not owing to unfaithfulness in him, but to instability in you! [Jeremiah 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.17). Only be vigilant to obey his will, and to follow him fully; and you need not doubt that he will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom [2 Timothy 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.18).

3. Those who are following him with cheerfulness to the heavenly land.

Blessed be God, there are some of you like-minded with Joshua and Caleb, [Numbers 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.24); [Numbers 32:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.12). And are not you living monuments of the power and grace of God? Have you not on many occasions proved his readiness to pardon sin? And do you not daily experience his paternal care and protection? Go on then with increasing vigilance and an assured hope. Know that all the power and perfections of God are engaged for you; and that "having guided you by his counsel, he will finally bring you to glory."

#95

THE VICTORIES OF ISRAEL GRADUAL AND PROGRESSIVE

**[Exodus 23:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.29-30)**

"But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land."

The more we investigate the dispensations of Providence, the more we shall see that "God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." If we had been left to form conjectures respecting man in his first creation, who would have conceived that God would allow the work of his hands to be so marred as Adam was by the fall, and so large a portion of his creatures to perish in everlasting misery?

Nor, if we were told that God would take to himself, from among the fallen sons of Adam, a peculiar people, and rescue them by so many signs and wonders from their bondage in Egypt, would we have imagined that he would, after all, keep them in the wilderness for the space of forty years, until the whole generation were swept away; and allow two individuals only, of the whole nation, to enter the promised land. But "his ways are in the great deep; and his footsteps are not known."

When, at last, he had brought his people into Canaan, we would then at least suppose that he would give them a speedy and quiet possession of the land. Yet, behold, he tells them beforehand, that he will "not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land."

We propose to inquire into,

I. The design of God in the dispensation here referred to.

It was intended,

1. As an act of mercy, to **preserve** his people.

The people altogether amounted to about two millions; and the country which they were to occupy extended from the Red Sea to the Euphrates, [Genesis 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.18). But, if so small a population were spread over so wide a space, the wild beasts would quickly multiply, and speedily desolate the whole land. True, indeed, God could, if it would so please him, interpose by miracle to change the ferocity of the most savage animals; but that was no part of his plan. He permitted, therefore, vast multitudes of the heathen nations yet to live, so that they might, for their own sake, prevent the increase and incursions of the wild beasts, until Israel should have multiplied so as to be able, in every part, to protect themselves.

2. As an act of righteousness, to **test** them.

All the trials with which God's people were visited in the wilderness were sent "to prove them," whether they would serve the Lord or not. Not that God needed any such information, as the result of experiment; because "he knew what was in man," whose heart and thoughts were open to him from the foundation of the world; but it was desirable, for their own sakes, that they should have an insight into their own hearts, and be able to appreciate the whole of God's dealings with them.

By the continuance of the heathen nations among them, they would see how prone they were to seek their own carnal ease and interests, by mingling themselves among them, when they should have been laboring with all their might to effect their utter extirpation.

By observing also the success or failure of their efforts against these enemies, they would be able to judge with accuracy, how far they were in favor with God, or under his displeasure; and would consequently be led to approach him with suitable emotions of gratitude or contrition. This is the view which the Scripture itself gives us of this very dispensation, "These were the nations which the Lord left to prove Israel by them: the Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians, and the Hivites; it was to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken to the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses, [Judges 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 3.1-4)."

3. As an act of judgment, to **punish** them.

Though there were good ends to be answered, by a gradual execution of the judgments denounced against the seven nations of Canaan, it was the fault of the Israelites themselves that the extirpation of them was not more rapid and complete. They gave way to sloth, when they should have been in full activity. They yielded to fear, when they should have gone forth in assured dependence on their Lord. By this, they greatly increased their own trials, and multiplied their own afflictions. God had told them by Moses, saying, "If you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come to pass, that those whom you let remain of them shall be thorns in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein you dwell. Moreover, it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them, [Numbers 33:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 33.55)."

Joshua also, at the close of his life, reminded them, that "no man had been able to stand before them;" and then assured them, that "one man of them should be able to chase a thousand, if only they would take heed to themselves to love the Lord their God; but that, if they did in any wise go back, and cleave unto the nations which remained among them, and make marriages with them; then know for a certainty," says he, "that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you, [Joshua 23:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.9-13)."

Accordingly, this prediction was soon verified; and God punished them, as he had said; for, on their "making leagues with the inhabitants of the land," they were induced at last to "forsake the Lord, and worship Baal and Ashteroth;" and "the Lord's anger was kindled against them; and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies; and they were greatly distressed. Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither did he deliver them into the hand of Joshua, [Judges 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.2); [Judges 2:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.12-15); [Judges 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.23)."

Thus in this dispensation there was a mixture of mercy and of judgment; of mercy primarily; of judgment through their own fault.

This view of God's dealings with his people of old affords us a fit occasion to inquire into,

II. His design in a corresponding dispensation towards his people at this day.

The redemption which he has given to us through the blood of his only dear Son might justly lead us to expect, that when once we are truly brought out from the dominion of sin and Satan, our triumphs over them would be complete. But it is not so; for though the yoke with which we were oppressed is loosened, a measure of our bondage still remains; there is yet "the flesh lusting against the spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would do, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)." Yes more, "there is yet a law in our members warring against the law in our minds, and too often bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members! [Romans 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23)." Now why is it, that God allows his people to be yet harassed with the remains of sin? He allows it,

1. For our **deeper humiliation**.

The sins of our unconverted state may well humble us in the dust, and cause us to "go softly," in the remembrance of them, to our dying hour. But the views of our depravity, which we derive from them, are as nothing in comparison with those which we gain from the workings of corruption in our converted state. These are the views which cause us to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me! [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24)." These were the views which constrained Job to exclaim, "Behold, I am vile;" "I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes! [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

And, in proportion as they are revealed to us, they will constrain every living man to "loath himself for his iniquities and abominations! [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31)." Now this is a feeling that well becomes our sinful race; and though the acquisition of it is obtained through much painful experience—yet does it, in the outcome, well repay all that we have suffered in the attainment of it.

2. For our **ultimate advancement**.

A child has all the members of a perfect man; yet are they in a very feeble and imperfect state; and it is by the exercise of his powers that he has those powers strengthened and enlarged.

Just so it is with every child of God. He is born a babe; and, though every gracious principle exists within him, he is so feeble as scarcely to be able to withstand temptation, or to exercise his powers to any great extent. But, through the remains of sin within him he is led to frequent conflicts with it; by exercise, his powers are increased; and by progressive increase, they are perfected. Thus, from "a babe," he grows up to maturer age and stature, and becomes "a young man;" and from "a young man," "a father."

Nor is it in this world only that the believer is benefitted by his conflicts; for in proportion as he grows in the knowledge of the Savior and in a conformity to his image, will be the weight of glory bestowed on him in the realms of bliss. The improvement of the talents committed to him will bring a corresponding recompense, at the time that he shall give up his account to God. If no corruption had remained in his heart "to prove him," he would have had scarcely any opportunity of showing his fidelity, his zeal, his love, his gratitude. But being called "to fight a good fight," and having approved himself "a good soldier of Jesus Christ," he shall receive, together with the approbation of his Lord, a brighter crown, and a more glorious inheritance, than could have been awarded to him at the period of his first conversion.

3. For his own **eternal glory**.

Doubtless the first exercise of mercy towards a repenting sinner brings much glory to God; and if at the first moment of his conversion every saint were translated to glory, he would have abundant reason to adore and magnify the grace to which he was so greatly indebted. But of the patience, the forbearance, the long-suffering, the compassion, and the faithfulness of God—he would have a very indistinct and inadequate conception. It is by his inward trials and conflicts that he acquires the fuller discovery of these perfections, and is prepared to give God the glory of them in the eternal world. The shouts of one who is but a babe in Christ will, on his introduction to the divine presence, no doubt be ardent; but what will be the acclamations of a soul that has passed through all the eventful scenes of arduous and long-protracted warfare! Of what wonders will he have to speak! or rather, how may we conceive of him as prostrating himself in silent adoration through his overwhelming sense of the divine goodness, while the less-instructed and less-indebted novice rends the air with acclamations and hosannahs! Yes truly; if the angels stand round about the saints, as not having so near an access to God as they, so we may conceive of the less-privileged saints as standing round about the elders, in whom "God will be more admired," and by whom he will be more "glorified, [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10) with [Revelation 7:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9-12)."

We must not however dismiss this subject without adding:

1. A few words of **caution**.

It is, as we have said, the fate of man in this world still to carry about with him a corrupt nature, which proves a source of much trouble and distress; nor can any man hope to get rid of it, until he shall be liberated by death itself. Nevertheless, it is our own fault that the corruptions which remain within us are not more weakened and subdued. Let anyone read the account given of the different tribes, in the first chapter of the book of Judges, and say whether he does not impute blame to the Israelites themselves, for allowing the nations, whom they were ordered to extirpate, to retain so formidable a power in the midst of them, [Judges 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.21); [Judges 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.27); [Judges 1:29-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.29-35). Had they persevered with the same zeal and diligence as they exercised on their first entrance into Canaan, and pursued with unrelenting energy those whom they had been commanded to destroy, their occupation of the land had been far more peaceful and entire.

Just so, if we, from our first conversion to God, had maintained with unremitting zeal our warfare with sin and Satan, as it became us to do, we should have had all the corruptions of our nature in more complete subjection, and should have enjoyed a far greater measure of tranquility in our own souls. Let not anyone, then, delude himself with the thought that the strength of his corruptions is a subject rather of pity than of blame; but let all know, that they are called to maintain a warfare; that armor, even "the whole armor of God," is provided for them, in order that they may prosecute it with success; and that, if only they will "behave like men," the Captain of their salvation has assured to them a complete victory. Gird on your armor then, my brethren; and, if your enemy has gained any advantage over you, return to the charge; and never cease to fight until Satan, and all his hosts, are "bruised under your feet!"

2. A few words of **encouragement**.

The doom of your enemies is sealed, [Deuteronomy 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.22-23); and, if you "go forth in the strength of your Lord," "you shall be more than conquerors through him who loves you! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)." Let it not be grievous to you that such a necessity is imposed upon you. Did your Savior himself enter the lists, and fight against all the powers of darkness until he had triumphed over them and despoiled them all; and will not you, at his command, go forth, to follow up, and complete, his victory, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15) with [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11).

Fear not on account of the strength or number of your enemies; for "they shall be bread for you;" and your every victory over them shall nourish and strengthen your own souls.

Let all animate one another to the contest. See the happy effect of this among God's people of old. We are told, "Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with you into your lot. So Simeon went with him. And Judah went up; and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, [Judges 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.3-4)."

True it is, indeed, that we cannot aid each other precisely in the same way that they did; but we may encourage one another, and strengthen one another, and by our example animate one another to the combat; and may thus contribute, each of us, to the success of those around us. And it is but a little time that we have to fight; for soon we shall come to that better land, where "there shall no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts." Even in this world we are taught that such a period shall arrive [Zechariah 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.21); but, if not permitted to behold it here, we shall assuredly behold it in the world above, where "former things shall have passed away, and sin and sorrow shall be found no more! [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4)." "Therefore comfort one another with these words!"

#96

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

**[Exodus 24:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.6-8)**

"Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Of such terrible majesty is God, that none could behold his face and live. Even in his most condescending fellowship with men, he has made them to feel, that he is "a God greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all those who are round about him." When he descended on Mount Sinai, to proclaim his law, all the people of Israel entreated that he would not speak to them any more, except through the intervention of a Mediator. He was graciously pleased to make further communications to his people, and to enter into a covenant with them; but here a select number only were permitted to approach him, and of them none but Moses was allowed to "come near unto him."

The covenant which he made with them, is the subject now before us; and we shall consider it in a two-fold view:

I. As made with Israel.

An altar being built, together with twelve pillars, the one to represent Jehovah, and the other the twelve tribes of Israel.

1. The covenant was **made**.

God, as the author of that covenant, declared by Moses the terms on which he would acknowledge Israel as his peculiar people. Moses had written In a book the laws which God had made known to him—the moral, the ceremonial, the judicial; and all these he read in the audience of the people. To these, in the name of God, he required a cheerful and uniform obedience; and, upon their obedience to these, God promised on his part to favor them with his continued protection, and with the ultimate and peaceful enjoyment of the promised land. Thus was care taken that they should know to what they were to subscribe, and that their future welfare depended on their fidelity to their own engagements.

The people on their part gave their consent to the terms prescribed; and this they did in the most solemn manner. In declaring their acceptance of the covenant they were unanimous, cordial, unreserved. There was not one dissenting voice. They had repeatedly before engaged to do whatever the Lord should enjoin, [Exodus 19:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.8); [Exodus 24:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.3); but here they do it with additional force and emphasis, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Nor do they make the least exception to any one thing as burdensome or oppressive. In the most unqualified manner they bind themselves to a perfect and perpetual obedience, We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

2. The covenant was **ratified**.

From the very time that God first set apart Abraham to be the progenitor of his peculiar people to the time when that people were carried captive to Babylon, it seems to have been customary to confirm covenants by sacrifices; which, when slain, were divided into parts placed opposite to each other; and then the parties covenanting passed between those parts, and thereby pledged themselves to a faithful observance of the covenant. In Abraham's time, [Genesis 15:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.9-10); [Genesis 15:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.17); in David's time, [Psalm 50:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.5); in Jeremiah's time, [Jeremiah 34:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 34.18-20). A similar custom obtained also among the Greeks.

But in this instance solemnities were used, which showed that the sacrifices were essential to the covenant itself. God could not enter into covenant with sinners until an atonement had been offered for their sins. And now that this atonement was offered, one half of the blood of the sacrifices was poured upon the altar, to evince that God was reconciled to them; and the remainder was sprinkled upon the book and upon the people, in order to seal upon their hearts and consciences his pardoning love, and to remind them that all their hope in that covenant depended on the blood of atonement with which it was sprinkled.

After having duly considered this covenant as made with Israel, it will be proper to view it,

II. As typifying that covenant under which we live.

That it was a type of the Christian covenant we are sure, because Paul quotes the very words of our text, to prove that the death of Christ was necessary to give efficacy to his mediation, and to secure to us the blessings of his covenant, [Hebrews 9:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.17-19). He mentions also some additional circumstances not related in the history; but of them we forbear to speak, that our attention may be confined to the point immediately before us. The connection between the two is that which we assert, and which we wish to illustrate. Let us then return to the covenant made with Israel, and notice more particularly,

1. The **nature** of the covenant made with Israel.

The covenant made with Israel was a mixed covenant:

partly legal, for it contained the law of the ten commandments delivered on Mount Sinai;

partly evangelical, for it comprehended many ceremonial institutions whereby the people were to obtain remission of their sins;

and partly national, because it comprised many civil restrictions which were peculiar to that people.

But the covenant under which WE are, is purely evangelical, having not the smallest mixture of anything else with it. Our covenant does not prescribe laws, by obedience to which we are to obtain mercy; but offers mercy freely as the gift of God through Christ, and promises grace, whereby we shall be enabled to fulfill the will of God. Sanctification is not required of us as a ground for our justification, but is promised to us as a fruit and evidence of our justification. In this New Covenant we are not to obey in order that God may give, but to obey because he has given, and will give. We are not first to give to God that he may afterwards give to us; but he gives all, and we receive all.

2. The **ratification** of the covenant made with Israel.

The blood of sprinkling used by Moses was a mere shadow; it had of itself no value whatever; it could neither satisfy the justice of God, nor bring peace into the consciences of men. But the blood with which our covenant is ratified is called "the blood of GOD, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)," because it was the blood of Him who was God as well as man. That blood has indeed an efficacy that transcends all conception. It has reconciled God to a guilty world; and, when sprinkled on the hearts of men by faith, it fills them with "a peace which passes all understanding." And as Moses, in the quality of God's high-priest, sprinkled the blood both upon the altar and the people, so does our "great High-Priest," the Lord Jesus, now sprinkle his blood for us before the throne of God, and sprinkle it also on our hearts, whenever we go to him for that purpose.

The New Covenant too itself is continually exhibited to us as sprinkled with his blood; so that we may be certain that God will fulfill it to us in all its parts. If only we accept it, and rely upon it, all its blessings shall be ours, both in time and in eternity.

3. The **acceptance** of the covenant made with Israel.

There was much in the people's acceptance of that covenant worthy of our imitation; but there was also much which it befits us carefully to avoid:

In the first place, guard against their ignorance. They were evidently not acquainted with the requisitions of the covenant to which they subscribed. They heard its contents read to them indeed; but they did not enter into their full meaning, neither had they duly considered them.

Let not this be the case with us, lest we "begin to build without counting the cost." Let us consider that it requires us to receive everything as people wholly destitute, and to receive it in every part without the smallest partiality or reserve. Let us remember, that though it does not require holiness as a meritorious condition of our acceptance, it promises holiness as one of its chief blessings, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27); and that, if we do not desire, and strive, to be "asholy as God is holy," and "as perfect as God is perfect," all our professed hope in the covenant is vain and delusive. We can no more be saved by the covenant without holiness, than we can without faith. Let this be known, and weighed, yes and be wrought into the soul as a fixed principle, before we presume to think that we have any interest in Christ, or in the covenant which he has sealed with his blood.

In the next place, guard against their self-righteousness. They imagined that they could so fulfill their obligations as to earn and merit all the blessings of the covenant.

Let not us make so fatal a mistake. Let us rather acknowledge, that "if we had done all that is commanded us, we would be only unprofitable servants." But who will say that he has done all that is commanded him, or indeed any one thing, in which God could not discern some imperfection and defect? If this is so, then do we need mercy and forgiveness even for our best actions; and consequently can never merit by them the salvation of God. Let this then be also engrafted in our minds, that we may be accepted with the publican, and not be rejected with the Pharisee.

Lastly, let us guard against their self-dependence. They never doubted but that they were able to do all that was commanded them. They thought it was as easy to perform as to promise. But in a very few days they provoked God to jealousy with their golden calf; so little did they remember the precepts that had been given to them, or the vows that were upon them.

Let it not be so with us. Let us bear in mind, "we have not of ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought;" and that "without Christ we can do nothing." If we embrace the covenant as they embraced it, we shall fail as they failed.

We cannot better CONCLUDE this subject than by addressing you as Moses addressed the Israelites, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you;" or, as Paul quotes the words, "the covenant which God has enjoined unto you!"

1. Behold the covenant itself.

It is "ordered in all things and sure;" there is not a need which a human being can feel, for which ample provision is not made in it. And it is free for every creature under Heaven. Whatever you may have been in times past, you may at this moment partake of all the blessings of this covenant, if only you are willing to receive them freely, and without reserve.

On the other hand, if you disregard this covenant, and "count the blood of it an unholy thing," "there remains no other sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume you!" God has shut you up to this, and enjoined it unto you by an irreversible decree. Receive it therefore, and live; reject it, and perish!

2. Behold the blood of the covenant.

What instruction does that blood convey! Did the Israelites see their bleeding sacrifices, and not discern the desert of sin? How much more then must we discern it in the precious blood of our incarnate God! And surely we may also see in it the transcendent love of Christ, who submitted to "make his soul an offering for sin," that, the covenant being sealed with his blood, we might be partakers of its richest blessings.

What comfort too does it convey to the soul! Look on that blood, you doubting Christian, and then say whether God will not fulfill all the promises that he has ever made; say whether, in such a mode of ratifying his covenant he has not provided "strong consolation for all who flee to the refuge set before them" in the Gospel.

Finally, What a stimulus does it give to all holy and heavenly affections! Shall not that question be continually upon your mind, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits unto me?" Look on that blood, and grudge God your services, if you can. Think much of any duties you can perform, or of any sufferings you can endure for him, if you can. Only keep your eye fixed upon that blood, and you shall be irresistibly constrained to exult and glory in God, and to consecrate unto him all the faculties and powers of your souls.

#97

A SIGHT OF GOD IS A FEAST TO THE SOUL

**[Exodus 24:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.11)**

[KJV translation] "And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink."

[NLT translation] "And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, he did not destroy them. In fact, they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in his presence!"

God is everywhere present, but no where visible, unless he is pleased to draw aside the veil—and reveal himself to us. It is in Heaven alone that his unveiled glory is continually seen. There have however in former times, been many occasions whereon he has discovered himself to men, sometimes in human form, sometimes in angelic form, and sometimes in a bright appearance, in which no similitude could be traced, and of which no representation can be made. The manifestation of which the text speaks, seems to have been of the last kind. It was given to a great many people at once; and while they beheld his presence, they feasted before him.

In discoursing upon this interesting event, we shall notice,

I. Their vision.

The circumstances of the vision are particular, and deserve an attentive consideration.

The **people** to whom the vision was given were Moses, and Aaron with his two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the "elders of Israel," who are also called "nobles." Who these nobles were, we cannot absolutely determine; but it is most probable that they were people of consequence in the different tribes, who were selected to represent the nation at large; and, if six were taken out of each tribe, they might in round numbers be called seventy, though strictly speaking they would amount to seventy-two.

The **time** at which they were thus favored, was after they had consented to the covenant which God had made with them. Subsequent to the publication of the moral law from Mount Sinai, God ordained a variety of statutes, which were peculiar to Israel as a nation; and at the same time made with them a national covenant, partaking of a covenant of works, and partly of a covenant of grace. In this, they undertook to serve God; and God undertook to protect and bless them. This covenant had been confirmed by a sacrifice, in which the different parties had met, as it were, and given their consent to it. God was represented by the altar; and the twelve tribes were represented by the twelve pillars which Moses had erected near the altar, as well as by the seventy elders, who had been chosen out from among them. The blood of the sacrifice had been sprinkled on them all—on the altar, the pillars, and the people. The book of the covenant also had been sprinkled with it, [Hebrews 9:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.18-23), to show that, though God did not relax the demands of his law, he would not be extreme to mark the unallowed violations of it. After this covenant had been thus made and ratified, God called Moses and the others to come up higher on the mountain; and revealed his glory to them.

The **manner** also in which God revealed himself, is worthy of notice. There had been a manifestation of the Deity prior to this; but O! how different from it! That display which God made of himself at the giving of the law was in blackness and darkness, and tempest; and attended with such tremendous thunderings and lightenings, that all the people, yes, and Moses himself, exceedingly trembled and quaked.

But, in this vision all was light and serene, and calculated to inspire the beholders with joy and confidence. The appearance of the Deity was beyond the brightness of the meridian sun; and underneath it "the pavement, as it were, upon which he stood, was like the sapphire" stone, or like the azure sky, bespangled with stars!

Thus the vision altogether was suited to a new-covenant state, wherein the people were introduced into communion with their God, and honored with these astonishing tokens of his love and favor.

Such a vision is now given to us under the Gospel.

We shall not indeed behold God precisely as they did; for such visions have long since been discontinued. But there is a spiritual view of the Deity, which we may, and must, partake of; and which. we are authorized to say, was typified by the vision before us. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the preceding context is expressly quoted, and that too with some additional circumstances not related by Moses, [Hebrews 9:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.18-23); and we are told that the event there referred to, was "a pattern of the heavenly things," which we enjoy under the Gospel. The view which we have of the Deity, prior to our embracing the new covenant, inspires us with nothing but terror; but when we have accepted the covenant of grace, which was confirmed by the sacrifice of Christ, and have sprinkled on our consciences the blood of that sacrifice, then we shall be admitted to a more clear, but less dreadful, new of God. is justice will appear more dreadful in the sacrifice which it demanded, than even in the curses it denounced. It will be seen tempered with mercy; and ready to harmonize with mercy in every act of love. This vision we are to enjoy, not through the medium of representatives, but every one of us for himself. It is of Christians in general, and not of some distinguished favorites only, that the Apostle says, "God has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)." Here, by the way, we see where we are to have this vision; it is to be "in our hearts;" it is an object of contemplation to the mind; and not of sight to our bodily organs.

Together with their vision, it will be proper to notice also,

II. Their feast.

It was generally supposed that none could see God and live, [Genesis 32:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.30); but here the seventy elders, as well as Moses and Aaron, beheld him, and yet "he laid not his hand on any one of them" to hurt them. This is the meaning of the words preceding the text. On the contrary,

They feasted on their sacrifice in the divine presence.

They had sacrificed burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings. Of the latter, the offerers were allowed to eat in token of their acceptance with God. Indeed it had long before been customary for parties covenanting with each other, to feast together at the ratification of their covenant, [Genesis 31:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 31.54). And here, if we may so speak, the different parties feasted together; God's part of the sacrifices had been consumed upon his altar; and the remainder was eaten by the offerers. Doubtless it must have been a precious feast to those, who had so lately trembled at the thunders of Mount Sinai. Their souls must have been yet more refreshed with a sense of the divine favor, than their bodies by the provision thus allotted for their support.

But their feast was no less **typical**than their vision.

Christ, who is our sacrifice, calls all his people to "eat his flesh, and to drink his blood." But we must not imagine that this refers to corporeal food; our Lord speaks of spiritual food, of which our souls are to partake by the exercise of faith on him. Yes, his atonement is indeed a feast to the soul; in this sense it may be truly said, "His flesh is food indeed; and his blood is drink indeed! [John 6:53-56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53-56)." On this we are to feed in the immediate presence of our God. However "far off we are, we may draw near by the blood of Jesus, [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13)." Yes, "we may have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus [Hebrews 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19);" we may see God reconciled to us in him; and may rejoice in him as our God and portion forever. The wonders of his love are to be the continual banquet of our souls. His "exceeding great and precious promises" are "a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined! [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6)." Of these we are to "eat freely, and abundantly! [Song of Solomon 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.1)." We are to "sit under his shadow; and his fruit will be sweet unto our taste! [Song of Solomon 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.3)." Yes, "we shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, [Psalm 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.5);" enjoying a "peace that surpasses all understanding," and being "filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

Address,

1. Those who are afar off from God.

The prohibition given to the Israelites, is cancelled with respect to you. The veil of the temple was rent in twain at the death of Christ, in token that a new and living way was opened to all, and that all who believed, were constituted "a royal priesthood, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." Will you then decline the invitation that is sent to you? We are commissioned to go forth into the highways and hedges to call you to the feast, which a God of infinite love has prepared for you. O come, and partake of it.

But remember that, in order to enjoy it, you must first accept the new covenant, and submit to be saved by the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Sprinkle yourself with the blood of Christ, your all-atoning sacrifice for sin; and then you may have fellowship both with the Father and the Son, and feast before God forever on the provisions of redeeming love.

2. Those who are inclined to rest in external privileges.

Such was the case with the greater part of those to whom the text refers. One would have supposed that they could never have forgotten their obligations to God, or have ceased to serve him; but, alas! in a very little time, Nadab and Abihu were struck dead for their impiety; and of the seventy elders, not one, as far as we know, held fast his integrity. They were ready, as indeed were all the people also, to profess their allegiance to the Deity, "All that the Lord has said, will we do, and be obedient;" but they soon forgot their pious resolutions, and revolted from their duty.

Beware, brethren, lest it be so with you. It will be to very little purpose to say at last, "Lord, Lord, have we not eaten and drunk in your presence? [Luke 13:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.26)." If you have "not been steadfast in his covenant," your outward professions, or past experiences, will avail little. Maintain therefore continually your dependence upon Christ; and, in his strength, exert yourselves to fulfill his holy will.

3. Those who are coming to the table of their Lord.

We ask not whether you have a deep experience of divine truth, but whether you have fled to Christ from the terrors of the law? Have you seen yourselves condemned by the covenant of works; and are you seeking mercy through the covenant of grace? Are you really sprinkling yourselves with the blood of Christ, your great sacrifice, and coming to God through him alone? If so, behold, there is a table spread, and you are called to come and feast upon your sacrifice in the presence of your God.

Come there in faith; and your God will make his glory to pass before your eyes. Yes, Christ will "reveal himself to you in the breaking of bread, [Luke 24:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.31); [Luke 24:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.35)," "and fill you with "his loving-kindness, which is better than life itself." Thus shall you be strengthened for all future services, until at last you shall be called to "eat and drink at Christ's table in the kingdom of your Father! [Luke 22:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.30)."

#98

THE COMMAND TO BUILD THE TABERNACLE

**[Exodus 25:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.8-9)**

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."

The more minutely we consider the Mosaic economy, the more we find it fraught with the richest instruction; and we are persuaded, that, if the lovers of literature had any idea what inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and knowledge are contained in it, they would not be so regardless of it, as they too generally are. We cannot read a single chapter without seeing ample ground for this remark. To go no further than the text; wherein we have the command of God to build a tabernacle for him, and to fit it up in a peculiar manner. Even upon the face of this command there is something that invites inquiry; but, when we have explored its hidden sense, we shall discover in it a deep mystery, and derive from it much important information.

Let us consider then the directions,

I. As given to **the Jews**.

In order to obtain a clear and just view of the subject, it will be proper to notice,

1. The **general direction**.

God delights in the exercise of mercy. Mercy prompted him to separate for himself a peculiar people in the midst of a ruined world. Mercy led him to reveal himself to them in such a way as to impress them with a solemn sense of his majesty; and afterwards to give an order respecting the making of a sanctuary for him, where they might obtain more easy and familiar access to him, and he might the more abundantly display unto them the riches of his grace. It was not for his own accommodation that he gave the order, (for "the Heaven of heavens cannot contain him,") but for their benefit; that, by seeing him continually in the midst of them, they might know that he was in a peculiar manner their God. It was an honor to them that he would accept their offerings, and that he would condescend to dwell in a habitation, such as his poor and sinful creatures could provide for him.

2. The **particular limitation** of it.

Such things only as he appointed were to be used either in the framing, or the furnishing, of the tabernacle; and, that everything might be formed agreeably to his mind, he not only gave to Moses a general description of what was to be done, but showed him a model of every individual thing that was to be made; and enjoined him to make it exactly according to the pattern shown to him in the mount. This order was given to Moses repeatedly, and with very peculiar force and emphasis; and his strict adherence to it in every particular is, in the last chapter of this book, mentioned no less than eight times, once after every separate piece of furniture that was made, [Exodus 40:16-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 40.16-33).

In the New Testament too his compliance with the command is repeatedly noticed, and the very order itself expressly quoted, [Acts 7:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.44); [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5).

Now what was the reason of this limitation? Why must only such and such things be made; and they of such precise materials and shape? The reason was, The whole was intended to typify things under the Gospel dispensation; and as none but God could know all the things which were to be prefigured, so none but he could know infallibly how to designate them to the best effect. Had Moses been left to contrive anything out of his own mind, there might have lacked a correspondence between the type and the antitype; but when a model of everything was shown him by God himself, the whole must of necessity accord with the mind and purpose of him for whom they were made.

We forbear to particularize the correspondence between the shadows and the substance, because that cannot be profitably done without entering more fully into the subject than our time at present will admit of; but that the correspondence was designed by God, and actually exists, and was the end for which such precise orders were given, is beyond all doubt.

[Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5), "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in Heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

[Hebrews 9:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.8-10), "The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order."

But the directions in our text had not merely a typical reference; for it may properly be considered,

II. As applicable to **us**.

The tabernacle typified, not only the Lord Jesus, "in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," but us also.

"The Church of God is his house, [1 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.15)," "the habitation of God through the Spirit, [Ephesians 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.21-22)." Yes, every believer is himself "the temple of the living God; as God has said; I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people, [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16)." Moreover, God himself, commending the fidelity of Moses in constructing everything according to his order, draws for us the parallel between the tabernacle erected by him—and that which Christ possesses in our hearts, "Moses truly was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, [Hebrews 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.5-6)." The truth is, that "God dwells not in temples made with hands." Even while his tabernacle and temple were yet standing, God testified respecting them, that the temple which alone he regarded, was a broken and contrite spirit! [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15); [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1-2) with [Acts 7:47-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.47-50).

To us therefore may the direction fitly be addressed.

My brethren, make a sanctuary for the Lord, that he may dwell among you; let every one willingly present unto him his heart, and entreat him to fill it with his presence. Let his habitation too be furnished with everything suited to the worship which you have to offer. You are not called to carnal ordinances, and therefore have no need of such things as were needed under the Jewish dispensation. It is with the gifts and graces of the Spirit that you are to serve and honor God.

Abound therefore in them. Grudge no expense whereby you may obtain them. Let them all be formed according to the model shown you in the mount. In Christ Jesus you have a perfect pattern of them all. "Look to it," that your graces accord with his. Let none be lacking, none be different. Let the command of God be the reason of all that you present unto him, the example of Christ the pattern, and the glory of God the end. Whatever you have brought with you out of Egypt (out of your unconverted state) honor God with it; let it be gold and silver, or talents of any kind, consecrate them to the Lord; make use of them for the building of his tabernacle, and the exalting of his glory in the world.

More especially, remember to be conformed to the pattern in this respect; his tabernacle was most glorious within; on the outside were rams' skins, and badgers' skins; but within, all was of gold and linen exquisitely wrought. O that our interior might be such, as most to glorify our God! We are far from saying that the exterior should be neglected; but it should be modest and unassuming; and those who from their connection with us can penetrate within the veil, should see that our hidden virtues are the most eminent, and that God is most honored in those dispositions and habits of ours, which are most concealed from public view.

In vain are you baptized into the name of the Sacred Trinity, if you do not "observe and do all things Christ has commanded you;" nor indeed can you in any other way hope for the accomplishment of that promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world! [Matthew 28:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19-20)."

Let me therefore entreat you to seek for "grace" whereby you may serve God acceptably; and to make the blessed resolution of the Psalmist, that "you will give neither sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eye-lids, until you have found a place (in your own hearts) for the Lord—a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob! [Psalm 132:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.2-5)."

#99

AARON'S BREAST-PLATE

**[Exodus 28:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.29-30)**

"So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the LORD continually. And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually."

Little do men in general imagine what treasures of knowledge are contained in the Old Testament. There is little revealed concerning Christ in the New Testament, which was not prefigured in the Mosaic ritual. As everything relating to his life and death may be clearly seen in the prophets, so everything relating to his office and character may be learned from the ceremonial law. Even the ornaments of the high-priest were intended to shadow forth some of the most important offices which our blessed Lord sustains. That particular ornament which we propose to notice at present, is the breastplate of judgment; respecting which we shall point out,

I. Its primary use.

It will be proper, before we speak of its use, to show what the breastplate was.

The priest wore an ephod, (a kind of short coat without sleeves,) made of fine linen, richly embroidered. The breastplate was a piece of fine linen, which, when doubled, was a span square. Upon that were placed twelve precious stones, each of them having the name of one of the tribes (according to their seniority) engraved upon it. This was worn upon the bosom, over the ephod; and the high-priest was to wear it whenever he went into the presence of God; and it was called "the breastplate of judgment," because God, by means of it, communicated his mind and judgment to him respecting the children of Israel.

Within this breastplate were placed the Urim and the Thummim. What these were, we are not informed. Many have thought, that they were not distinct from the stones; and that the terms Urim and Thummim merely designated the use to which those stones were applied. But the language of the text, especially when confirmed by [Leviticus 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 8.8), leaves no doubt, but that the Urim and Thummim were distinct from the breastplate, and were "put into" it after it was made. It is no objection to say, that the one is sometimes mentioned without the other, or, that we know not who made the Urim and Thummim, or what they were. It is sufficient for us to know, that they were added to the breastplate, and that they were appointed for a very important purpose.

The particular use of the breastplate shall now be distinctly declared.

The breastplate thus formed, was to be worn by the high-priest, whenever he performed the duties of his office. It was suspended from his shoulders by two golden chains, fixed to two onyx-stones; on which, as well as on the twelve stones, were engraved all the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, six on each stone; and both the one and the other were "for a memorial before the Lord continually." We must understand this as spoken after the manner of men. We are not to suppose that God needs to be reminded of his people; but the sight of their names, whenever the high-priest came into his presence, was (so to speak) to remind him that he had a people who were to be the objects of his peculiar care.

The Urim and Thummim were for a different purpose. They were, in some way or other, to communicate answers to the high-priest, whenever he consulted God upon any matter relating to the civil or religious concerns of the nation. To inquire how the answers were given, whether by a secret suggestion to the mind of the high-priest, or by an audible voice, or in any other way, is vain; we should be content to be ignorant about those things whereon God has not seen fit to inform us. That the Urim and the Thummim were consulted, and not only by the high-priest, but by others without him; and that specific answers were obtained from God, is certain. Joshua, [Numbers 27:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 27.21), and those who succeeded him in the government of Israel, [Judges 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.1), sought instruction from God through the medium of these. The eleven tribes had the mind of God repeatedly made known to them in the same way, when they desired to be informed, whether they were to wage war against the offending tribe of Benjamin, [Judges 20:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.18); [Judges 20:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.23); [Judges 20:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.27-28). David in various straits took counsel of God in this way, and had such information conveyed to him as was impossible for any but the omniscient God to impart, [1 Samuel 23:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.9-12); [1 Samuel 30:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.7); 1 Samuel 8. Saul asked counsel in the same way; but could not obtain an answer, because he had provoked God to cast him off, [1 Samuel 28:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 28.6). At the time of the Babylonian captivity, the Urim and the Thummim were lost, and were never afterwards recovered, [Ezra 2:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 2.63); [Nehemiah 7:65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 7.65); until Christ, whom they typified, came to instruct us in all things that can at all conduce to our real welfare.

The very names, Urim and Thummim, serve in a great measure to designate their particular use. Their import is, Lights and Perfections; and they were for the express purpose of conveying light to those who consulted them, even such light as would perfectly and infallibly direct their way.

Thus, as the breastplate of judgment consisted of two different parts, so it was intended for two different uses:

the stones in it were for a memorial before God;

the Urim and Thummim that were in it, were for the obtaining of instruction from God.

But we shall have a very inadequate notion of the breastplate, unless we understand,

II. Its typical intent.

Few are so ignorant as to need to be informed, that Christ is our great High-Priest. Now the breastplate, of which we have been speaking, was designed to represent,

1. What Christ is doing **for** us.

Christ, in the execution of his priestly office, was to "enter into the holy place," there "to appear in the presence of God for us." Accordingly, after his resurrection, he ascended to Heaven, that he might there complete the work he had begun on earth. On his heart are engraved the names of all his people; on his shoulders he also bears them all; not one of them is forgotten by him; he presents them all before his Father, and is "their memorial before God continually."

God cannot even look upon his Son without being reminded, that there is in this lower world a people who need his incessant care. He sees at one view all their states, and all their circumstances. He sees how dear they are to his Son, who bears them ever on his heart; who sympathizes with them in their afflictions, and desires to have them extricated from all their difficulties. Were he disposed to be unmindful of them, he could not cast them out of his thoughts, or be deaf to the intercessions of our great High-Priest.

Here then is the security of all the children of God, "they have a great High-Priest, who is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God," who has undertaken their cause, and is their Advocate with the Father, and "who is therefore able to save them to the uttermost, because he ever lives to make intercession for them!"

2. What Christ will do **in** us.

In Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." There is no case wherein we may not consult him; nor any, wherein he will not grant to direct our steps. How he will answer us, we will not presume to say; he has ten thousand ways of making known his will, and of over-ruling our purposes, without at all infringing the liberty of our will, or altering the general dispensations of his providence. It is sufficient for us to know, that "the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way;" and that "whatever we ask of him he will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

From the consideration of his being our great and compassionate High-Priest, we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need! [Hebrews 4:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.14-16); and we are sure, that, if we come unto God through him, "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." We need not say, This is so great a matter, that it would be presumptuous in me to ask it; nor, This is so small, that it would be unworthy of his attention; for, whether it be great or small, he would spread it before his heavenly Father, and obtain for us an answer of peace; his light should dispel our darkness, and his perfections dissipate our fears; the weakest should not be left to faint, [Isaiah 40:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.29-31), nor the most ignorant to err, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8).

In this subject we may find abundant matter,

1. For reproof.

When we come into difficult circumstances, we are too apt to imagine, like the Church of old, that "God has forsaken and forgotten us." But if God reproved them by declaring, that "a nursing mother could sooner forget her nursing child than he could forget them, since they were engraved on the palms of his hands, [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16)," how much more are we reproved by this typical representation of Christ, on whose shoulders we are supported, and on whose heart we are engraved! O let such unbelieving fears be put away! Let us "know in whom we have believed, that He is able to keep that which we have committed to him." Let us remember, that, while he retains his priestly office, and his Father retains his regard for him, "he will not allow one of his people to perish!"

2. For encouragement.

Our trials may be numerous, and our difficulties urgent; but our High-Priest is ever at hand, to inquire of God for us. Nor does he need to be informed by us, what to ask; for he "knows what is in man," and sees at the same time all the devices of our enemy. If only we lift up our hearts to him, his effectual aid shall be instantly obtained; for he is with us, to know our desires; and with God, to interest him in our favor. Let us then be encouraged to cast our care on him; and let us make him, what God has intended he should be to us, "our wisdom, and righteousness, our sanctification, and redemption! [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)."

#100

AARON'S MITRE

**[Exodus 28:36-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.36-38)**

"Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD. Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the LORD."

If it were once ascertained that God had imposed a number of ordinances upon his people, we should be ready to conclude that his institutions were not mere arbitrary and insignificant laws, but that they had some spiritual meaning, worthy of their divine Author. But when we are informed by God himself, that many things, apparently most indifferent, were intended to shadow forth the great mystery of redemption, we are persuaded that not even the minutest ordinance among them was without some appropriate and important signification. But though we believe this, we do not presume to assign the meaning of each, any further than we are warranted by the Scriptures themselves. Instead of wandering into the regions of conjecture, we judge it more for general edification to confine ourselves to matters which are obvious and acknowledged.

The whole dress of the high-priest was unquestionably typical; and designated either the office of our great High-Priest, or his qualifications for the discharge of it. That part to which we would now direct your attention, is his mitre. This, as the text informs us, was a covering for his head (somewhat like the turbans worn in the East at this day); it was made of fine linen, and had, in the front of it, a gold plate, with this inscription, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. It was worn by him whenever he officiated in the temple. Through this the high-priest was considered as holy, and was the appointed means of expiating the defects that were in the services of the people, and of procuring acceptance for their persons. Now, while the end for which it was worn manifests, beyond a doubt, that the appointment was typical, it enables us to declare with certainty the true intention of the type.

This institution then was intended to foreshow,

I. The holiness of our great High-Priest.

Christ was in truth "the holy one of Israel" It was necessary that he should be spotless himself; for had he not been so, he could not have made atonement for us; yes, he would have needed an atonement for himself, [Hebrews 7:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.26-27). [1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.5). The utmost care was taken respecting the typical offerings, to ascertain that they were without blemish; and it seems to have been particularly ordained by God that the innocence of Jesus should be established by every possible proof, (and by the repeated testimony even of the judge that condemned him,) in order that his fitness, as our sin-offering, might appear. Thus was the type accomplished in him; and a sure foundation was laid for all the hopes that are built upon him.

II. The need we have of a saving interest in it.

The high-priest, so dressed, was to "bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the people should hallow." Their best services were imperfect, in manner at least, if not in the matter of them also; and they were to seek acceptance through the holiness of their high-priest alone.

Thus it is with us also. All that we do is imperfect. The best service we ever performed was mixed with sin, and needed an atonement to be made for it. Without an atonement, it could never have been regarded by a holy God. This was strongly marked in the ordinance before us, and ought to be remembered by us as a ground for the deepest humiliation.

III. Its efficacy in our behalf.

The people's services were, through this typical holiness of their high-priest, accepted by God, notwithstanding the imperfection of them; nor shall ours be despised, if we trust in the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus. This was beautifully represented under the Mosaic dispensation by the acceptance of leavened bread, [Leviticus 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.11) with 7:13 and 23:17, and mutilated beasts [Leviticus 22:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 22.21-23), when offered as thank-offerings, and not as offerings for sin; and the same encouraging truth is plainly asserted in the New Testament, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15); [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5). Let us only be savingly interested in "the spotless Lamb of God," and all that we do in his name shall find acceptance before God.

This subject is well calculated,

1. To humble the self-righteous.

What room can there be for trusting in our own righteousness, when the most righteous act we ever performed had an iniquity in it which needed to be borne by our great High priest? Lay aside your proud thoughts, and "seek to be found in Christ, not having your own righteousness, but his."

2. To encourage the desponding.

Be it so; you are a sinner, "but if any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;" and through him you may draw near to God with boldness and confidence! [Ephesians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.12); [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22).

3. To direct and animate the godly.

You are now "priests unto God;" and are to have holiness to the lord written upon your foreheads, [Zechariah 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.20), that it may be visible to God and man. Remember that "God will be sanctified in all who draw near unto him, [Leviticus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.3); [Psalm 93:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 93.5);" and that "as He who has called you is holy, so must you be holy in all you do, [1 Peter 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15-16); 1 Peter 2:9."

#101

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

**[Exodus 30:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.7-10)**

"Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come. Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it. Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on its horns. This annual atonement must be made with the blood of the atoning sin offering for the generations to come. It is most holy to the LORD."

The little acquaintance which Christians in general have with the Mosaic Law, unfits them for the reception of that instruction which the Law is well calculated to convey. Doubtless, to find the precise import of all its ordinances is beyond the power of man. But there is much of it explained in the New Testament; and much may properly be explained from analogy; and the light which it reflects on the truths of Christianity would richly repay any efforts that were made for the discovery of it.

In the altar of incense, in its materials, for instance, or its structure, we are not aware that any mystery of practical importance is contained, except indeed that it was preeminently holy, and therefore required peculiar sanctity in those who should approach it. Its situation too, as immediately before the mercy-seat, and separated from it only by the veil which divided the sanctuary from the holy of holies, marked in a peculiar way, that those who burnt incense upon it were to consider themselves as more than ordinarily near to God, and to have in exercise every disposition that befits them in so high and holy an employment. The use to which it was ordained, is the point to which I would more particularly call your attention. And we may consider it,

I. As a typical institution.

And here are two things particularly to be noticed in relation to it, namely:

1. Its daily use.

Aaron himself in the first instance, and afterwards other priests in their courses, [Luke 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.8-9), was to trim the lamps every morning and evening, and to light any of them that might have gone out. At these seasons, he was to take fire from the altar of burnt-offering, and to put it on a censer, and to burn incense with it upon the altar of incense. This, I say, he was to do every morning and evening; and that was called "a perpetual incense before the Lord."

This, beyond all doubt, was intended to typify the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as our great "High-Priest, is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man, [Hebrews 8:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.1-2)." To him is assigned the office of interceding for his Church and people; and he has ascended up into the more immediate presence of his God for that end; as says the Apostle, "Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us! [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)." There he superintends the lamps of his sanctuary, "walking among the seven golden candlesticks, which are the seven Churches, [Revelation 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.13); [Revelation 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.20); [Revelation 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.1)," and either trimming or furnishing them with supplies of oil, as their various necessities may require. At the same time he offers up to God his intercessions for them, pleading with him in behalf of every individual, and obtaining for them all those blessings which they more particularly stand in need of.

To the Aaronic priests God had said, "There will I meet with you;" and no doubt he did, in numberless instances, as well as in that of Zachariah, [Luke 1:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.11-13), grant to them there more peculiar answers to their prayers. Our Great Intercessor could say, "I know that you hear me always, [John 11:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.42);" nor can we doubt but that myriads of his people are either preserved from falling, or restored after their falls, purely through "his intercession for them, that their faith may not ultimately fail, [Luke 22:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.32)."

2. Its annual expiation.

It was enjoined that "an atonement should be made upon the horns of this altar once a year with the blood of the sin-offering of the atonements." And this, I apprehend, was to show that without the blood of atonement, no intercession could be of any avail. An atonement must be made for sin; and "without it there could be no remission, [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22)." The blood, too, that must be put on this altar must be the blood of bullocks, and not either of goats or lambs; for in the very same offering which was made for sins of ignorance, the blood or bullocks which was shed for a priest, and for the whole congregation, was put upon the horns of the altar of incense; whereas that which was shed for a ruler, or a common person, which was of goats and lambs, was put upon the altar of burnt-offering; by which the sins of priests were marked as of greater enormity than the sins of others; and the altar of incense as of higher sanctity than the altar of burnt-offering. Compare [Leviticus 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.7); [Leviticus 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.18) with [Leviticus 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.22); [Leviticus 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.25); [Leviticus 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.27); [Leviticus 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.30); [Leviticus 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.34).

This is very strongly expressed in the New Testament, there being always a superior efficacy ascribed to the intercession of Christ than even to his death. Thus when, to the question, "Who is he that condemns?" the Apostle answers, "It is Christ that died," he adds, "yes rather, who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us! [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34)."

Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews he lays the greatest stress on the intercession of Christ as being the most effectual for the salvation of his people, "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them! [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)."

And to the same effect, also, in his Epistle to the Romans, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life! [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10)." Whether this was intended to be marked by the atonement being only annual, while the offering of incense was daily, I pretend not to say. I would apprehend not. I should rather think that that part of the appointment signified that Christ would make the expiation but once, while his intercession would be continual; but, at all events, the union of the two is absolutely indissoluble; as John intimates, when he says, "If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the atoning sacrifice for our sins! [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1)."

In fact, his atonement is the very plea which he offers in our behalf. When the high-priest entered within the veil, immediately after burning the incense he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat, [Leviticus 16:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.11-14); intimating thereby, that all his hope of acceptance, whether for himself or others, was founded on the sacrifice which he had offered.

Precisely thus does the Lord Jesus Christ prevail; for it is in consequence of his having offered his soul a "sacrifice for sin," that he is authorized to expect a spiritual seed to be secured to him; and in consequence of his "having borne the sins of many," that he confidently and with effect "makes intercession for the transgressors! [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10); [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12)."

I have observed, that we may yet further consider this ordinance,

II. As an emblematic rite.

In this view it marks,

1. The privilege of Christians.

We have before said, that common priests were ordained to officiate at this altar. And are not we "a royal priesthood? [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." Are not we "made kings and priests unto our God? [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)." Yes; and "the prayers we present to God come up before him as incense; and the lifting up of our hands is as an evening sacrifice, [Psalm 141:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 141.2)."

In this manner are we privileged to draw near to God. We, every one of us, "have, through Christ, access by one Spirit unto the Father, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18);" yes, "we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, [Hebrews 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19)," and to prostrate ourselves at the very footstool of God himself. Did God say to Aaron, "I will meet you there?" So says he to us also, "Draw near to me; and I will draw near to you, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8)." Nor need we go to Jerusalem, or to his tabernacle to find him; for he has said, that "in every place incense should be offered to him, and a pure offering, [Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.11)." And, that we may feel ourselves more at liberty to approach him, his altar under the Christian dispensation is represented as of wood, and not of gold, and as being four times the size of that which was made for his tabernacle, [Ezekiel 41:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 41.22); to denote, I apprehend, the greater simplicity of Gospel worship, and the admission of all nations to the enjoyment of it.

We must indeed pay particular attention to that caution given to Aaron in the text, "You shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt-sacrifice, nor meat-offering; neither shall you pour a drink-offering thereon." The incense was to be that alone which God had appointed; and special care was taken to make no confusion between the offerings belonging to the altar of burnt-offering, which were for an atonement, and that which was proper to the altar of incense, which was for acceptance only.

Thus, when drawing near to God in prayer, we must not bring the fervor of mere carnal spirits, which are so often mistaken for true devotion; but a broken and contrite spirit, which alone sends forth an fragrance that is well pleasing to God, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17).

Nor must we imagine that by our prayers, or by anything else that we can bring to God, we can atone for sin, or contribute in the least degree towards the efficacy of Christ's atonement; these must be kept quite distinct; and while our prayers are offered on the altar of incense, our pleas must be taken solely from the altar of burnt-offering, even from the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, "by whom alone our offerings can ascend to God, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15)," and "through whom alone they can be acceptable in his sight, [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5)."

In this manner we are to approach God, while we go in before him to trim our lamps, and to have them duly supplied with oil. Every morning and evening at the least must the fragrance of our incense ascend up before God; or, as the Apostle says, we must "pray without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17;" and we may be sure that "God will meet with us," and bless us in all that we solicit at his hands, "However wide we open our mouth, he will fill it, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10);" yes, "he will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)."

2. The ground of their acceptance in the use of it.

This is strongly marked in the annual atonement made on this altar. Day and night was the priest to officiate there; yet, after he had presented incense on that altar for a whole year, he must make atonement on the altar with blood.

Just so, however much or devoutly we pray, we must trust, not in our prayers, but in the great Sacrifice that has been offered for us. Yes, our very prayers need that sacrifice; the very best service we ever offered, needed an atonement; nor could it come up with acceptance before God, if it were not washed in the Redeemer's blood, and presented to God by him!

Hear what John says, in the book of Revelation, "Another angel came, (the Angel of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus,) and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar that was before the throne; and the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God, out of the angel's hand, [Revelation 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 8.3-4)." "Were God to call us into judgment for the very best prayer we ever offered, we could not answer him for one of a thousand, [Job 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.3);" no, nor for one during our whole lives; but when cleansed in the Redeemer's blood, both our persons and our services shall be regarded by God as pure, even "without spot or blemish! [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27)."

Of course, it is here supposed that we harbor no willful sin within us; for, "if we regard iniquity in our hearts, God will not hear us [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18);" our very "incense will be an abomination to him, [Isaiah 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.13);" and, in offering it, "we shall be as though we offered swine's blood, or blessed an idol, [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3)." But, if we "draw near to God with a true heart, we may also approach him with full assurance of faith, [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22)."

Let us see here,

1. How highly we are privileged under the Christian dispensation.

The Jews were privileged, and highly too, in comparison with all the nations of the earth, in that they had ordinances of divine appointment, in the due observance of which they might find favor with God.

But how infinitely are we distinguished above the Jews themselves! We have not to seek the intervention of a man, a sinful man, yes, and a dying man, who must soon leave his office to another, and be followed by an endless succession of sinners like himself. We have a High-Priest, who is "Emmanuel, God with us;" "who needed not to offer first for his own sins, and then for the people's sins;" and "who, having an unchangeable priesthood, continues forever," and "is consecrated for evermore [Hebrews 7:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.23-28)." Moreover, we are not like the Jews, to whom all access to God in their own persons was prohibited; and who, if they had presumed to invade the priestly office, would have been made monuments of God's vengeance on the very spot.

No, we may draw near to God, every one of us for himself; even to God's throne may we go, and offer him our sacrifices with a certainty of acceptance. The way prepared for us is "a new and living way;" and while going to him in that way, "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us;" yes, even "before we ask, he will answer; and while we are yet speaking, he will hear, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24)." Reflect on these privileges, brethren, and be thankful for them; and improve them diligently in the way prescribed.

2. What a holy people we should be unto the Lord.

What the priests were in their attendance on the altar, yes, what the Lord Jesus Christ himself is before the throne of God—that should we be, to the utmost of our power. We should be ever delighting ourselves in the exercise of prayer and praise, and dedicating our whole selves to the service of our God. Let our "lamps" be ever kept burning bright before the Lord. Let us obtain "from the sacred olive branches fresh supplies of golden oil through the golden pipes" of his word and ordinances, [Zechariah 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.11-12); and let our whole deportment show, that we correspond with the description given us, "a people near unto the Lord! [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14)."

#102

THE ATONEMENT-MONEY

**[Exodus 30:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.14-16)**

"All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the LORD. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the LORD to atone for your lives. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD, making atonement for your lives."

It is always profitable to mark the accomplishment of the divine promises, that, from discovering the faithfulness of God, we may learn to acknowledge his providence, and depend upon his care. He had promised to Abraham, that "his seed should be as the stars of Heaven for multitude;" and, though their increase for about three hundred years was but small—yet, previous to their departure from Egypt, they had become exceeding numerous; and God appointed that they should be occasionally numbered, and a stated tax be levied on every individual, so that the fulfillment of his word might be made manifest.

In this appointment there were some circumstances peculiarly instructive, especially the equality of the tax, and the application of it to the service of the sanctuary.

Let us notice,

I. The tax levied.

The tax being "a ransom, and an atonement for their souls," had evidently a spiritual import; and from the same being leveled upon all, we observe,

1. That the souls of men are of equal value in the sight of God.

The half-shekel was equal to about fifteen-pence of our money; and this was to be paid by every one that was numbered, without any regard to his station or ability, "The rich were not to pay more, nor the poor less." Now as this was "a ransom and atonement for their souls," it is manifest, that all their souls were of equal value in the sight of God. And who is there that does not feel this?

There are many things in this world the *value* of which is purely imaginary, and depends upon the taste of the possessor; but the worth of the soul is real; the poorest of men has as deep an interest in the welfare of his own soul as the richest; Heaven is as desirable, and Hell as terrible—to the one as to the other; and God has an equal respect for both [Job 34:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.19). Let not anyone despise others, as though their eternal interests were not to be consulted; or imagine that they themselves are overlooked by God, as though he did not will their salvation as much as that of any other person in the universe, [1 Timothy 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.4).

2. That all equally need reconciliation with God.

A ransom and an atonement were required for all; and as all of them needed mercy at God's hands, so do all of us. We are far from saying that all are equally sinful; for there doubtless are different degrees of guilt, and will be corresponding degrees of punishment; but this we say: that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; and consequently all are liable to "that wrath of God, which is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

We know that many conceive so highly of themselves, as to imagine that God would be unjust if he should consign them over to destruction. But such people have never considered what the law of God requires, or what it denounces against those who have violated its commands, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). We willingly concede, that, in the eyes of men, some may be comparatively innocent; but, "before God, every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty."

3. That all must seek reconciliation with God on the same terms.

Here again we remark, that no difference was put between one and another; all were to offer the half-shekel as an atonement for their souls. It is by an atonement too, that we also must seek acceptance with God. None can merit forgiveness at his hands; none can do anything towards meriting it; the sin-atoning blood of Christ is that which alone can satisfy divine justice; and it is his obedience unto death which must constitute the justifying righteousness of all mankind, [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25); [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6). Anything of our own, blended with that, or added to it, will invalidate it altogether. Salvation must be wholly of works, or of grace [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6); and if we cannot earn it by our works, (which no created being can,) then must we accept it altogether as "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23)."

It is evident that so small a sum as half a shekel could not purchase the divine favor; it was a mere acknowledgment that they needed an atonement, and were willing to accept the favor of God on any terms that he should propose. Just so, our humiliation and faith can purchase nothing; but only manifest our cordial acquiescence in the way of salvation provided for us.

It will be yet further instructive to consider,

II. The use and application of the tax.

The tax was intended,

1. To obtain acceptance for the offerers.

The very terms "ransom," and "atonement," clearly show, that the offerers were considered as in a state of guilt and bondage; and they were warned, that, if they refused to pay "the atonement-money," they would bring upon themselves the divine displeasure. It was certainly an aggravation of David's sin in numbering the people, that, while he gratified his own pride and creature-confidence, he neglected to honor God by levying for him the appointed offering; and no less than seventy thousand of his subjects were destroyed in three days by a pestilence sent from God. This may give us some little idea of the vengeance that will overtake those who despise the atonement of Christ; and of the glorious deliverance which they shall obtain, who believe in him. The protection, the peace, the plenty, which his obedient people enjoyed in the wilderness, and their final possession of the promised land, represented the spiritual blessings which all "the ransomed of the Lord" shall eternally inherit.

2. To convey instruction to the rising generation.

The money, we are told, was to be "a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord." We read of different memorials in the Scriptures. The censers in which Korah and his company offered incense were taken out of the fire with which the offerers were consumed, and were made into plates for the covering of the altar, "to be a memorial, that none but the seed of Aaron come near to offer incense before the Lord, [Numbers 16:36-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.36-40)."

The jewels and bracelets of which the Israelites took from the slaughtered Midianites were presented to the Lord, "as a memorial unto the children of Israel," that not one of their own army fell, though the whole Midianite kingdom was utterly destroyed, [Numbers 31:48-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.48-54).

Now such memorials were the half-shekels at the numbering of the people; they served to remind the whole nation of Israel, that, as sinners, they stood in need of an atonement, and that none who consecrated themselves to the service of their God would ever perish.

Such memorials too are all who now seek for mercy through the sin-atoning blood of Christ. They are as lights in a dark world; they unwittingly instruct all around them; as Noah by building the ark "condemned the world," and tacitly admonished them of the impending judgments, so do those who flee to Christ for refuge, testify to all around them, that there is salvation in Him, and in him alone.

3. To give honor unto God.

It was by these offerings, that the various services of the tabernacle (by which above all things God was honored) were maintained.

And who are they that now honor God in the world? Who are they that truly and spiritually maintain his worship? We fear not to say, that God is more acceptably served by his penitent and believing people, than by all the world besides. The gift of his only-begotten Son to die for us is that which he himself most commends to our attention; nor can he be more glorified on earth, or even in Heaven itself, than in acknowledgments of our obligations to him for this stupendous effort of his love.

APPLICATION.

Among the Israelites there were several classes exempt from the payment of this tax; but none among us can plead any exemption from that which is required of us, the tribute of a broken and contrite spirit.

1. Not the Levites.

These were not numbered for war, and therefore were not included in the tax, [Numbers 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 1.47). But the Levites among us should be the very first to devote themselves to God, and to render to him that tribute, which they demand from others.

2. Not old people.

These for the same reason were omitted both in the numbering and the taxation. But who have so much cause to bear in mind the atonement of Christ, as they who are on the borders of eternity, and are so soon to stand at his judgment-seat? It is to be lamented, that people advanced in years too generally take for granted that all is well with them, though they have never sought "a ransom, or an atonement, for their souls." But let the aged among us be diligent in working out their salvation, and "so much the more as they see the day approaching."

3. Not women.

These were considered as included in the men; and therefore were not personally either taxed or numbered.

But our offerings must be personal; nothing can be done by proxy; as there is "neither Jew nor Greek among us, so is there neither male nor female;" all must be judged by their own works, and all must be accepted through their own faith.

4. Not children.

Persons under twenty years of age were not deemed strong enough for war, and therefore were passed over, [Numbers 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 1.3). But who shall say at what age our responsibility to God begins? Who shall assign the limit at which God will "wink at," or condemn, the transgressions of his law? Surely this were presumptuous and dangerous ground; let not any of you dare to stand upon it.

If the services of a Samuel or a Timothy can be acceptable to God, the iniquities of childhood are provoking to him.

The tax required from you is not burdensome to any; seek not therefore, nor desire, an exemption from it. It is your heart, and not your property, that God requires. Present it to him as purchased by the blood of his dear Son, and you shall be numbered among his people to all eternity.

#103

THE ANOINTING OIL

**[Exodus 30:25-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.25-31)**

"Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony, the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy. "Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. Say to the Israelites, 'This is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come.' "

Of the Ceremonial Law in general we may say, it was intended to shadow forth the Lord Jesus Christ in the whole of his work and offices. The Epistle to the Hebrews admirably illustrates it in this peculiar view, showing with minuteness and precision the scope and object of it as relating to him, and as fulfilled in him.

To his priesthood, in particular, the ordinance which we here read of more especially referred; for in the fortieth chapter, where the words of my text are, again almost literally repeated, it is said, "Their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations, [Exodus 40:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 40.10-15)."

But it is remarkable, that after the Babylonish captivity, this ointment, so far as we are informed, was never made. And this seems to have been permitted by God, in order to direct their minds to that richer unction, which they were to receive from their Messiah.

Previous to the time of Christ, the Holy Spirit was very sparingly and partially bestowed; as it is said, "The Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified, [John 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.39);" but after the ascension of our Lord and Savior to Heaven, "the Spirit was shed forth abundantly" upon God's people, [Titus 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.6); and from that time, multitudes, both of priests and people, have been wholly sanctified unto the Lord. Under this dispensation it is our happiness to live; so that, with a special reference to ourselves, I may well proceed to show,

I. The **universal need** there is of the Holy Spirit's influence.

There was nothing under the **Law** so holy, that it needed this divine unction.

"The tabernacle" itself, the immediate residence of the Deity; and "the ark," wherein the tables of the Law were placed, and which was a preeminent type of the Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law for us; these, I say, were anointed; as were also "the table" of showbread, and the candlestick, the one representing Christ as the bread of life, and the other "as the light which enlightens every man that comes into the world."

Now, whence was it that these needed such purification? They were used in the service of sinful man, and therefore were polluted, and needed to be so purified; as Heaven itself, the abode of all the glorified hosts, is said to be; for "the patterns of things in the heavens were purified with these earthly sacrifices, while the heavenly places themselves were purified with better sacrifices than these, [Hebrews 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.23)."

That "Aaron and his sons" needed this holy ointment, we do not wonder, since they were sinners like unto us. But taking the whole together as used for sinful man, they serve to show us, that there is not a thing or person in the universe that must not be so sanctified, before God can find pleasure in any services presented to him.

Nor is there anything under the **Gospel** which does not need this divine unction.

What are the ordinances of religion, or what the souls of men, without the Holy Spirit? The ordinances are an empty form; and the hearts of men, "a cage of every unclean bird." Regard us as men, and everything we do is defiled before God. But consider us as priests, for into that office every true Christian in the universe is brought, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9); [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6), and how can we approach the Most High God, and offer any acceptable sacrifice unto him, unless we are first consecrated with that divine unction, which God has promised to all who seek him in spirit and in truth, [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.13). It is the duty of the greatest of men, and the privilege of the lowest, to get himself anointed with this holy oil. Even our Lord Jesus Christ himself, as man and as Mediator, needed it. We are informed, that "God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, [Acts 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27); [Acts 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.38)," Much more, therefore, must we, corrupt and sinful creatures, need, under all circumstances, his gracious communications; indeed we are expressly told, that, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9)."

II. Holy Spirit's **sufficiency** for all to whom that influence is applied.

This appears,

1. From the preciousness of the ointment which was used.

The spices were peculiarly rare and fragrant; and the oil with which they were blended was most pure. And was this appointed for nothing? Doubtless this was intended to shadow forth the excellency of the Spirit's gifts; for on whoever he was poured, whether on the Savior himself or on any men—he was "a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and he made the person of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3)."

There is not a faculty in man to which the Spirit's influence does not extend, or which it will not sanctify. The Spirit imparts:

light to the understanding,

subservience to the will,

purity to the affections,

tenderness to the conscience,

and holiness to the entire man.

The Spirit makes us altogether "a new creation," and sanctifies every offering which we present to God; so that "God smells a sweet savor from it, [Philippians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18)," and is well pleased with services which could not otherwise be accepted by him.

2. From the virtue infused into everything anointed with it.

Every vessel that was anointed with that ointment, imparted a sanctity to everything with which it came in contact. And thus, in like manner, every true Christian communicates to others, so far as his influence extends, the same divine principles which he himself has imbibed. As it was said of the Savior, so may it be said of all the Lord's anointed, "Their garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, [Psalm 45:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.8);" and wherever they come, they diffuse around them "the savor of the knowledge of Christ."

We cannot have a more complete idea of its efficacy, than the Corinthian Church, through the instrumentality of Paul, exhibited. In their unconverted state, many of them had been of a most abandoned character; yet, having drawn that character in all its most degraded forms, he says of them, "Such were some of you; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-11)." Only let the Spirit of God accompany the word to the hearts of men, and the day of Pentecost fully shows us what effects it will produce.

I entreat you then, my brethren:

1. Seek the Holy Spirit for your own souls.

There is "an anointing of the Holy One," which every one of you may obtain, and which will operate upon you to your complete salvation, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27).

But I must guard you against every counterfeit that may be mistaken for it. There is such a thing as mere enthusiasm; and it is by no means uncommon for people to mistake some feelings or conceits of their own for the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God. And I must warn you, that, as any person compounding for himself an ointment similar to that which was made for God was to be cut off from his people, verse 33, so a substitution of anything in the place of God's Holy Spirit will infallibly outcome in your destruction. You shall not however err, if you go to your great High-Priest, and ask for the Holy Spirit at his hands; for he has been anointed with "the Spirit without measure, [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34);" and the Spirit who has been poured so largely upon him shall "descend to the skirts of his garments, [Psalm 133:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 133.2)," and to the very lowest of all his members.

2. Guard against everything that may reflect dishonor upon him.

The high-priest under the Law was forbidden to display those feelings which were incident to common men, because "the crown of the anointing oil was upon him, [Leviticus 21:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 21.10-12)." And you likewise, my brethren, if you have been indeed anointed with the Spirit of God, must show that superiority to earthly things, which would be in vain looked for from the natural and unconverted man. Very striking is that expression of Solomon, "As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor, [Ecclesiastes 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 10.1)." There is a sanctity about the Christian character which should be kept inviolate. If you are "sons of God, you should be blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining among them as lights in the world, [Philippians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15)."

The Spirit of God may be soon "grieved;" yes, he may be even "vexed," and "quenched" by any deliberate sin; for sin in you will "cause the very name of God himself to be blasphemed." I beg you, then, walk wisely, and in a way "worthy of your high calling." Yes, "worthy also of Him who has called you unto his kingdom and glory." O "may the Spirit of God sanctify you wholly! and I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

#104

GOD THE SOURCE OF ALL WISDOM

**[Exodus 31:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 31.6)**

"I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen so they can make all the things I have commanded you to make."

When the time is come for carrying into effect the purposes of God, difficulties, which appeared insurmountable, vanish, and "mountains become a plain." The obstacles which opposed the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, were only augmented until the precise hour for its accomplishment arrived; but at the appointed hour, even "the self-same night," they not only went out unmolested, but were actually thrust out by their oppressors. At the Red Sea, an interposition equally seasonable was given to them; as was also a supply both of bread and water in the wilderness, in the hour of need. Those who looked only to second causes judged the various blessings as unattainable; but, on all the occasions, God showed that there was nothing impossible to him; and that whatever he had ordained, should not fail for lack of means and instruments whereby to effect it. Having brought his people into the wilderness, he commanded a tabernacle to be reared, and to be furnished with a great diversity of vessels proper for his service. The most costly materials were to be used, and the most exquisite workmanship employed, in the structure of the whole. But where should all the materials be found? Behold! the Egyptians themselves had loaded the Israelites with them to an immense amount, no one throughout the whole land of Egypt refusing to an Israelite anything that he required.

Still, though gold and silver and precious stones and other things were found among them, and were granted by them with a liberal hand, who was there among the whole nation that could fashion them according to the model shown to Moses in the mount? They had been so oppressed, that it would be in vain to look for people sufficiently skilled in works of gold and jewelry and embroidery, to execute all that was required for the occasion. But was the work therefore delayed? No; God, by his Spirit, instructed two people, Bezalel and Aholiab, with a perfect knowledge of the whole work; and, under their superintendence, others were speedily qualified for executing the office assigned to him; so that the whole was finished within the short space of nine months. Every one performed his part aright, because "in the heart of all that were wise-hearted God had put wisdom."

From this remarkable expression I shall take occasion to point out, in reference to "wisdom,"

I. Its only source.

The wisdom here spoken of, proceeds from God.

Whatever difference may be occasioned in men by education, the original faculty of understanding is our Creator's gift. Some, indeed, are born into the world destitute of any rational powers; if, therefore, we have been favored with them, we are the more indebted to the goodness of our heavenly Father. It is probable that among the poor, or even among the uncivilized part of mankind, many possess by nature as much strength of intellect as the most learned philosopher; while, for lack of the advantages of education, they have never been able to turn it to any good account. If, therefore, we have enjoyed the means and opportunities of cultivation which have been withheld from others, we must ascribe that also to God, who in this respect, also, has made us to differ.

The Scriptures trace to this same source the wisdom manifested by the gardener in ploughing his ground and threshing out the corn, "Does the plowman plow all day to sow? Does he open the clods of his ground? His God instructs him to discretion, and does teach him. This also comes forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working [Isaiah 28:24-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.24-29)."

We wonder not, therefore, that the skill so suddenly given to Bezalel, and to all who worked under him, is ascribed to God; for that was indeed truly miraculous.

But the declaration which traces it to God, extends to every kind and every measure of wisdom; and consequently constrains us to give God the glory of every faculty we possess, and of all the improvement that we have made of it. We are not left in any respect to boast in our abilities; the whole honor must be given to God, and to God alone.

But to the same source must we yet more eminently trace the attainment of **spiritual**wisdom.

Of this, no measure whatever is born with man, or is natural to man. "He is born like a wild donkey's colt." As for "the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Nor is wisdom the product of mere human instruction; for "the world by wisdom knew not God." The Apostles, when instructed in divine knowledge, traced the acquisition to the only true source, "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God."

Even the Messiah himself was instructed for the discharge of his office by the very same Spirit who wrought in Bezalel for the forming of the tabernacle. Of Bezalel it is said, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship;" and of Jesus it is said, "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3)."

The same Spirit will be given to us also, to enlighten our minds with saving knowledge; for Paul says, "I pray always for you, that God may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18)." To him, then, must every man look for wisdom; and from him shall every man receive it, who seeks it in a befitting way, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6). As Bezalel and Aholiab were instructed at once how to perform all manner of work; and as the disciples of Christ, poor uneducated fishermen, were enabled at once to speak different kinds of tongues; so shall the Spirit impart to us also, according to our respective necessities, that we may both know and do all that God has required of us.

In the works to which this consummate wisdom was to be applied, we may see,

II. Its most appropriate use.

This wisdom given for the formation of the tabernacle.

For that work it was indispensably necessary; for the things which were to be formed had never been seen before; no, nor anything like them; and for such sacred vessels the most exquisite skill was required. Had even angels been employed in the formation of this structure, their utmost abilities would have been well employed.

And have not we a similar use for the wisdom bestowed on us?

Behold "the tabernacle of David which is broken down!" does not that need to be reared again? [Amos 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.11-12) with [Acts 15:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.16-17). Are not the whole race of mankind to be formed as "vessels of honor fit for their Master's use?" But who can discharge this office? If Paul, with all his endowments, was constrained to ask, "Who is sufficient for these things, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)." how much more must we? For, who among us has such an insight into the deep mysteries of the Gospel, as to be fully assured that he shall in no respect deviate from "the pattern shown" to Prophets and Apostles "in the mount?" Or who shall undertake to fashion the crude materials of the human heart after the perfect image of our God? Who that knows anything of Jewish prejudice or Gentile superstition, shall attempt to cope with them in his own strength, or hope to reduce them to the obedience of faith? Truly the Preacher of the Gospel needs to be endued with wisdom from above, with wisdom too of no ordinary measure, for the work to which he is called; and all the talents that the most distinguished philosopher can possess, will find ample scope for exercise in this great work.

In comparison with rearing a tabernacle for the Lord, what is there under Heaven that deserves a thought? If the forming of the shadows of divine truth was a just employment of supernatural skill, doubtless an exhibition of the substance may profitably engage all the talents that were ever confided to mortal man.

To all, then, I would say,

1. Acknowledge God in all the talents you possess!

Not only Bezalel and Aholiab, but all who were employed in the different departments of the work, were taught of God. So, whatever ability we have for the constructing of God's spiritual tabernacle, we have received it from the same heavenly source, and must ascribe the glory of it altogether to our God. Let this be borne in mind, and none will envy those who are endowed with greater talents than themselves, or despise those who are called to occupy a humbler post. The eye in the natural body vaunts not itself above the hand, nor the hand above the foot; but each is satisfied with executing the work for which it is fitted and ordained; so let it be with us; every one doing what God has called him to, and every one seeking the glory of God in all that lie performs.

2. Improve your talents for the end for which they have been committed to you.

At the formation of the tabernacle, everyone engaged, according to his ability, to expedite the work. Men, women, rulers, all accounted it their honor to be employed for God, [Exodus 35:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 35.21); [Exodus 35:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 35.24-27); and "so," we are told, "it became one tabernacle, [Exodus 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 36.13)." And who can say what the effect would be, if all men, women, and rulers, engaged heartily in the work of God, and labored to advance his glory in the world?

Beloved brethren, let us not sit down in despair, because the work is too great and arduous. God can fit us for it, however ignorant we are; and can bless us in it, however unequal we may be for the task assigned us. Only let it be said of every one among us, "He has done what he could," and we shall yet see glorious days among us; and God will rear his tabernacle, and glorify himself, as in the days of old.

But, for this end, it is necessary that you "stir up your hearts;" for, by nature, they are sadly averse to it. Nor need we fear that any exertions of ours will exceed the demand for them. The materials for the tabernacle, and the work, were soon supplied, when a whole nation were willing and active in the cause; but there is no fear that we shall have to bid you to cease either from your offerings or your labors, [Exodus 36:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 36.5-7). The whole world is the tabernacle which you are to rear; and every soul within it is a vessel you are to form for God's honor. Go on then, all of you, both in your individual and collective capacity, without intermission and without weariness; so shall the work proceed to the honor of our God, and a rich recompense be treasured up for your own souls.

#105

MOSES' INDIGNATION AGAINST THE WORSHIPERS OF THE GOLDEN CALF

**[Exodus 32:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.19-20)**

"When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it."

It is painful to reflect how transient is the effect of the most laborious ministry, and in how many instances hopeful appearances of piety come to nothing. If ever any man was faithful, it was Moses; of whom God himself says, "He was faithful in all his house." And if ever there was reason to expect that the work of conversion had taken place upon many hundreds of thousands of people, it was when Israel were singing praises to their God on occasion of their deliverance at the Red Sea. It might well be supposed, that their gratitude to God on that occasion, deepened by the awe impressed upon their minds at the thunders of Mount Sinai, would never be forgotten. But, behold! Moses, summoned as he was by God into the holy mount, in order that he might receive from Jehovah a written copy of that Law which had been just proclaimed, had not been absent from the people forty days, before they all concurred in asking Aaron to make for them a God whom they might worship, and who should go before them in their way to the promised land; and even Aaron himself became an active confederate in this horrible apostasy. As for Moses, they seem to have lost all respect for him, as well as all befitting reverence for Jehovah, whose minister he was.

Of this, God apprised Moses; and at last sent him down in haste to the people, that he might see with his own eyes what impiety they were committing. Moses, therefore, hastened down from the mount; and, filled with indignation against them for their wickedness, he testified his displeasure in the way recorded in our text.

Let us consider,

I. The grounds of Moses' indignation.

The worshiping of the golden calf was a sin of most extraordinary enormity.

Such interpositions in their behalf had that people seen, as never had been witnessed by any other people under Heaven. And they were still within sight of that burning mount where Jehovah himself, their great Deliverer—had given to them his visible presence. They had but just before, too, received an express command to make no symbol of the Deity, [Exodus 20:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.4), nor to keep in existence any of the gods of the heathen, but to "destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire;" and not so much as to "desire the silver or gold that was on them, or to take it unto them, lest they should be snared therein; but they were utterly to detest and abhor it, as an accursed thing! [Deuteronomy 7:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.5); [Deuteronomy 7:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.25-26)."

Yet, behold! within less than forty days, they desire Aaron to make them a golden image, similar, probably, to what they had seen in Egypt, [Ezekiel 20:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.8); and they take the ear-rings from their sons and from their daughters for the purpose of forming it; and, having formed it, they offer sacrifices to it, and ascribe to it the honor of all their past deliverances, saying, "These are your gods, O Israel, which have brought you up out of the land of Egypt, verses 1–8."

This was plain and unequivocal idolatry. Perhaps they might be ready to deny this charge, just as the Papists have since done; and to say, that they only looked to the calf as a symbol, to remind them of the Deity, to whom alone they had respect in all the worship that they paid. They might say, that they could not be supposed to ascribe their deliverance to that which but a few days before was in their own ears, and had no collective existence until it was cast into a mold and made a calf.

But God declares it to have been idolatry, as all the worship paid to images and crucifixes by the Church of Rome also is; as the Apostle, in reference to this very transaction, says, "Neither be idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. Compare with [1 Corinthians 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.7)." Here, then, was ample occasion for the hot displeasure of Moses.

And is there no similar evil prevalent among us?

As Protestants, we have discarded the idolatrous practices of the Church of Rome. But we may "set up idols in our hearts! [Ezekiel 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.3)," as well as in our houses; we may have the love of money there; and that is expressly designated by the opprobrious name of idolatry, "Covetousness," says the Apostle, "is idolatry [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.5)." We may be addicted to sensual appetites; and then we make, as we are told, "a God of our belly, [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.19)." "The loving and serving of the creature more than the Creator, [Romans 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.23)," in whatever way we do it, is the very essence of idolatry; and "provokes the Lord to jealousy, [1 Corinthians 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.22)," as much without an external symbol, as with one. God says, "My son, give me your heart;" and if that is withheld from him, he is justly filled with indignation against us!

Let me, then, bring home this matter more closely to your hearts and consciences.

The Israelites professed to celebrate their redemption from Egypt; and having presented their sacrifices of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, "they sat down to eat and to drink (of the portion of the peace-offerings which was allowed to them, and rose up to play." And, when Moses came down from the mount, he heard, while yet at some distance, their carnal revelry; which they judged a befitting mode of honoring their great Deliverer.

Now at this Christmas season, we profess to commemorate the Redemption, not of a single nation, but of the whole world; and not by power only, but by price—even the precious blood of God's only dear Son. We commemorate, I say, the Incarnation of the Son of God, for the deliverance of our souls from sin and Satan, death and Hell. And in what way do we commemorate it? Is not this season proverbially devoted to carnal mirth? We present our offerings, if I may so say, on the day appointed; and throughout the whole season, with the exception of two or three hours, "we sit down to eat and to drink, and rise up to play!" Such is our religion, precisely like that of those impious idolaters!

To the honor of the Levites, it must be acknowledged that they did form an exception to this national transgression. Would to God the like could be said of our Levites! or even of our Aarons! But, with us, Levites and Aarons too are found, for the most part, sanctioning, by their presence and example, these sad enormities; as if Christ had come for no better purpose than to give us a more ample occasion for carnal indulgence!

Judge, then, whether God may not well be filled with indignation against us, as he was against his less enlightened and less indebted people of that day?

Having seen the grounds of Moses' indignation, let us proceed to mark,

II. Moses' expressions of it.

1. He broke before their eyes the tables of the Law, which God had committed to him.

Was this done in a fit of rage? No! The manner in which Moses, forty years afterwards, relates it, sufficiently proves this. See [Deuteronomy 9:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.16-17). It was a significant action, declaring, in effect, to the whole people, that they had made void all their solemn engagements with God, [Deuteronomy 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.27); and that therefore the covenant he had made with them, of which "these tables were a testimony, verse 5," was utterly annulled.

And are not all the provisions of the Gospel, too, made void by willful and deliberate sin? They are; and all hope in the Gospel, while our hearts are alienated from God, and fixed on earthly vanities, is nothing but delusion. Our Lord has faithfully warned us, that it is in vain for us to "cry, Lord! Lord! if we do not practice the things which he says;" and that however we may debate the matter with him in the last day, saying, "Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, and in your name cast out devils, and in your name done many wonderful works? He will reply, I never knew you; depart from me, you who work iniquity! [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23)."

Whoever then you are, who, instead of delighting yourselves in God, are addicted to carnal mirth, I break the tables of the covenant before your faces this day; and declare, that "whoever does not practice righteousness, is not of God;" but that, on the contrary, "whoever commits sin, is of the devil, [1 John 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.6); [John 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.8-9)."

It is needful that we declare this faithfully; for, while dancing about your golden calf, you conclude that all is well, and little think in what light your conduct is viewed by a holy and jealous God. And to learn it, first, when your Lord shall descend from Heaven to judge the world, will be too late; for, as the Levites passed through the camp, and avenged the cause of God on the offenders without favoring even their nearest relatives, so will the angels at that day inexorably and irresistibly execute on all the violators of God's covenant the judgments denounced against them! Compare [Isaiah 37:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.36) with [Matthew 13:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.41-42). Let all, then, bear in mind, that "God is a jealous God;" and that "he will neither give, nor allow us to give, his glory to another."

2. He ground the calf to powder, and constrained the people to swallow it with their drink.

We need not look for any recondite mystery in this, because the obvious effect of the act itself was sufficiently instructive. No greater indignity could be offered to this worthless idol, than that which he devised; nor any more humiliating punishment be inflicted upon the people, than to compel them to swallow their God, and to "cast him out into the draught" with their common food.

And shall not we, also, be made ashamed of the gods that we have chosen? Yes! if we will choose "vanity, we must have vanity for our recompense." Do I say, We must? Let me rather change the word, and say, "We have; for I may ask of all the votaries of earthly gain or pleasure, "What fruit have you ever had of those things whereof you are now ashamed? What have you done, but "filled your belly with the east wind?" I must warn you, then, that you shall all "eat of the fruit of your own ways," and "be filled with your own devices." The day is quickly coming, when you shall be as much ashamed of those things which you now regard with idolatrous affection, as ever the Israelites were of their golden calf; yes, and when you yourselves also "shall wake to shame and everlasting contempt! [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2)."

From this subject we may fitly learn,

1. The danger of sanctioning the evils around us.

Aaron should have rejected with abhorrence the measure proposed to him; but he acquiesced, and even made himself a ringleader in this vile apostasy. With such a sanction as his, it is not to be wondered at if the people went forward with unsuspecting alacrity, and sacrificed with readiness their most valuable ornaments for the furtherance of their plans.

But who does not see how aggravated his guilt was, in comparison with theirs? He, from his nearer fellowship with God, had far greater information than they; and, from the high office which he sustained, he was bound to use his influence for the suppression of evil, and the enforcing of God's commands.

The same I must say of all who are possessed of influence among ourselves. Whether it be magisterial or ministerial influence that we possess, or only that which is connected with our respective situations in life, we are bound to exert it for God; and, if we neglect to do so, the blood of those who perish through our neglect may well be required at our hands.

I know that we have excuses without number to offer in our behalf; just as Aaron had when reproved for his conduct on this occasion. But, behold, what a pitiful figure he made, when attempting to justify himself before his reprover! "Let not the anger of my Lord wax hot; you know the people, that they are set on mischief." (This was a reason why he should have withstood them, and not a reason for concurring with them.)

Again, "The people said to me, Make us gods who shall go before us. Then I said to them, Whoever has any gold, let him break it off. So they gave it me; and I cast it into the fire; and this calf came out! Verses 1–24". It came out accidentally, I suppose, and without any mold prepared for the formation of it! What a web of folly and of falsehood! See to what a state this man was reduced, even he who was so eloquent, that he was appointed to "be a mouth to Moses."

But thus it will be with sinners in the last day, with Aarons as well as others; (for official dignity is of no account in the sight of God;) or rather, their mouths will be shut through their utter incapacity to offer the smallest vindication of their folly! [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12). Remember this, brethren; and "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11)."

2. In what way we should be affected with the evils around us.

See what a contrast there was between the conduct of Moses and of Aaron on this occasion! While Aaron was uniting with the people in their transgression, Moses was filled with indignation against the sin, and with pity for the sinners. His indignation we have seen; and no sooner had he expressed it in the way that befit him, than he returned to God, to implore mercy in their behalf. Forty days and forty nights had he already fasted; and he went up to the mount and fasted forty more days and forty nights, wrestling with God in fervent intercession, if that by any means he might prevail to obtain pardon for their sin, [Deuteronomy 9:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.18-19). Here was a man of God indeed!

This, then, is the way in which we should act in reference to the sins around us. We should weep over them before God; yes, "rivers of tears should run down our eyes, because men keep not God's law." Such men as he are blessings to the world; for, as "God hearkened unto him at that time also, [Deuteronomy 9:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.18-19)," so will he do to us, if we "stand in the gap before him, to avert his wrath" from an ungodly world! [Psalm 106:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.23). Little did that people think to whom the preservation of their lives was owing; and little do an ungrateful world know to whom they are indebted for the forbearance that is yet daily exercised towards them, [Matthew 24:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.22).

Let it be sufficient for us, that God knows and approves our labors of love; and that, whether we prevail for others or not, our prayers shall surely return into our own bosom, to the everlasting benefit of our own souls! [Ezekiel 22:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 22.30).

#106

THE LORD'S PEOPLE TO BE DECIDED AND FIRM

**[Exodus 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.26)**

"Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me."

These are the words of Moses; and they were spoken on a very particular occasion. While he had tarried on the top of Mount Sinai for the space of forty days, Aaron and the people of Israel, despairing of his return, had made a golden calf to represent Jehovah, and had worshiped that as their God. Moses, on his return, found them in the very act of performing their idolatrous rites; and, filled with indignation against them, he broke the two tables of the Law which he had received from Jehovah, in token that the covenant which God had made with them was altogether dissolved; and he reduced the golden calf to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the people to drink of it; so that they might have within themselves a testimony of their folly, and be assured that a cup of merited affliction should one day be put into their hands. And it is remarkable, that the Jews in general conceive that, in all their afflictions, there are, as it were, some grains of this golden calf even to this very day. For Aaron, Moses interceded, and obtained forgiveness, [Deuteronomy 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.20). And on behalf of the people, too, he so far prevailed, that only the ringleaders in this rebellion should be punished in the first instance; though, at a future period, this sin should surely be visited upon them all. To punish those who were most bold and daring in this impiety, and were walking abroad as not ashamed of it, Moses called to him those who were zealous for God's honor, and ordered them to go through the camp and indiscriminately slay all they met with, without regarding even their nearest and dearest relatives. This was doubtless a most painful service to all who were engaged in it; but they executed it with fidelity, and brought thereby a blessing on their own souls.

Now, let it not for a moment be imagined that God's faithful servants are called to any such office now. Christianity provides no such bloody employment for its votaries; it consigns the sword altogether to the civil magistrate, who alone is empowered to use it for the punishment of evil-doers. Still, however, there will arise many profitable lessons from this passage; to elicit which, I shall make some observations upon,

I. The inquiry instituted.

Among the people of Israel there were, especially of the tribe of Levi, some who had not joined in the idolatrous rites, but had remained faithful to their God; and Moses, standing in the gate of the camp, called them to his assistance, saying, "Who is on the Lord's side?" Now from hence we observe,

1. That there are two classes, and two classes only, into which the whole world must be divided.

There are some who are "on the Lord's side." And there are others who are on the side of sin, and the world, and Satan. That in these two great parties there may be many subdivisions, I grant; but there is no third party. Among the godly there may be people of different opinions and different habits; and among the ungodly there may also be many different degrees of impiety, and different states of mind; but, still, the great leading features of both parties sufficiently and infallibly attest to which they belong. The distinguishing marks of each I shall trace presently; at present I have only to show, that two parties do actually exist, and must of necessity exist, as long as there continues an ungodly man on earth. They may be very unequal in their numbers, as was the case in the history before us; an immense multitude, with Aaron at their head, were on the side of idolatry; and a little remnant, with Moses at their head, were "on the Lord's side." It is probable, that, at that time, the friends of idolatry poured contempt on the godly as a party, just as the ungodly world do at this day on the advocates of true religion; forgetting that they themselves also are a party, no less than their opponents. But whose fault is it if the godly are a party? Are they to blame for adhering to their duty, and siding with their Lord? No, surely; the blame must attach altogether to those who turn from their God, and are disobedient to his will. And if the godly are but "a little flock" in comparison with their opponents, it may be their misfortune, but it is not their fault, any more than it was the fault of Noah, or of Lot, or of Elijah, that they were so circumstanced in the ages and places wherein they lived.

Let it not be thought that I am justifying what is usually called a party spirit; for I cannot but reprobate that as a very great evil; but I do, and must maintain, that to serve our God with fidelity is our bounden duty, even though the whole world, with Aaron at their head, should depart from him; and, if they choose to designate us as a party, I would have no man ashamed of belonging to a party of which our Lord and Savior is himself the Head.

2. That it is of great importance to ascertain to which class **we** belong.

Both are alike in this respect, that they are rational and mortal beings; but in many respects they differ widely from each other.

The one are "partakers of a divine nature" through the influence of the Spirit of God upon their souls; the others are altogether carnal, possessing nothing but what they brought into the world with them.

The one live altogether for God; the others, for themselves.

The one are in favor with God; the others are under his just and heavy displeasure.

The one will, before long, stand at the right hand of their Judge; the others will be turned to his left hand, differing as widely from the former as goats from the sheep.

The one will be exalted to Heaven, and be seated forever on the throne of God; the others will be cast down to Hell, and take their portion in the lake of fire and brimstone forever and ever.

Can these differences be contemplated for a moment, and any doubt remain whether we ought to examine to which class we belong? Methinks the matter should not be left in suspense one single moment; more especially since the means of ascertaining the point are close at hand, and easy to be used. The blessed Word of God, if studied with prayer, will enable us to form a very correct judgment. True it is, that we cannot determine the question in relation to others, because we know not what passes in the hearts of men, and can therefore judge of each other by the outward conduct alone; but we have an internal monitor, that will faithfully discharge its office, if we will listen to it, and will declare to us all that it has seen in the inmost recesses of our hearts; and, if we will but lay, to our own souls, "judgment for a line, and righteousness for a plummet," we shall soon discover "whose we are," and with whom we must expect our everlasting abode.

To this I will add some observations on,

II. The direction given.

Moses, in calling to him the faithful servants of the Lord, showed, that the Lord's people should on all occasions manifest,

1. A readiness to confess him.

Neither the authority of Aaron, nor the rage of all Israel, was to deter any one from showing himself on the Lord's side. So neither should any of us be afraid to confess Christ openly in the face of an ungodly world. We err exceedingly if we imagine that there is any third party to which we may adhere with safety to our souls. There are but two governors, to one or other of which we must adhere, "the god of this world," and the God of Heaven. The servants of Satan are bold in serving Satan; and the servants of the Lord Jesus must be bold in confessing him; and if, from any motive whatever, we deny him, he will be ashamed of us, and deny us, in the presence of his Father and of the holy angels. I mean not to say, that Christians are to distinguish themselves by foolish singularity in matters of indifference; but in matters of plain duty they are to differ from the ungodly as widely as light from darkness, "they are to come out from among them, and be separate, and not to touch the unclean thing," if they would have "God for their Father," and approve themselves to him as "his sons and daughters"

2. A determination of mind to sacrifice everything for him.

Moses, in his farewell discourse, at the distance of forty years, particularly commends this conduct of Levi, in that "he said unto his father and his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children; but he had observed God's Word, and kept his covenant, [Deuteronomy 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.9)." And this shows, that, though we are not called to follow his act, we are to imbibe and manifest his spirit, so far at least as to sacrifice everything to, and for, our God. Our blessed Lord distinctly and frequently inculcates this important lesson, "We are to forsake all for him; father, mother, brother, sister, houses, lands, yes, our very life also, if we would be his disciples;" yes, we are to "hate them all for him," that is, in comparison with him, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26). Doubtless, in the execution of this duty, we may appear unkind, undutiful, and cruel; but we must be firm, and Allow nothing to divert us from the path of duty; however painful it may be to discharge it, we must proceed, and, in dependence on divine strength, endure firmly unto the end. No doubt, if we are called to advance in opposition to the will of those who have the rule over us, we should be much on our guard, that we give them no unnecessary offence. We are to take great care that we contend for nothing but what is of vital importance, and that in our necessary conflicts we manifest nothing of an unhallowed spirit. But we must proceed in obedience to our God; and if called to an account for it by any human authority whatever, our answer must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge; for we cannot but do what is commanded us by our God."

As a further **improvement** of this subject, we will proceed:

1. To pursue the inquiry.

"Who among you is on the Lord's side?" I have before said, that this is easy to be ascertained; and now let us address ourselves to the inquiry. By nature, we are all "enemies to God," and "children of wrath." It is by grace alone that our state can be changed, so that we can with justice be numbered as the servants of the Lord.

Who then, among you, has been made sensible of his guilty and undone state?

Who, among you, has fled to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge from the wrath of God?

Who is yet daily imploring mercy at the hands of God in his name?

Who has given up himself unreservedly to God, as his reconciled God in Christ Jesus?

Who is living to the glory of his holy name?

These are questions to be asked, and answered, in order to ascertain the point in hand. You must remember, that your having been baptized into the name of Christ will by no means determine the point; for all the Israelites had been circumcised, and had been "baptized also unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;" and as their profession was insufficient to prove them the Lord's, so also is ours. Nor will any transient impressions of joy and gratitude prove the point; for such emotions had been lately experienced by all Israel at the Red Sea, though now, alas! they were altogether forgotten. It is the daily life and conduct that alone can determine this all-important point. "Examine yourselves then, my brethren, and prove your own selves."

Try whether you are ready to obey the call of God, and to abandon all for Christ.

See whether you resemble your Lord and Savior in the whole of his spirit and deportment.

See whether, while you profess to be on the Lord's side, you are really "walking as he walked," and giving up yourselves entirely to him.

Do not decide the question on any doubtful or insufficient grounds, lest you deceive your own souls, and perish amidst the enemies of God!

One thought only I will leave upon your minds; and it is this: 'If you be not on the Lord's side, can you reasonably hope that ever he should be on yours? And if you have not him for your friend and portion in the day of judgment, how awful will be your condition!' But an hour before, the whole camp of Israel was filled with the noise of joy and shouting; and in another hour, thousands were smitten down by the swords of their own brethren.

Just so, in a few more hours may the most thoughtless among you be consigned over to the jaws of death, by the hands of an angry and avenging God. Oh! may God awaken you to your condition before it is too late! and may you be found of that party, of which God himself is the acknowledged and eternal Head!

2. To enforce the direction.

"Come unto me," says Moses; and I also would say, "Go unto him." If you belong truly to the Lord, you must go and learn from Moses what the will of the Lord is. The tables of the Law must be to you a rule of life and duty. "The whole Law is comprehended in these two commandments, To love God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and To love your neighbor as yourselves." This is "the law of love, which if you fulfill, you will do well." This is the law of Christ, which every follower of Christ is bound to obey. Go then, daily, and sit at the feet of Moses. For your principles and motives you must go to Christ alone; but for your directory in the path of duty, you must go to the law of Moses, which is a perfect transcript of God's mind and will. Never can I enforce this too strongly, and especially after what I have said of sacrificing all for Christ. The command to honor your father and your mother is "the first commandment with promise;" and this shows how high it stands in the estimation of your God. Let it not be less high in your estimation also; and remember that, except in those things which are directly contrary to God's revealed will, the commands of earthly superiors should be regarded by you as the commands of God. A sword is indeed put into your hands; but it is for the purpose of slaying, not men—but sin and Satan, with whom you are to contend, until they are "bruised under your feet." Gird yourselves, therefore, for the occasion; and go through the whole camp of your spiritual enemies, and spare neither small nor great. So shall the blessing of God come upon you, both in time and in eternity!

#107

MOSES INTERCEDES FOR ISRAEL

**[Exodus 32:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.31-33)**

"So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book!"

Well may it be said, "Lord, what is man?" Truly "his goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew that passes away." If we did not see it verified in fact, one would scarcely conceive it possible that man should be so frail and mutable as both history and experience attest him to be. The Israelites were now at the very mount where they had beheld Jehovah shining forth in all his terrific majesty, and had heard him proclaiming in most tremendous sounds his holy law. They beheld also upon the mount that very same cloud, the symbol of the divine presence, which had led them in their way from the land of Egypt to that place; yet, because Moses, when summoned by God to come up to the mount, abode there longer than they expected—they cast off him, and God also; and desired visible gods to be made for them, that they might in future commit themselves to their guidance and protection. It is this, which Moses so pathetically laments in the words before us.

The whole history is very instructive. That we may have a concise, but comprehensive, view of it, let us notice,

I. The sin of Israel.

This was a dreadful compound of ingratitude, folly, and impiety!

The people had already forgotten the numberless mercies which they had received from God, through the ministration of his servant Moses; they thought that they themselves could form an image which should supply the place of all other benefactors, human and divine; and in direct opposition to the most express commands, [Exodus 20:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.4); [Exodus 20:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.23), to which they had so recently promised the most faithful adherence, they made a golden calf, and appointed it as the representative of the Deity, and offered sacrifices to it as their deliverer and their guide. Yes, so bent were they upon having a visible God to go before them, that they at the very first proposal gave up their jewelry, in order that from them an image might be formed, which they might worship after the manner of Egypt. But most of all are we surprised that Aaron, the divinely appointed colleague of Moses, should, at the first mention of such a wicked device, assent to it, and be the very person to form the image, and to proclaim a feast unto Jehovah in honor of it; and that, when reproved for his wickedness, he should attempt to justify it by such frivolous and even false excuses, verse 4. Well might Moses lament before God, "Oh! this people have sinned a great sin!"

But the greatness of the sin will be more easily imagined from the indignation which both God and Moses expressed against it.

The wrath of God, we are told, was "fierce, and waxed hot" against the offending people; and he threatened instantly to destroy them. The anger of Moses also "waxed hot" as soon as ever he beheld their impiety; and the indignation he manifested clearly showed his opinion of their wicked conduct.

First, having in his hands the tables of stone, whereon God had with his own finger written the precepts of his law, he dashed them in pieces before their eyes. This was no rash expression of intemperate wrath, but a holy and significant emblem, representing to them the crime they had committed. God had condescended to enter into covenant with them to be their God; and they had covenanted to be his people; and these tables of stone contained, as it were, the terms of the agreement; and were a pledge that God would fulfill to them all that he had spoken. But this covenant they had entirely annulled; and all their expectations from God were utterly destroyed.

Next, he reduced the idol to dust, and cast it on the water, that all the people might be compelled to drink of it. This was well calculated to show them how much they had debased themselves, in submitting to worship that as a God, which they must swallow with their food, and cast off together with it.

But lastly, he made them feel, as well as see, the marks of his displeasure. He called the Levites, who notwithstanding the defection of Aaron had remained faithful to their God, and commanded them to go through the camp, and without favor or pity to slay all the ringleaders with the sword. Thus were three thousand of them punished on the spot; there needed no formality of trial; they were caught in the fact; and the judgment with zeal was deservedly executed upon them.

That no part of Moses' anger was of a sinful kind, or expressed with undue severity, is evident from his tender compassion for the offenders, while he hated and abhorred their offence. To elucidate this, we notice,

II. The intercession of Moses.

No sooner did he see how God was displeased with them, than, notwithstanding the prohibition given him, Moses began to intercede for them.

The prohibition, "Let me alone," operated on his mind rather as an encouragement to intercede; because it seemed to say, If you intercede for them, my hands are tied; and I cannot execute upon them my threatened vengeance. He fell down instantly before God, and urged in their behalf every plea which was suited to the occasion.

He reminded God of His relation to them. Though God had appeared to disclaim them in that he had called them Moses' people, Moses pleaded, that God himself had brought them out of Egypt, and had signally marked them as his peculiar people. He reminded God also of his promise to their fathers, which, if they were utterly destroyed, would be violated. As for having another nation raised up from his loins, he did not desire that honor; all he wanted was, to avert from this offending people the judgments they had merited. He further expressed his concern to God respecting his honor among the heathen. Lord, what will the Egyptians say? What opinion will they form of you? Will they not represent you either as weak, and incapable of carrying this people to the promised land; or as cruel, and bringing them out here on purpose to slay them? Lord, if you regard not them, have regard for your own honor, and spare the people for your great name's sake.

After reproving their iniquity, he returned again unto the Lord, to renew, more fervently than ever, his intercession for them.

He confesses humbly the greatness of their sin; well knowing, that for the obtaining of mercy, nothing is so efficacious as humiliation before God.

He then implores pardon for them, if pardon can be extended to so rebellious a people.

But, if some atonement must be made, and if some signal mark of his displeasure must be given, then he entreats that the judgment may fall on him, and not on them. He desires to be excluded from Canaan, and, as far as relates to this life, to be blotted out of the list of God's peculiar people, in their stead; so that the enormity of their sin, and God's abhorrence of it, might be made manifest, and yet the transgressors themselves be living monuments of God's mercy. It were absurd to think that he proposed to subject himself to eternal misery for them; for this would be more than even Christ himself has done for us.

What a bright pattern is here of zeal for God, and compassion for men! And how desirable is such a union of them, as will keep us from palliating sin on the one hand, or hating and despising the sinner on the other.

How far this intercession prevailed will be found in,

III. The reply of God.

God condescended to remit the punishment of their iniquity.

At the very first intercession of Moses, God repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto his people; and, in answer to the last, he renewed his commission to Moses to lead them to the promised land; and, though he withdrew himself from them in a measure, he commanded a created angel to guide them in the way. He declared indeed, that, if by a continuance of their rebellions they compelled him to punish them, he would then visit for this sin together with the rest; but, if they were truly penitent, and observant of his will in the future, he would remember it against them no more.

What an amazing view does this give us of the condescension of God, and the efficacy of fervent prayer! The prayer of one single person availed for the procuring of pardon for two million people, and for Aaron at their head, notwithstanding the peculiar enormity of his sin! [Deuteronomy 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.20). Read that whole chapter; yes, it prevailed at a time when God was so incensed against them as to forbid any intercession in their behalf, and to declare that he would "blot out their name from under Heaven." Surely the remembrance of this single instance is sufficient to encourage all the world to implore mercy for themselves, and to make continual intercession also for others.

He declared, however, that at his future tribunal justice should be strictly administered to all.

Rewards and punishments are often national in this world, and consequently partial; sometimes the innocent are involved in the punishment of the guilty; and sometimes the guilty escape without any punishment at all. But at God's tribunal in the last day, no such inequalities will be found; there every one will answer for his own personal transgressions, and stand or fall according to his own personal conduct, "The wicked will go into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." Multitudes in that day will be found, who, in name and profession, were the Lord's people; but, inasmuch as they "had only a name to live, and were really spiritually dead," God will blot them out of his book, and disclaim all relation to them or regard for them. Solemn indeed, and most worthy to be impressed upon our minds, is this declaration of God; it relates, not to that people only, but to all that dwell upon the face of the whole earth. Intercession may prevail in this world for the averting of temporal judgments even from the impenitent; but, in reference to the eternal world, nothing will prevail but personal repentance, and humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

From this subject we may learn,

1. What an evil and bitter thing sin is!

The Israelites might have excused themselves by saying, as the Papists do respecting their images, that they did not intend to make a God of the golden calf, but only to use it as the means of bringing the true God more forcibly to their minds. But what would such sophistry have availed them? Would either God or Moses have altered their estimate of the crime, because they chose to veil it under specious names? It is expressly called idolatry! [1 Corinthians 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.7). And to what purpose is it for us to extenuate our crimes? We have soft imposing names whereby to conceal the evil of covetousness and sensuality; but does not God declare both the one and the other to be idolatry? [Ephesians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.5); [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.19). Does he not speak of men having "idols in their heart! [Ezekiel 14:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.3-4); [Ezekiel 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.7)." and is not this the essence of all idolatry, to "love and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore?"

We may attempt also to extenuate our guilt, as Aaron did, from our acting under the influence of others, and not designing to do exactly all that we did; but this could not deceive Moses; much less can it deceive God.

Moreover, both the people and Aaron might even think that they were honoring Jehovah; for they kept the feast professedly unto him; and when they had eaten and drunk of their sacrifices, they might think it well befit them to indulge in mirth. We too may keep our feasts, and fasts, and Sabbaths, professedly to the Lord; and may conclude we have ground for cheerful security; but God may, all the while, be as angry with us, as he was with them, and may have determined to blot out our unworthy names from the book of life! O that we would duly reflect on these things! O that we would consider that sin, however extenuated by us, is hateful to God; that he sees it wherever it is transacted, and under whatever veil it may be concealed; and that, finally, the time is quickly coming, when he will execute judgment upon all according to their works! Then will sin appear in its real colors; not in the temporal destruction of a single nation, but in the everlasting destruction of all who have died in impenitence and unbelief.

2. How much we are indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The intercession of Moses for the Jewish nation was typical of the yet more effectual intercession of our great Advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ. We may in a measure picture to ourselves the benevolent exercise of Moses, while the thoughtless Israelites were reveling in security. In that then let us view what has been taking place in Heaven on our behalf. We have been sinning against God, a stiff-necked and rebellious generation; and many times has the decree gone forth, "Cut them down! Why do they cumber the ground?" But the Lord Jesus, presenting that most efficacious of all pleas, his own atoning blood—has said, "Spare them, O my Father! spare them yet another year." Yes; had it not been for his intercession, we would not have been now in this place, but in that place of torment from whence there is no return. O that we might learn to estimate our obligations to him! O that we might go to him ourselves, and entreat him to obtain for us converting grace, and everlasting glory! Were but our eyes duly turned to him, our expectations could not be too large, or our confidence too strong.

But we must remember that nothing can supersede our own repentance; not even the blood and intercession of Christ will avail for those who die impenitent. The declaration of God shall never be reversed, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I (if he dies impenitent) blot out of my book."

There are two fatal errors which pervade the great mass of nominal Christians:

the one is, that they shall be saved by their repentance, though they trust not in Christ.

The other is, that they shall be saved by Christ, though they do not personally repent.

But neither of these things can ever take place.

The impenitent may be spared for a time; but they shall perish forever!

But the penitent who believe in Christ, "shall never come into condemnation, but shall have everlasting life!"

#108

REPENTANCE OF THE ISRAELITES

**[Exodus 33:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.5-6)**

"For the LORD had said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you! Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.'" So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb."

That which is principally required of ministers is fidelity, [1 Corinthians 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.1-2), to dispense the Word of God aright, without courting the applause of men, or fearing their displeasure.

That which is principally required of hearers is that they receive the Word of God with all readiness of mind, and obey it without reserve.

Where such ministers and such people are, will they be happy in each other, and happy also in their God.

Of the description we have mentioned was Moses; but not so the people of Israel; they were stiff-necked and rebellious throughout the whole course of his ministry among them. On some few occasions, however, they seemed to be of a better mind; particularly on the occasion now before us.

Moses had declared to them a message from God; in which their true character was drawn, and his judgments against them were awfully denounced; and the effect, for the present at least, was such as was reasonably to be expected: they trembled at the divine judgments, and humbled themselves instantly in the mode prescribed. This is declared in the text; for the elucidating of which we observe,

I. God is not able to exercise mercy towards an impenitent transgressor.

God certainly is "rich in mercy," and delights in the exercise of it; and would gladly manifest it towards all the human race, 1 Timothy 2:4; [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11). But impenitence presents an insurmountable obstacle in his way, so that he cannot show mercy towards any who abide in it.

1. God cannot exercise mercy to the impenitent, because it would be inconsistent with his own perfections.

He is a God of inflexible justice, unspotted holiness, and inviolable truth. But what evidence would there be that anyone of these perfections belonged to him, if he, in direct opposition to his own most positive declarations, put no difference between the proud despiser of his authority, and the humble repenting suppliant?

2. God cannot exercise mercy to the impenitent, because it would be ineffectual for the happiness of the people themselves.

Annihilation indeed would be a benefit, if that were granted to them; because they would then be rescued from the sufferings that await them; but to raise them to Heaven would be no source of happiness to them. Having still a carnal mind which is enmity against God, they must hate him even in Heaven; either God, or they, must change, before they can have fellowship with each other. As little comfort could they find in the society or employment of the heavenly hosts. The glorified saints and angels could not unite with those who had no one sentiment or feeling in unison with their own. They would be ready to "thrust him out" of their society, [Luke 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.28); nor would they who hate the exercises of prayer and praise in this world, find any satisfaction in such exercises in the world above. I say therefore again, that to an impenitent sinner, Heaven would be no Heaven; for while sin reigns within him, he has a Hell in his own bosom, and carries it with him wherever he goes.

3. God cannot show mercy to the impenitent, because it would introduce disorder into the whole universe.

What sensations must it occasion in Heaven! for if God can so change his very nature as to love an unholy creature, who can tell but that he may go one step further, and hate a holy one? As for the effect of it on earth, no one from that moment would either hate or fear sin; not hate it, because they would see that God does not hate it; and not fear it, because they would see that he will not punish it. Even in Hell the effect of it would be felt; for, if God takes an impenitent man to his bosom, why may he not an impenitent spirit also; and what hinders but that the fallen angels may yet become as happy as those who never fell? Could such a thought as this be cherished in that place of torment, Hell would from that moment cease to be the place it is!

Here then is ample reason why God, notwithstanding his delight in mercy, cannot find how to exercise it towards impenitent sinners. But,

II. Where humiliation is manifested, there mercy may be expected.

1. This appears from the very mode in which repentance is here enjoined.

When we speak of God as embarrassed in his mind, or perplexed in his counsels, we must not be understood to intimate that such things actually exist; for "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world;" nor can any occasion possibly arise, wherein he can be at a loss how to act. But he is pleased to speak in this kind of language respecting himself, in order to accommodate himself to our feeble apprehensions, "Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you." Thus in various other places he speaks as perplexed in his mind about the line of conduct he shall pursue, [Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.4), and as wishing to show mercy, but not knowing how to do it consistently with his own honor, [Jeremiah 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.19). Let us not then be misunderstood, as though, in accommodating ourselves to the language of our text, we deviated at all from that reverence which is due to the Supreme Being.

It is here intimated then, that, while impenitence continues, he knows not how to exercise mercy to the sinner; but it is also intimated, that, when once people are humbled for their wickedness, he is at no loss at all how to act towards them; he can then give full scope to the merciful disposition of his own heart, and can pour out all his benefits upon them without any dishonor to his own name. Yes; that point attained, the law is honored by the sinner himself; the sin-atoning blood of Christ may be applied freely to cleanse him from his guilt; the mercy given to him will not be abused; the heavenly hosts will be made to shout for joy; and God himself will be glorified to all eternity. There is no obstacle whatever to the freest and fullest exercise of love towards such a Being; and therefore God knows both what to do, and how to do it to the best effect.

2. This appears from the experience of penitents in all ages.

Look at those in our text; God had threatened that he would go with them no more, but commit them to the guidance of a created angel. This had produced upon them a very deep impression; the fear of being deserted by him had wrought more powerfully upon them than the slaughter of three thousand of their number on the day before. They humbled themselves in the way that God had commanded; and, behold! the mercy, so ardently desired by them, and by Moses, was granted, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest!"

Look at all other penitents from the foundation of the world; was ever so much as one spurned from the footstool of divine grace? Was ever one sent empty away? Even where the repentance was far from genuine, considerable respect was paid to it, and the blessing sought for was bestowed, [1 Kings 21:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.27-29). How much more where the repentance itself has been deep, and the contrition manifest! Not even the greatest accumulation of guilt that ever was known, was allowed to outweigh the tears of penitence, or to shut up the tender mercies of our God from a contrite soul [2 Kings 21:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 21.16) with [2 Chronicles 33:1-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.1-13). The Savior was sent into the world for the very purpose of saving those who are lost; and he assures "all who are weary and heavy laden with a sense of their sins, that, on coming to him, they shall find rest unto their souls."

APPLICATION.

1. Consider what obstructions you have laid in the way of your own happiness!

Had you not sinned, or, after your sins, continued impenitent, you would have been happy long since in the enjoyment of your God. He has been long "waiting to be gracious" unto you, but you would not allow him to be so. He has been longing "to gather you, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not." Say then, what alternative is left to God? He has called, but you have refused; he still calls, and you still continue to reject his counsels.

Truly, "he knows not what to do;" if he spares you—then you only add sin to sin; and if he cuts you off—then you will perish without the smallest hope of mercy. Who can tell but that he is deliberating at this moment, and just about to form his ultimate decision? Who can tell but that this very night he may determine, as he did respecting his people of old, "Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled, [Isaiah 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.5)." Or, as he elsewhere says, "I swear in my wrath that they shall never enter into my rest?" Know, beloved, that if this calamity falls upon you, the fault is utterly your own; nothing but "iniquity can separate between you and your God; nothing but sin unrepented of, can hide his face from you, [Isaiah 59:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.2)."

2. Endeavor instantly to remove these obstructions.

Methinks I see your impenitence, like a dam, barring out from you those streams of mercy, which would refresh and fertilize your souls. O remove it without delay! But take care that your repentance is genuine and unreserved.

External and temporary repentance will avail only for the removal of temporal judgments. That which is required in order to the final remission of your sins, must be deep, spiritual, and abiding; it must show itself in the whole of your conduct and conversation. You will put away those sinful pleasures, those sinful vanities, those sinful companions, that have been to you an occasion of falling; and you will "walk mournfully before the Lord Almighty" to the last hour of your lives, "you will loath yourselves for all your iniquities and abominations," as well after God is pacified towards you, as before, [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31) with 16:63. Let this then be begun immediately, even as "the Israelites put off their ornaments on the very mount of Horeb."

Let there be no delays; no waiting for a more convenient season.

And let not the loss of Heaven be the only object of your fear; fear also the loss of the divine presence. This, as you have seen, was peculiarly dreaded by the Israelites; let it also be peculiarly dreaded by you; and never cease to humble yourselves before God, until you have attained a sweet assurance of his guidance through this wilderness, and of his blessing in Canaan at the termination of your way!

#109

PAST MERCIES PLEADED BEFORE GOD

**[Exodus 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.12-13)**

"Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find grace in your sight. Remember that this nation is your people."

Nothing is more profitable than to be brought, as it were, into the secret chamber of the saint, and to be a witness of his fellowship with God.

His humble confidence,

his holy boldness,

his fervent supplications,

his almost irresistible pleadings

—give us a juster view of man's present salvation, than any declarations, however strong, could convey. The blessedness of true religion is there embodied, and is therefore seen in all its fair proportions and magnificent dimensions.

The prayer which we have just heard, was uttered on occasion of the transgression of Israel in the matter of the golden calf. God had threatened to destroy the whole nation; but, at the intercession of Moses, he so far forgave them, as to suspend his judgments, and to promise, that though he would conduct them no longer by his immediate presence, he would send an angel with them, who would lead them to the promised land. This, however, Moses could not endure; if God would not go with them, he judged it undesirable to be guided there at all; and therefore he renewed his pleadings with God in their behalf, hoping to prevail to the full extent of his wishes.

God had offered to destroy that whole nation, and to raise up another from the loins of Moses; and this token of God's good-will towards him he laid hold of as a ground of hope, and urged it as a plea with God to grant him his full desire, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and grace in your sight."

Let us notice here,

I. The fact pleaded.

God had given him the assurances here spoken of.

We are not told exactly either when, or how, God had declared to him these glad tidings. It is probable, however, that it was by an audible voice during their late extraordinary fellowship, wherein, we are told, "The Lord spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaks unto his friend." The import of the declaration, however, is clear. It could not mean that God merely knew the name of Moses; for he knew the name of every human being as well as his; it means, that from all eternity he had ordained Moses to his high station, and had appointed him to be a vessel of honor, in whom he would be glorified.

I say not, but that the conduct of Moses, as contrasted with that of Aaron and the people of Israel, might bring down upon him more special tokens of God's favor; for I can have no doubt but that God, who rewards every man according to his works, did confer upon him many blessings as the reward of his piety, according to that established rule of his, "those who honor me, I will honor." But the primary source of all his blessedness was God's electing love and sovereign grace; though the manifestations of that love, by an immediate assurance from Heaven, might be given him as a recompense for his fidelity.

And are not similar assurances given to God's faithful people at this day?

If we examine the Holy Scriptures, we shall find that neither electing love, nor the manifestation of it to the soul, are confined to Moses. To Jeremiah this declaration was given, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations, [Jeremiah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.5)." Here the very same expression, "I knew you," is explained as equivalent to a fore-ordination of him to the prophetic office. And the same sovereign grace is exercised towards men in reference also to their everlasting concerns; as it is said, "Whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)." Nor must we understand this foreknowledge as forming the ground of God's future mercies to the people foreknown, but rather as constituting the source from whence those blessings flow; as the Apostle says, "God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy (not because he foresaw that we would be holy, but in order that we might be holy) and without blame before him in love [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)." And it is on this electing love of his, and not on any merits or strength of ours, that our security, in reality, depends; for it is said, "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal: The Lord knows those who are his, [2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19)."

But does God manifest his electing love to any now, as he did to Moses? Yes; not indeed by an audible voice, but by other means sufficiently intelligible both to themselves and others. What else is meant by the Witness of the Spirit? for, now, as well as in former days, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16)." Nor is it in that way only that he makes known our relation to him, but by a work of grace upon our souls; for it was from the "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ," which Paul saw in his Thessalonian converts, that he "knew their election by God, [1 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3-4)."

The fact, then, which Moses pleaded with God is no other than what all his saints are at liberty to plead; for as it is true, that "he knows them by name, and that they have found grace in his sight," so is it true, also, that he has, more or less evidently, declared it to them all; not indeed to any by an audible voice; but to some by the secret influences of his Spirit, and to all by the visible operations of his grace.

The next point for our consideration is,

II. The petition urged.

It is thought by many, that an assurance of our acceptance with God would render us careless and supine; but,

The very reverse was its effect on Moses.

The mercies given to him, only stimulated him to a more earnest desire after further blessings. He does not say, "If I have found grace in your sight, I am content; but, if I have found grace in your sight, then show me your way, that I may know you, and that I may find further grace in your sight."

And such will be its effect on all God's chosen people.

Blessings will be regarded by them, not as gifts wherein to rest, but as pledges of future blessings. It was a wise and truly spiritual argument which was offered by Manoah's wife for the pacifying of her husband's mind, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering or a meat-offering at our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would he, as at this time, have told us such things as these [Judges 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.23)." Past mercies are rather urged by them in prayer as pleas for further blessings.

It was thus that David regarded them, "You have delivered my soul from death; will not you deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living [Psalm 56:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.13)." And in this way will God's special favor operate on every sincere mind. Instead of being satisfied with a taste of his love—we shall hunger and thirst after the full banquet; and never cease from aspiring after a further growth in grace, until we have attained the full measure of the stature of Christ, and our graces are perfected in glory.

Nor shall we be anxious about our own advancement only; we shall feel for God's honor also; and for the welfare of those around us. This appears, in a striking point of view, in the conduct of Moses on this occasion; for, not content with finding grace himself, he adds, "And consider that this nation is your people;" in which words he combines a tender regard for God's honor with a concern for his people's welfare.

His further pleading also deserves attention, "Wherein shall it be known here, that I and your people have found grace in your sight? Is it not in that you go with us, [Exodus 34:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.9)." Now this shows us the true effect which a sense of God's love will produce; it will make us not only anxious to obtain richer communications of grace and peace to our own souls, but more earnest also to promote to the utmost of our power, the good of all around us.

The answer given to this petition leads us to notice,

III. The plea admitted.

God, in his mercy, gave to Moses an answer of peace.

The plea peculiarly honored God, in that, while it acknowledged his sovereign grace in the blessings already bestowed, it regarded him as a God of unbounded goodness, able and willing to fulfill all his petitions. And God's answer to it showed how greatly it was approved by him, "The Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that you have spoken, for you have found grace in my sight, and I know you by name!" Here, I say, God not only grants the petition, but specifically founds the grant upon the very plea that had been urged.

And when did he ever refuse to hear a petition so enforced?

God loves to be addressed with confidence, provided the confidence is grounded on his power and grace. He bids us to come to him "with a full assurance of faith;" to "ask what we will;" and he gives us reason to hope, that, if we come in faith, he will "do for us not only what we ask, but exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." It might be feared, that the importunity of Moses would offend him. But it did not; nor was he angry with Jacob, who "wrestled with him in prayer all night," and boldly said, "I will not let you go until you bless me." On the contrary, he commands us to wait on him with unwearied importunity, and to "continue instant in prayer," until he bestows upon us all that our hearts can wish. "The wider we open our mouths in prayer, the more he will fill them!"

To **improve** this subject, I would say,

1. Bear in mind the tokens of God's love.

Look at what he "has said to you" in his word; take his "exceeding great and precious promises," and tell me whether you can ever lack a plea to urge at the throne of grace. You admire his condescension and grace to Moses; but it is no other than what he will manifest to you—if, like Moses, you consecrate yourself to his service. You cannot, indeed, expect to converse with God face to face, as a man converses with his friend; but by faith you may approach him no less certainly, and no less nearly; and may be sure of obtaining from him an answer of peace. Only take with you his words of promise, and spread them before him; and every jot and tittle of them shall be fulfilled to your souls!

2. Let the effect of his distinguishing grace, be to make you more earnest in your desires after him.

When David said, "O God, you are my God," he added, "early will I seek you." In truth, this is our great encouragement to seek him; for, if he "loved us with an everlasting love," then what may we not expect his loving-kindness to do for us? If once you could bring yourselves to say, 'I am one of God's elect, and therefore am at liberty to relax my efforts in his service;' you would need no further evidence, that you are "yet in the gall of bitterness," and have no part or lot in his salvation. If you have a good hope that you are his children indeed, then you will"walk worthy of your high calling," and "purify yourselves even as he is pure."

3. Improve your saving interest in God for the good of others.

In this Moses greatly excelled; he was willing and desirous even to "be blotted out of God's book" himself, if that, by means of it, he might obtain mercy for his offending nation. See to it, brethren, that your religion operates thus on you. Behold the state of those around you; how many thousands there are dying in their sins! And will you not interest yourselves in their behalf, and labor to obtain for them the mercy that has been given to you? Will you allow your very friends and relatives to perish, without any serious effort in their behalf? Oh! pity them, and pray for them; and "give unto God no rest," until you have obtained some evidence that you have not labored altogether in vain!

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GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH

**[Exodus 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.14)**

The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

It is not in the power of words to express, or of any finite imagination to conceive—the extent and riches of divine grace! The instances in which God manifested his grace to the Israelites of old, inasmuch as they were obvious to the eye of sense, are more calculated to excite our admiration. But the church at this time, and every believer in it, experiences equal tokens of God's kindness, if we can but view them with the eye of faith.

It was under circumstances, wherein the Israelites had justly incurred God's heavy displeasure, that the promise in the text was made to them; and to us, if we do but use the proper means of attaining a saving interest in it, is the same promise given, notwithstanding our heinous backslidings, and innumerable provocations.

That we may be stirred up to improve it, we shall point out,

I. The blessings here promised.

Though the promise was given immediately to Moses—yet it was not literally fulfilled either to him or to the people of that generation; since both he, and they, died in the wilderness. This circumstance alone would lead us to look for some mystical accomplishment, which it would receive; and while the Scripture warrants, it will also fully satisfy, our inquiries on this head. The promise has relation to us, as well as to the Israelites.

1. God's promise teaches us to expect **His presence along our way**.

God had refused to proceed any further with the Israelites, on account of their worshiping the golden calf. In answer however to the supplications of Moses, he had condescended to say that he would "send an angel" in his stead. But when Moses would not be satisfied with that, and continued to plead for a complete restoration of his favor to Israel, with God, overcome, as it were, by his importunity, promised to go before them still in the pillar and the cloud, [Exodus 32:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.34), with the text. More than this they did not need; and less than this could never satisfy one who had ever experienced the divine guidance and protection.

And has not our blessed Lord made the same promise to us? Has he not said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world! [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20)." Has not his prophet assigned this as a reason why we should dissipate our fears, and look forward to the eternal world with confidence and joy, [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10). On this promise then let us rely; and let us know, that if we have God for our guide, our protector, and provider—then we have all that can be necessary for us in this dreary wilderness world.

2. God's promise teaches us to expect **His glory as our end**.

Canaan was a place of rest to the Israelites after the many difficulties that they sustained in their way to it. Just so, Heaven will be indeed a glorious rest to us after our weary pilgrimage in this poor world. Now as the prospect of the land flowing with milk and honey, sweetened all the fatigues and dangers of their journey in the wilderness, so the hope of "that rest which remains for God's children," encourages us to persevere in our labors to attain it; and this rest is promised us, in spite of all the exertions of men or devils to deprive us of it. Our conflicts may be many, and our trials great; but our rest is sure; for God has said, "I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you! Compare [Joshua 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.5), with [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6)."

These blessings being so necessary, we should anxiously inquire into,

II. The means of **attaining** these blessings.

Moses is here to be considered in a double view, as a type of Christ, and as an example to us.

1. We are to attain these blessings through the intercession of Christ. Christ, like Moses, has immediate access to that Divine Being who is wholly inaccessible to us, [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16); and it is owing to his entrance within the tabernacle to "appear in the presence of God for us," that the wrath of the Almighty has not burst forth upon us on numberless occasions, and consumed us utterly! [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24). It is not only at our first return to God that we must seek the mediation of Jesus Christ; we must apply to him continually as our advocate with the Father, expecting nothing but through his prevailing intercession. This is the way pointed out for us by the beloved disciple, especially in seasons when fresh-contracted guilt has excited just apprehensions of the divine displeasure, "If any man sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, 1 [John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.1)." Whether therefore we desire grace or glory—let us seek it through Christ, as the purchase of his blood, and the consequence of his intercession.

2. We are to attain these blessings through our own importunate supplications.

While the Israelites took off their ornaments in token of their sincere humiliation, Moses, as their representative, importuned God for mercy, and urged his requests with the most forcible and appropriate pleas. In this manner should we also cry unto our God for pardon and acceptance, not enduring the thought of being left by him, lest we come short of that rest to which he has undertaken to lead us, [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1). Nor should we cease to plead, until we have an assured hope that he is reconciled towards us, and a renewed prospect of his continued presence with us to the end of life.

It is in this way that his people have prevailed with him in every age, [Daniel 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.7-8); [Daniel 4:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.17-19); and he has pledged himself to us, that, when our uncircumcised hearts are humbled, he will remember his holy covenant, and return in mercy to us, [Leviticus 26:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.40-42).

Inferences:

1. How greatly are we indebted to Jesus Christ!

Where shall we find one who has not made to himself some idol, and "provoked the Lord to jealousy?" And how justly might God have sworn in his wrath that we should not enter into his rest! But our adorable Savior has sprinkled the mercy-seat with his precious blood, and offered up the incense of his own prevailing intercession on our behalf. Surely he is well called "Our peace, [Ephesians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.14)," since he alone procures it, maintains it, perfects it. Let us bear in mind then our obligations to him, and ascribe to him the glory due unto his name.

2. How earnest ought we to be in intercession for each other!

In the history before us we behold one man interceding for a whole nation, and that too under circumstances where there could be scarcely any hope to prevail; yet he not only obtains a revocation of the sentence which God had passed, but a renewal and continuance of his usual favors towards them. Shall we then neglect the duty of intercession, or intercede for each other merely in a formal way, as though we expected no answer to our petitions? Let us not so greatly dishonor God, and so wickedly slight our own privileges, [1 Samuel 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.23). We are expressly commanded to pray one for another, yes, and to make intercessions for all men, [James 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16); let us not doubt therefore but that, by pleading earnestly with God, we may obtain blessings for our friends, for our country, and for all whose cause we plead. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much!"

3. How happy are those who are enabled to live upon the promises!

Were we to consider:

the length and difficulty of our way,

the enemies we have to encounter, and

our utter insufficiency for anything that is good

—we would utterly despair of ever reaching the heavenly Canaan.

But God promises to us his presence along the way, and his rest at the end of our journey; and "he who has promised is able also to perform." Let our trust then be in him, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Let us "cast our cares on him who cares for us." Let our discouragements, yes, our very iniquities, bring us nearer to him, and cause us to rely more simply on his word. Thus shall we experience his faithfulness and truth, and be monuments of his unbounded mercy to all eternity!

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GOD'S GOODNESS HIS GLORY

**[Exodus 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-19)**

Then Moses said, "I beseech you, show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

No man can have ever contemplated the intercession of Abraham in behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, without being astonished at the condescension of God, who would permit a worm of the earth so to encroach upon his goodness, and so to make every fresh concession a foundation for yet further petitions.

Somewhat of the same kind we behold in Moses when interceding for Israel, when God had threatened to destroy them for worshiping the golden calf. He had, by his importunity, prevailed on God to promise that he would suspend the execution of his judgments on them; and that, though he could no longer promise to conduct them himself, he would send an angel, who should lead them in safety to the promised land. Having succeeded so far, he prosecuted his work of intercession, until he had prevailed on God yet further to bear with them, and to continue to them his presence and guidance as he had hitherto done. And now, having found Jehovah so infinitely condescending to him when importuned for others, he determined to urge a petition for himself; a petition, which, under any other circumstances, he could never have dared to ask; and it was no less than this, "I beseech you, show me your glory."

His success in this petition will form the first part of our present subject; and some reflections arising out of that success will close it. Let us notice,

I. His success in this petition.

The **petition** itself must be first explained.

Respecting its import, commentators have differed; some having imagined that it proceeded from weakness and infirmity, as if he had needed further evidence of God's presence and favor. But a due attention to God's reply will remove all doubt respecting the precise meaning of his servant's request. Moses had enjoyed many visible tokens of God's presence; in the burning bush; in the bright cloud which conducted Israel out of Egypt; on the burning mount, where he had been admitted into the immediate presence of the Deity; and at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, where God had descended on purpose to honor him in the sight of all Israel, and "spoken with him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend;" Jehovah had appeared to him.

How then, after so many manifestations of the divine presence, could he say, "Show me your glory?" I answer, In all those manifestations he had seen only a symbol of the Deity; now therefore he desired a sight of the Deity himself. He knew that the Deity was visibly seen in Heaven; and he did not know but that he might also be visibly seen on earth; and therefore he made this the subject of his request.

God's gracious reply to him shows clearly that this was the thing desired; for he said to Moses, "You cannot see my face; for no man shall see me, and live." Human nature, in its present shape, is incapable of sustaining so bright a vision; as the unprotected eye is of gazing upon the meridian sun. And therefore, while God approved of the petition as proceeding from an ardent desire after a more perfect knowledge of him, he told him that in its full extent it could not be granted; not because of any lack of condescension in the Deity to grant it, but for lack of a capacity in Moses himself to sustain it.

The **answer** of God to Moses' petition will be now clear.

"I will make all my goodness pass before you;" so that, though the full effulgence of my glory will be veiled, all that can be endured by you, and that will profitably correspond with your petition, shall be granted. In respect of the effulgence of my glory, I will favor you with such a view of my back parts (for my face you can not see) as shall give you as full a conception of my glory as you are capable of in your present state; and, by an audible voice, will make known to you my perfections, which you are more concerned to know, and by an acquaintance with which your soul will be far more enriched, than it could be by any manifestation of my Godhead, however clear or bright!

Accordingly, God put him into a cleft of a rock, and covered him there with his hand while he was passing by; and then withdrew his hand, that he might have such a distant and mitigated view of his back parts, as might be seen without the utter destruction of the beholder.

This vision God accompanied with a distinct and audible annunciation of his own attributes, as a God of infinite majesty, of almighty power, of unbounded mercy, and of immaculate and inexorable justice—all of which perfections were illustrative of his goodness, [Exodus 34:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.5-7). Here it is of importance to observe, that God's justice, no less than his mercy, is an essential part of his goodness. As in human governments the exercise of justice, however painful to those who by their violations of the law have incurred a sentence of condemnation, is beneficial to the whole community; so is it in the divine government, which, if it allowed impunity to transgressors, would be disparaged and dishonored.

The particular perfection of God's sovereignty is supposed by many to be in direct opposition to the attribute of goodness; and is therefore denied by them as having any existence, or at least any exercise, in the divine government. But, the very moment that God says to Moses, "I will make all my goodness pass before you," he adds, "and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you, and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." This perfection, therefore, in conjunction with all the rest, must be considered as constituting an essential part of the divine character, and as properly illustrating his "goodness."

And here let me remark, that it is not in any single perfection that God's glory consists, but in the united and harmonious exercise of all. "God is light," we are told in [1 John 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.5). Now light consists of many different rays, some of a more brilliant, and others of a more somber aspect; and we can no more detach from it those which are of a darker hue, than those which are more bright and vivid. It is in the union and just admixture of all, that light consists.

And so it is with respect to the divine glory; to which all of God's perfections—the more austere attributes of sovereignty and justice, no less than the more endearing perfections of love and mercy, are necessary. And this view of the divine glory fully answered the wishes of Moses, which a more literal compliance with his petition, even if it could have been endured, would not so well have satisfied.

A more distinct explanation of the particulars contained in this answer to Moses will more properly arise, while we make,

II. Some reflections arising out of his success.

Behold here,

1. The excellence of the **Gospel**.

In the Gospel, all that was given to Moses is imparted to us with tenfold advantage; because, while a fuller insight into the revelation itself is granted to us than was ever given to him, we can contemplate it at our leisure, and without any such emotions as would tend to confuse our minds. Behold then, I say, that Almighty God, "who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen or can see, 1 Timothy 6:16," has become visible to us in the person of his Son; as it is said, "No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18)."

The Lord Jesus Christ, "having in himself all the fullness of the Godhead, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)," is, on this very account, called "the image of the invisible God, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15);" because Jehovah, who in his own essence is invisible to mortal eyes, has become visible to us in the person of his Son, who is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person! [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3);" insomuch, that "whoever has seen him, has seen the Father, [John 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.9)."

In truth, this was the mystery, which Moses probably did not understand at the time; the mystery, I mean, of his being put into the cleft of the rock. For, "that rock was Christ! [1 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.4);" and it is in Christ alone that God's perfections can find scope for exercise towards sinful man, and be all displayed in united splendor. But in Christ, "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other! [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)."

Come then, Beloved, come to the Gospel, even to "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God!" come there, and "behold in it, as in a looking-glass, the glory of the Lord, that you may be changed by it, even as Moses was, into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)." You are privileged beyond all the prophets, not excepting even the Baptist himself; for Paul says, that "what no eye had seen, nor ear heard, neither had it entered into the heart of man to conceive, (no, not even the eye, or ear, or heart of Moses himself,) God had revealed unto the Christian by his Spirit! [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10)." And by that same Spirit, working in and by the word, will God reveal it unto you also, even all "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)."

2. The power of **faith**.

Faith is justly called "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, [Hebrews 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.1)." Faith penetrates into the highest heavens, and "beholds Him who is invisible! [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27)." It "sees God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, [Acts 7:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.55)," able to support, and ready to reward, his faithful people. Yes, "though now we see not our adorable Savior with our bodily eyes—yet, believing in him, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

We need not envy Moses; for as great as his privilege was, it was not to be compared with ours. His eyes were gratified with a glorious sight, no doubt; and his mind was instructed with audible sounds; but he saw not the truths realized; nor did he fully comprehend the things revealed to him, [1 Peter 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-12). But we have seen our God incarnate; and have "beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)." We have seen in his atonement, all the perfections of God harmonizing and glorified; and we understand clearly, how God can be "just, and yet the justifier of sinful men! [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26)." We know him to be "a just God, and yet a Savior, [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21);" and live in the sweet assurance, that he is not only merciful, but "faithful also, and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness! [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9)."

The world at large, indeed, and multitudes even of the professing Christian world, have no experimental sense of these things; and the reason of their blindness is, they have not saving faith; but to genuine believers, "Christ manifests himself as he does not unto the world, [John 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.22);" and so enables them to "behold his glory, that they are changed by it into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

Blush, then, you who "see in Christ no beauty nor loveliness for which he is to be desired, [Isaiah 53:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.2);" know that this is the result of "unbelief, by which the devil has blinded you, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4);" and that, "if you will believe, you shall see the glory of God! [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40);" you shall see it, not only in the exercise of his power, but also in the display of "all his goodness."

3. The efficacy of **prayer**.

Wonderfully is this illustrated in the passage before us. But shall we suppose that God is less condescending now than in the days of Moses, or that he will not answer prayer at this time as well as then? Know that God is the same gracious God as ever, "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17);" "The prayer of the upright is still his delight, [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8)," as much as at any period of the world; and that "those who come to him in his Son's name, he will never cast out." On the contrary, he tells us, that "we may ask what we will; and it shall be done unto us, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7)." There is no limit to his answers to believing prayer, except such as his own glory, or our capacity, have imposed. "It is not in him that we are straitened, but in our own affections, [2 Corinthians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.12)."

How, then, should we urge the petition of Moses, and say, "O Lord, I beseech you, show me your glory!" Let us have but "one thing to desire of the Lord;" and let that be, that we may behold his glory! [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4). Let us go into his presence; and say, with David, "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water; to see your power and your glory, [Psalm 63:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-2);" and God will draw aside the veil that intercepts our views of him. Yes, "he will come down from the habitation of his holiness and his glory, [Isaiah 63:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.15)," and present himself before us, saying, "Here I am! [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9)." He would even fulfill to us his promise, "hearing us before we ask, and answering while yet we are speaking to him, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24)."

O that we would plead with him as he has commanded us to do, [Luke 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1); [Luke 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.7), and "give him no rest, [Isaiah 62:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.7)," until he answers us in the desire of our hearts! Let us not imagine, that he will be offended at the largeness of our petitions; for he is as willing, as he is "able, to do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)." Let us "open our mouths ever so wide, he will most surely fill them! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)."

4. The blessedness of **Heaven**.

When Peter beheld his Lord transfigured upon Mount Tabor, he said, "It is good to be here." And if such a view of Christ's glory, with his bodily eyes, was so delightful—then what must it be for our disembodied spirits to be introduced into his immediate presence, and to "see him as he is! [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2)." What views shall we then have of the perfections of the Godhead all uniting and glorified in the work which he accomplished on the cross! Truly that heavenly city, where he abides, "has no need of the sun or moon to lighten it; for he will be the light thereof, [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)," and with his glory shall every soul be filled. If we account Moses happy when favored with his transient visions of God, then what shall we be, when around his throne we behold him in all his glory, and look forward to a never-ending duration of our bliss! O that we could contemplate more the blessedness of that state; and live more in a habitual preparation for it! Lift up your hearts, brethren; for the blessed period is near at hand. Be "looking for it, and hastening to it, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12);" and let "nothing short of that have any glory in your eyes, by reason of the glory that excels."

Take now already the golden harps into your hands; and begin "the blissful song." Emulate to the utmost of your power, those who are gone before you; and soon you shall join the countless choir in singing "the song of Moses and the Lamb!"

#112

THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD

**[Exodus 34:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.5-7)**

"Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished."

The voice of inspiration says to every one of us, "Acquaint yourself with God, and be at peace." An acquaintance with ourselves (which indeed is equally necessary to our salvation) will only lead us to despair, unless its effects are counteracted with a proportionable knowledge of our God. The more we discern of our own depravity, the more must we see of our guilt, our danger, and our helplessness; nor can anything pacify our consciences, and allay our fears, but a view of the divine perfections, as united and harmonizing in the work of redemption. But that once obtained, our minds will be serene and happy; and the more complete our view of God is, the more firm will be our confidence in him, and the more sublime our joy.

Moses, well aware of this, prayed to God to show him his glory. To this request God graciously condescended, and appointed him a place where he would meet him, and make this discovery unto him. In discoursing upon this marvelous event, we shall notice,

I. The situation in which Moses was placed.

We are told that "God stood with him there;" but this not being a prominent feature in the text, we shall premise some observations as introductory to our remarks upon it.

In the first place, we would observe that in interpreting the Holy Scriptures, we are not at liberty to indulge our own imagination; we must approach them with sacred awe and reverence; and give such explanations of them only, as we truly believe to be agreeable to the mind of that blessed Spirit, through whose inspiration they were written.

Next, we observe, that the whole of the Mosaic economy was of a typical and mysterious nature; and that, though it is sometimes difficult to ascertain the precise import of some events—yet the meaning of those which are more striking is clear and obvious, and may be stated without any fear of deviating from the truth.

Further, there are many events, of which we should have made only a general improvement, which God himself has marked as conveying very minute and particular instruction. For instance, the miracle wrought by Moses, when he struck the rock, and thereby gave the whole nation a supply of water, which followed them all through the wilderness, might be supposed to teach us only that God will supply the needs of his people who put themselves under his guidance; but Paul teaches us to look deeper into that miracle, and to find in it the great mysteries of redemption. He tells us that "that rock was Christ!" and, that the water which they drank of was "spiritual drink." Or, in other words, that the miracle denoted, that Christ, being struck with the rod of the law, becomes unto us a never-failing source of all spiritual blessings! [1 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.4).

We only observe further, that there was no occasion whatever, in which we might more certainly expect to find something typical and mysterious, than in that before us. God was about to reveal himself to Moses in a manner that he never did, either before or since, to any mortal man; and the directions which he gave previous to this discovery of himself, and which were necessary for the safety of his favored servant, were so minute and significant, that we cannot doubt but that the whole transaction was replete with mysterious import, and most valuable information.

We come now to notice the situation in which Moses was placed.

God commanded Moses to go up to Mount Sinai, and stand upon a rock; and promised that he would there pass by him in a visible manner; but, because it was not possible for Moses to behold the splendor of the divine glory, God told him, that he would put him into a cleft of the rock, and reveal to him such a view of his glory as his frail nature could sustain. Accordingly, having put him into the cleft of the rock, and covered him with his hand, to prevent him from getting any sight of his face (which he could not have seen consistently with the preservation of his life), he passed by, and then, withdrawing his hand, he permitted him to see his "back parts," that is, to have such an indistinct view of him as we have of a person who has passed by us, [Exodus 33:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.20-23).

Now Sinai and Horeb, it appears, were two tops of the same mountain. We are told in the context, that God called Moses to come up unto Mount Sinai; yet the preceding chapter informs us that the Israelites were at that time encamped by the Mount of Horeb, [Exodus 33:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.6). The whole nineteenth chapter of Exodus informs us that the fellowship which Moses had with God at the time of the giving of the law, was on Mount Sinai; whereas Moses elsewhere informs us, that he stood before the Lord in Horeb, [Deuteronomy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.10); [Deuteronomy 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.15); and that the Lord made a covenant with them in Horeb, [Deuteronomy 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.2); and that the people provoked the Lord to wrath in Horeb, [Deuteronomy 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.8) with 10:1–5. which was the very period alluded to in the text. Hence it is manifest, that the terms Horeb and Sinai are used as nearly, or altogether, synonymous; because the same transactions are represented indifferently as having taken place on the one, or on the other.

Now it has already appeared that the rock in Horeb is declared by God himself to have been a lively representation of Christ; and therefore we may well suppose, that this rock, which was certainly in the same mountain, if not the very identical rock, was intended also to prefigure Him; more especially as the putting of Moses into the cleft of it exactly represents the benefits we receive by virtue of a saving interest in Christ.

To those who are not "in Christ," "God is a consuming fire! [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29);" and, if he were to pass by any people who have not "fled to Christ for refuge, [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18)," he would instantly "burn them up as thorns! [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.4)," and "consume them with the brightness of his coming! [2 Thessalonians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.8)." Besides, it is in Christ alone that we can have even the faintest view of God; because it is in Christ alone that his perfections are displayed to man; and it is only when we are in Christ, that we have any eyes to behold them!

Here then we see, not only that there is something mysterious in the situation of Moses, but that a due consideration of it is necessary to a full understanding of the passage before us.

In considering this singular favor conferred on Moses, we proceed to notice,

II. The revelation which God gave of himself to him.

Though the terms in which God described his perfections are many—yet they may be reduced to three heads:

1. His **majesty**.

God, in calling himself "the Lord, the Lord God," intimated that he was that eternal, self-existent Being, who gave existence to every other being, and exercised unlimited authority over the works of his hands.

His dominion is universal,

his power is irresistible,

his sovereignty is uncontrolled, "He does according to his will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth;" "nor can any stay his hand, or say unto him, What are you doing?"

Such a manifestation of his majesty was peculiarly necessary, in order that our obligations to him might appear in their proper light; for never, until we have learned to acknowledge and adore his sovereignty, shall we be able rightly to appreciate his love and mercy.

2. His **mercy**.

Many expressions are heaped together upon this subject, because mercy is the attribute in which God peculiarly delights; and because he desires to impress our minds with right apprehensions of it.

God first, in general terms, declares himself to be "merciful and gracious;" by which we are to understand, that he is ever ready to pity the miserable, and relieve the needy. He is in his own nature has a propensity to love and kindness, and forward to exercise his benevolence, whenever he can do it in consistency with his other perfections.

The first-fruit of his mercy is "long-suffering."

And how long did he bear with the antediluvian world? For the space of one hundred and twenty years did he wait, to see if by the ministry of Noah he could turn them from their evil ways.

What can we conceive more insufferable than the conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness? They were always murmuring and rebelling against God, who had done such great things for them yet did he bear with them forty years.

But we need not look back to the Antediluvians or the Jews; what monuments have we ourselves been of his patience and long-suffering! How have we provoked him to anger every day of our lives? Yet we are here at this moment on praying ground, instead of being, where we most richly deserve to be, in the very depths of Hell!

Nor has he merely borne with us; he has shown himself also "abundant in goodness and truth." He has been doing us good from the first moment of our existence to this present hour. He has "made his sun to shine, and the rain to descend upon us," and "given us fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." But he has done infinitely more for us than this; for he has given his only dear Son to die for us, and "his Spirit to instruct us," and has been calling us by the ministrations of his servants to receive all the blessings both of grace and glory. Many "great and precious promises also, has he given us;" not one of which has he ever falsified, or shown the least reluctance to fulfill.

Moreover, this kindness of his extends to the last generations; for he is "keeping mercy for thousands" that are yet unborn. One reason why he bears with many proud rebels, is that he has mercy in reserve for many who are to proceed from their loins, who would never be brought into existence, if he were to execute on their offending parents the judgments they deserved. Who can tell? He may have "kept mercy" for some of us to this present hour; and the time may now be come, wherein he shall make us willing to accept it. Would to God it might be so!

But the completion of his mercy is seen in his "forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Search the sacred records, and see what sins he has forgiven! what sins before conversion! what sins after conversion! and you will find, that there is no species or degree of sin which he has not pardoned, even though it has been often repeated, and long continued in. Let anyone attempt to enumerate his own transgressions, and he will find them more in number than the sands upon the sea-shore, and sufficient, if visited according to their desert, to sink the whole world into perdition! Yet, if he is a believer in Christ, they are all forgiven. How many iniquities then is God continually pardoning in every quarter of the globe! But this is the habit which most characterizes his nature and perfections. Though he cannot look upon iniquity without the utmost abhorrence of it—yet "judgment is his strange work," and mercy is his delight.

3. His **justice**.

The concluding sentence of our text is understood by some to mean, that when he begins to punish "he will not make a full end," but "in judgment will remember mercy;" and it is certain that it will bear this sense, because, literally translated, it stands thus, "Clearing, he will not clear." But then, in this description of his attributes, God would wholly omit his justice, which we cannot suppose he would; nor would the words, in this sense, at all agree with the words that follow them.

We take them therefore as they are in our translation; and, according to their obvious meaning, they convey to us a most important truth. God does indeed take pleasure in the exercise of mercy; but still he will never violate the rights of justice; he will pardon; but not the impenitent or unbelieving. It is to those only who repent, and believe the Gospel, that he will finally approve himself a reconciled God. Nothing shall ever prevail upon him to "clear one guilty" person, who holds fast his iniquities, or will not wash them away in the Redeemer's blood. It may be asked, Will he not have respect to the multitude, of those who are in that predicament? Or will he not be softened when he shall see them weeping, and wailing, and gnashing their teeth, in Hell? We answer, No; he will by no means clear the guilty; if they will live and die in sin—then they must "eat the fruit of their own doings."

It is worthy of particular notice in this place, that Moses desired to see God's glory; and that God said, he "would make all his goodness pass before" him; from whence we are assured, that God's goodness and his glory, are as much seen in his justice, as in any other attribute whatever. Indeed, if God were destitute of impeccable justice—then he would cease to be either glorious or good; he could not be glorious, because not perfect; nor could he be good, because he would give licence to his creatures to violate his law, to throw his whole government into confusion, and to render themselves miserable; for even God himself could not make them happy, while sin lived and reigned in their hearts. It is by his justice that he deters men from sin; and teaches them to flee from that which would embitter even Paradise itself; and therefore justice, however severe may he its aspect upon sin and sinners, is indeed a part of the divine goodness, and a ray of the divine glory.

Inferences:

1. How wonderful is the efficacy of prayer.

Moses, notwithstanding an apparent prohibition, had interceded with God on behalf of the idolatrous Israelites, and had prevailed, [Exodus 32:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.10-14). Still however, God, to mark his displeasure, refused to go with the people any more; and said he would commit the guidance of them to an angel, [Exodus 32:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.34). But Moses, having thus far obtained a favorable audience, requested and urged that God himself should still go with them, as he had hitherto done. Nothing would satisfy him but this, [Exodus 33:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.15). When he had succeeded in this, he grew bolder still; and asked, what no living creature had ever dared to ask, "O God, I beseech you. show me your glory!" God approved of his boldness, and granted him this also.

Just so, what would he not grant to us, if we would ask in humility and faith? He says himself, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)."

O brethren! see in this instance the efficacy of prayer; and know, that if you asked forgiveness for the vilest of all sins, and prayed to have the presence of God with you all through this wilderness, and even begged to have the glory of God himself pass before your eyes, it would be given to you; your iniquities would be forgiven; you would have God for your constant protector and guide; and he would "shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus! Christ [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)." O pray without ceasing, and without doubting!

2. Of what importance is it to obtain a saving interest in Christ.

All, except the true Christian, have erroneous views of God; some are led by his majesty or justice to give way to desponding fears; others from a sight of his grace and mercy are induced to cherish presumptuous hopes. It is the Christian alone who sees his majesty tempered with mercy, and his mercy harmonizing with the demands of justice. No man can have this sight of God, until he is put into the cleft of the rock. What we said at the beginning, we now repeat, that to all who are not in Christ, God will be a consuming fire! Seek then, my brethren, to be "found in Christ." Then "you shall see the King in his beauty! [Isaiah 33:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.16-17)." Then you shall behold him transfigured, as it were, before your eyes [Matthew 17:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.1-2); and have a foretaste of that blessedness which you shall enjoy, when "you shall see him as you are seen, and know him even as you are known! 1 [John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.2) with, [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.12)."

#113

JEHOVAH A JEALOUS GOD

**[Exodus 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.14)**

"The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

Genuine religion is founded on the character of God. If he were, as many foolishly imagine him to be, "a Being like unto ourselves," a very small measure of duty and service would be all that he could reasonably require. But being a God of infinite majesty, and unbounded mercy, it is not possible to exercise towards him too great a measure of fear and love; nor can he be too strict in exacting at our hands the utmost that we are able to pay. In this view, the feeling of jealousy, which seems at first sight not to comport well with our notions of the Supreme Being, may very properly be ascribed to him; and we may justly say, as in our text, "The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

Let us contemplate:

1. The character of God, as here described.

Jealousy does exist in the bosom of Jehovah.

Jealousy in man is a painful feeling, arising from a suspicion that a measure of the regard due to us is transferred to another, who is in no respect entitled to it. And so deep is the wound which it inflicts, especially on a husband who conceives himself to have been dishonored by his wife, that nothing can ever heal it. "Jealousy," says Solomon, "is the rage of a man; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance; he will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though you give many gifts, [Proverbs 6:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.34-35)."

In God, also, does jealousy burn with a most vehement flame, "They have moved me to jealousy," says God, "and a fire is kindled in my anger, and it shall burn unto the lowest Hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them, and will spend my arrows upon them! [Deuteronomy 32:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.21-23)." To the same effect the Prophet Nahum also speaks, "God is jealous; and the Lord revenges; the Lord revenges, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries; and he reserves wrath for his enemies! [Nahum 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Nah 1.2)."

Nor is jealousy unworthy of God's character.

On account of his own inconceivable excellency, God deserves to stand without a rival in our affections. On account of what he has also done for us in creation, in providence, and in grace, especially in the gift of his only dear Son to die for us; and, I may add, on account of the relation in which he stands as "the Husband of his Church, *[Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5)*"—God has additional claims to our supreme regard; and if he sees that we are in any respect allowing anything to stand in competition with him, he may well be jealous.

In truth, he could not, consistently with his own perfections, dispense with these obligations, even for a moment. "He cannot give his glory to another, [Isaiah 42:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.8);" he would cease to be God, if he could allow his own inalienable rights to be withheld from him, and not express his indignation against the idolatrous offender. It is his very "name" and nature to be jealous! As to those who love him, he is a God of love and mercy. So is he, of necessity, to those who alienate their affections from him, "a jealous God, and a consuming fire! [Deuteronomy 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.23-24)."

From this view of his character, let us proceed to notice,

II. Our duty, as arising from God's jealousy.

We must not act in any way inconsistent with the relation which we bear to him.

1. We must not allow any alienation of our affections from him.

We are bound to love him with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength. Nothing is to be loved by us but in subordination to him, and for his sake. If anything under Heaven is permitted to share our regards with him, we are guilty of idolatry, [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.5). Nothing is excepted. The Apostle says, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth! [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2)." We must take care, therefore, not only not to love anything above him, but to "hate even father and mother, and our own lives also," in comparison with him.

2. We must not allow any abatement in our devotion to him.

God speaks of our espousals to him as a season of peculiar love, [Jeremiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.2). And at that season we are, for the most part, delighted with everything that may bring us into nearer communion with him, and express the feelings of our heart towards him. Then the reading of his word, and secret prayer, and an attendance on the public ordinances of religion are to us sources of the sublimest joy.

But if we become cold in these respects, and the ardor of our love abates, can we suppose that he will be pleased with us? Will he not say to us, as to the Church at Ephesus, "I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love! [Revelation 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4)." Surely, if an earthly husband will not endure a declension in his wife's regards, then much less will the God of Heaven and earth endure a diminution of ours.

3. We must not allow any unnecessary fellowship with things which have a tendency to draw us from him.

This is particularly marked in the preceding context. God requires his people not to form alliance with their heathen neighbors, nor to accept invitations to their idolatrous feasts; he commands them to "destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves," and to forbear even the mention of the gods whom they worshiped. He knew how soon "bad company corrupts good character;" and therefore he forbade any unnecessary fellowship with the heathen.

And has he not given a similar injunction to us also? Has he not declared, that, as soon may "light and darkness have communion with each other, or Christ with Belial, as a believer with an unbeliever;" and that, therefore, we must come out from the ungodly world, and be separate, and not touch the unclean thing, if we would have him for "a father unto us, and act as befits his sons and daughters, [2 Corinthians 6:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-18)."

This is a gracious and merciful warning, similar to what an affectionate husband would give his wife in relation to the society of one who was seeking to seduce her. And we must carefully attend to it; and be no more "of the world, than Christ himself was of the world." We must endeavor to "keep our garments clean" amidst the pollutions that are around us, [Revelation 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.4), and "hate even the garment spotted by the flesh, [Judges 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.23)." We must not be contented with avoiding evil, but must "abstain even from the appearance of it! [1 Thessalonians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.22)."

ADDRESS.

1. To those who think it an easy matter to serve God.

Though a woman may without any great difficulty perform her duties to an affectionate husband, where the bias of her natural affections is on the side of duty—it is not so easy to execute all that our God requires; for there we stem the current of nature, instead of being carried forward by it. Hence, when the whole people of Israel were so ready to bind themselves to serve their God, Joshua warned them, that they could not do it without divine aid, [Joshua 24:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.18-19). So let me say to you, that, if you will indeed give yourselves to the Lord, and take him as your portion, you must not engage in your own strength; but must look unto your "God, who alone can work in you either to will or to do."

2. To those who are unconscious of having given occasion to God to be jealous of them.

Look, not merely at your acts, but at the depositions of your heart and mind; and then judge. He says, "Give me your heart!" Now see whether your affections have not strayed; yes, whether you have not been like the wild donkey in the wilderness, whom none can overtake or keep from her mate, [Jeremiah 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.23-24). This is a humiliating, but a just, image of our conduct; and if we will not acknowledge it, remember that God is a jealous God!

3. To those who are ashamed of their past ways.

Among men, the unfaithfulness of a wife may have been such as to preclude a possibility of her restoration to the station she once held; but no departures, however grievous, shall prevent our restoration to the divine favor, if, with sincerity of heart, we humble ourselves before him, [Jeremiah 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.1). In the name of God himself, I am commanded to proclaim this, and to invite the most abandoned of you all to return to him, "Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt--you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,'" declares the LORD. "Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, "for I am your husband! [Jeremiah 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.12-14). "Return, then, unto him, so that your iniquity shall not be your ruin [Ezekiel 18:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.30)."

#114

THE THREE YEARLY FEASTS AT JERUSALEM

**[Exodus 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.23-24)**

"Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD, the God of Israel. I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the LORD your God."

Besides the weight of evidence arising from the accomplishment of prophecy, and the working of miracles, to prove the divine origin of the Mosaic dispensation; there is a great abundance of internal evidence in the dispensation itself, that corroborates and confirms our conclusions respecting it. What impostor that ever lived would have been weak enough to put his religion to such a test as this which we have now read? No one would have done it even for a few years, while he himself might be at hand to execute his own plans; much less would any man transmit such an ordinance to posterity, when one single instance of failure would be sufficient to subvert his whole religion. But, not to dwell on this, we will,

I. Draw your attention to the institution itself.

It was that all the males should go up to Jerusalem thrice in the year, from every quarter of the land, to keep a feast there unto the Lord.

1. Consider of what nature this appointment was.

It was partly political, and partly religious.

As a political ordinance, it was intended to cement the people together, and to keep them united in love. Had they no common center of union, no appointed means of communion, the different tribes might in process of time have forgotten their relation to each other, and have sought their own separate interests, instead of acting in concert with each other for the good of the whole. But by this expedient, all who had the greatest influence among them were brought frequently into the closest interaction with each other, and, on their return to their respective homes, diffused the same brotherly affection through the land.

As a religious ordinance, it was of singular importance, not only for the preserving of the people from idolatry, (to which they were always prone,) but for the impressing of their minds with a love to vital godliness.

The times appointed for their assembling at Jerusalem were:

1. At the feast of unleavened bread, to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt and from the sword of the destroying angel.

2. At the feast of weeks, that is, that of Pentecost, seven weeks after the Passover.

3. At the feast of tabernacles, or of in-gathering (as it was called), to commemorate their living in tents in the wilderness, and to render thanks for the fruits of the earth which they had gathered in. See [Deuteronomy 16:1-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.1-16).

Thus at the returning seasons of spring, of summer, and of autumn, they were required to commemorate the mercies which had been given to their nation, and with joy and gratitude to acknowledge their obligations to Jehovah.

They were ordered to rejoice before the Lord, and to make free-will offerings to him, "None were to come empty." Mark especially, [Deuteronomy 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.10); [Deuteronomy 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.15-16). What a blessed tendency had such seasons to keep alive in their minds a sense of their high privileges, and to spread a savor of true religion through every family in the land!

2. Consider what care God took to guard against the objections to which it was liable.

It would of necessity occur to all, that, by their observance of this ordinance, their land on every side would be exposed to the incursions of their enemies, who would not fail to take advantage of their absence, and to retaliate upon them the injuries they had sustained. In this view it should seem, that they would be highly criminal in leaving the women, the children, the aged, and the sick, in such a defenseless state; and that it would be more advisable to depute some from every quarter to represent the rest. But God would not be served by proxy; he commanded all to keep the feasts at the place prescribed; and, to remove all apprehensions about their property or their families, he pledged himself to protect their frontier, and so to overrule the minds of their enemies, that they should not even "desire" to invade their land at any of those seasons. They had seen how able he was to turn the minds of their enemies in Egypt, who had just before sent, yes even "thrust," them out of the land, laden with spoil; and he engaged that, to the remotest period of their existence as a nation, he would interpose for them with equal effect, if only they would trust their concerns to him, and serve him in his appointed way.

We indeed have nothing to do with the institution before us; nor do we much admire the formal custom (which seems to have arisen from it) of attending at the Lord's supper on the three great festivals of our Church, while we live in the neglect of that ordinance all the year besides. Nevertheless the institution is far from being uninteresting to us; as will be seen, while we,

II. Suggest some **observations** founded upon it.

Much might we speak respecting the providence of God, who so miraculously wrought upon the minds of their enemies, that no infidel could ever adduce one single instance wherein this promise failed. We might speak also respecting the happiness of true religion; and draw a parallel between the Jews assembling for their solemn feasts, and Christians universally uniting in the same grateful acknowledgments and heavenly joys. But there are two observations, to which, as arising clearly out of the subject, and as being of singular importance, we would limit your attention:

1. The service of God is of paramount obligation.

We have seen what strong objections might have been made to the ordinance before us, which yet was required punctually to be observed. And we know that carnal reason has much to suggest in opposition to the commands of God, much that is founded in fact and in the experience of mankind: 'If I serve my God according to the requisitions of his word, I shall be forced to deny myself many things that are pleasing to flesh and blood; I shall also be singular, and shall expose myself to the derision and contempt of those who are hostile to true religion; my very friends may turn against me; and I may suffer materially in my temporal interests.'

All this, and more than this, is very true; but it affords no reason whatever for disobeying the commands of God. The Jews would doubtless on many occasions have preferred their domestic ease and comfort, or the occupations in which they were engaged, to the fatigue and trouble of a long expensive journey. But the command was positive; and so is ours; it admits of no excuses; we are expressly required to "deny ourselves, to take up our cross daily, and to follow Christ;" and it is on these terms alone that we can be his disciples. If called to "forsake father and mother, and houses and lands, for the Gospel's sake," we must forsake, yes and "hate them all," if they stand in competition with Christ, or would draw us from our allegiance to him.

We must not love even life itself in comparison with him, but cheerfully sacrifice it at any time, and in any way that our fidelity to him may require.

Thus must the Christian say, "Tell me not of difficulties, or dangers; it is not necessary that I should be rich, or honored, or even that I should live; but it is necessary that I should obey my God. A heated furnace, or a den of lions, is nothing to me; duty is all. If I die for conscience sake, I rejoice that I am counted worthy to suffer in so good a cause."

This was the mind of Paul, "None of these things move me," says he, "neither do I count my life dear unto me;" "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Lord's sake." O that we might be like him:

men of piety,

men of principle,

men of firmness and decision!

2. Those who serve the Lord shall be saved by him.

The trust which the Jews at those stated seasons reposed in God was never disappointed. Nor shall ours be, though all the hosts both of men and devils were confederate against us. The challenge is justly given us: "Who ever trusted in the Lord, and was confounded?"

There is a great fault among religious people in relation to this; many are distressing themselves with doubts and fears, 'Shall I persevere to the end? Shall I be saved at last?' A holy caution is doubtless very befitting in every state; but not a slavish fear. Our concern should be to serve God. It is his concern, if I may so speak, to save us. Even from temporal trials he can, and will, protect us, as far as is for our good.

See a most striking illustration of this truth in [Acts 18:9-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.9-18). To allay Paul's fears, God promised to protect him in Corinth—a city proverbially abandoned to debauchery. He preached there eighteen months unmolested. At last a violent assault was made upon him by all the Jews in the city; but the judge would take no cognizance of their complaints, and drove them away from his judgment-seat. The Greeks, who had joined with the Jews, being irritated by this conduct, laid hold on Sosthenes, whom they conceived to be a friend of Paul's, and beat him in the very presence of the judge; but Paul, on whose account the clamor was raised, escaped unhurt, and continued in the city a good while longer without any injury whatever; and at last departed from it in peace. So faithful are the promises of God!

As for spiritual and eternal evils, he will assuredly protect us from them. "Who is he who shall harm us, if we be followers of that which is good?" Satan, it is true, will never for a moment relinquish his desire to assault us; that roaring lion will never intermit his wish to devour; but God will be as "a wall of fire round about us," and "his grace shall be at all times sufficient for us;" "nor shall any temptation take us beyond what we are able to bear, or without a way to escape from it."

"Know then, brethren, in whom you have believed; that he is able to keep that which you have committed to him." Know that, if only your eyes were opened, you might at this moment see horses of fire and chariots of fire all around you, and a host of angels encamped around you for your protection. Invade not any longer the province of your God. Leave to him the care of preserving you; and confine your solicitude to the serving and honoring of him. This is your duty; it is also your privilege. The direction of God himself is this, "Commit your souls to him in well-doing as into the hands of a faithful Creator." Be assured that he will not fail you; and that "He who has promised, is able also to perform."

#115

THE VEIL OF MOSES

**[Exodus 34:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.33-35)**

"When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD."

It is an established and invariable truth, that "those who honor God, shall surely be honored by him." We have the clearest evidence of this, both in the antediluvian and patriarchal ages. Did Abel honor God by his offering, Enoch by his walk, and Noah by his faithful warning of an ungodly world? They also were blessed with signal manifestations of the divine favor. Did Abraham, Lot, or Job display singular piety? They were as singularly protected, delivered, and exalted by their God.

The same we observe of Moses. He was faithful to his God, when all Israel, not excepting Aaron himself, revolted from him; and to him did God grant so bright a glory, that none of his countrymen were able to fix their eyes upon him; insomuch that he was constrained to put a veil upon his face, in order to facilitate their access to him, and restore his usual opportunities of conversing with them. This veiling of his face is to be the subject of our present consideration; and we shall notice it in a two-fold view:

I. This veiling of Moses' face was **a kind expedient**.

The face of Moses shone with a dazzling and overpowering splendor.

He had for forty days and nights been communing with God upon Mount Sinai; and it pleased God, for the confirmation and increase of his authority among the people, to send him down to them with a luster upon his countenance, that should at once convince them whose servant he was, and whose authority he bore.

At the first sight of him, both Aaron and all the people were affrighted. This was the natural effect of that guilt which they had so recently contracted. They feared that he was sent as an avenger to punish their iniquity. When they found that their organs of sight were too weak to behold the bright effulgence of his glory, they felt how unable they must be to withstand the terror of his arm.

As the brightness of Moses' face was supernatural, so the effect of it on the people was peculiar to that occasion. But there is an awe inspired by the presence of every godly man, in proportion to the weight of his character and the eminence of his piety. Herod, though a king, "feared John, because he knew that he was a just and holy man." And Job tells us, that at his presence "the aged rose, and the young men hid themselves."

To facilitate their access to him, he adopted the expedient mentioned in the text.

He was not conscious of the splendor with which his countenance was irradiated, until their inability to behold him convinced him of it. Just so, those who bear much of the divine image are not conscious of their own superiority; their minds are fixed on their own defects rather than on their excellencies, and, from their deep views of their remaining corruptions, they are ready to count themselves "less than the least of all saints."

When he perceived the effect which the sight of him produced, instead of being elated with the honor conferred upon him, or desiring to employ it for the maintenance of his own authority, he put a veil upon his face to conceal its brightness, and called them to him that he might impart unto them the instructions he had received from God. As often as he returned to commune with God—he took off the veil, as not either necessary or befitting in the divine presence; but in all his fellowship with the people, he covered his face.

On this point many useful thoughts occur; but we shall reserve them for the close of our subject, where they will be more advantageously suggested in a way of practical improvement.

II. This veiling of Moses' face was **an instructive emblem**.

Whether Moses himself understood the full signification of his own act, we cannot say; it is probable he did not; for certain it is, that the prophets in many instances could not see the full scope of their own prophecies. But, whether he understood it or not, we are assured, on infallible authority, that his covering his face with the veil was intended by God to represent,

1. The darkness of that dispensation.

The Mosaic dispensation was "a shadow of good things to come;" but what the substance was, none could exactly ascertain. The very tables which at this time Moses had brought down from God, contained a law, the nature, intent, or duration of which none of them could understand. They could not discern its spiritual import, but judged of it only by the letter.

They thought it to be a covenant of life; whereas it was not at all designed "to give life," but rather to be "a ministration of condemnation and death."

They supposed it was to continue to the end of time; when it was merely given for a season, until the things which it prefigured should be accomplished.

Its splendor was veiled from their sight, as was the brightness of Moses' face; and Paul informs us, that the expedient to which Moses resorted, was intended to show that the law was in itself "glorious, 2 Corinthians 3:7," but that "the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of it, [2 Corinthians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.13)."

2. The blindness of the human mind.

There were in the Jews of those days, and there are at this hour, a blindness of mind, and an obduracy of heart—which render them almost invincibly adverse to the truth of God. We see it, and wonder at it, in them; but are unconscious of it in ourselves, and insensible of it as a matter of personal experience. Yet are we, in fact, greater monuments of obduracy than they; because there was a veil over their dispensation, which is removed from ours. Did they continue stiff-necked and rebellious, amidst all the mercies and judgments with which they were visited? So do we: The "God of this world has blinded us."

"Our understanding is darkened."

"We are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, and because of the blindness of our hearts."

We "hate the light, and will not come to it, lest our deeds should be reproved."

Now this propensity in human nature to reject the truth, and to "account it foolishness," was intended to be marked by this significant action of the Jewish lawgiver. Paul explains it in this very way, "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts." [2 Corinthians 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.14-15)

3. The benefit to be expected from their promised Messiah.

The occasional removal of his veil when he went into the presence of his God, showed, that it was not always to continue in the dispensation, but that at a future period it should be removed, and the dispensation itself "abolished." The Messiah, to whom they were constantly directed to look, as to that promised seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed, was to take away both the foregoing veils; the one, by fulfilling the law in all its parts; and the other, by communicating his Holy Spirit to all his followers. Then the true nature of that law would be fully understood; and Christ would be recognized as "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes." Then should the glory of that dispensation be clearly seen, and the incomparably brighter glory of the Christian dispensation be seen also.

For this view of the subject we are also indebted to the Apostle Paul; who tells us that the Gospel, as "a ministration of the Spirit" and "of righteousness," was to succeed, and to eclipse, the law; and that "when the Jews should turn to the Lord, the Messiah would take away that veil" from their hearts, and bring them into the light and "liberty" of the children of God, [2 Corinthians 3:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.7-11); [2 Corinthians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.16-17).

In the former part of our discourse we forbore to make several remarks, which we reserved for this place; and which, while they elucidate the subject, will afford rich instruction,

1. To ministers.

We have seen what Moses did; and in some respects we should imitate him; but in others we should adopt a directly opposite conduct.

It was truly amiable in him to condescend to the infirmities of the people, and to veil his own glory for their good. Thus every minister should prefer the instruction of his people, to the display of his own talents, or the aggrandizement of his own name. It is pitiful indeed to court applause for our learning, when we should be converting souls to Christ.

Paul, qualified as he was to astonish men with his abilities and talents, "would rather speak five words to the understandings of men, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

Our blessed Lord "spoke as men were able to hear it;" and reserved his fuller instructions until his hearers were better qualified to receive them.

Paul also gave only "milk to babes," while "to those who were of full age he administered meat." Thus should we do, lest we blind or dazzle men by an unseasonable display even of truth itself.

But are we, like Moses, to use concealment? No; the Apostle expressly guards us against imitating Moses in this particular, "NOT as Moses," says he, "NOT as Moses, who put a veil over his face;" but, on the contrary, we must "use great plainness of speech, [2 Corinthians 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.12-13)."

There is nothing in the Gospel that requires concealment, nor anything that admits of it; we must "declare unto men the whole counsel of God." We must discriminate so far as to judge what will, and what will not, "be profitable to men;" but the truth we must declare without the smallest mixture or reserve; and "by manifestation of the truth must commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, [2 Corinthians 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.2)." It must be our labor to rend away the veil from the hearts of our hearers; for "if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are lost, 2 Corinthians 3:13 to [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)." "The glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ;" and to show them that God's glory in all its brightness, is to be the one object of our labor; just as it is the unwearied effort of the devil to conceal it from their view, [2 Corinthians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.13) to [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6). The beauty of the passage is lost if the two chapters be not read together.

2. To hearers.

You should be aware that there is a veil upon your hearts, else you will never pray unto the Lord to remove it. Even the Apostle Paul, learned as he was in all biblical knowledge, had, "as it were, scales fall from his eyes," when God was pleased to lead him to a clear view of his Gospel.

So must "the eyes of your understanding also be enlightened," before you can "discern aright the things of the Spirit." But though God has appointed ministers to instruct you, you are all at liberty, yes you are required, to go yourselves, like Moses, into the presence of your God. Do not however veil your faces before him, but go exactly as you are. Your fellow-creatures could not endure to see all that is in your hearts; nor would it be of any use to reveal it to them; but "to God all things are naked and open;" and the more fully you unbosom yourself to him, the more will his blessing come upon you. It is by putting off the veil from your own hearts, that you shall with "open unveiled face behold his glory;" and, by beholding it, "be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."

Truly you shall, in a measure, experience the same benefit as Moses did; you shall be "beautified with salvation;" "the beauty of the Lord your God shall be upon you;" and all that behold you shall be "constrained to acknowledge that God is with you of a truth."

When this effect is produced, "let your light shine before men." You are not called to veil it, but rather to display it; not indeed for your own honor (that would be a base unworthy motive), but for the honor of your God, that those who "behold your good works may glorify your Father that is in Heaven."

#116

THE OFFERINGS FOR THE TABERNACLE

**[Exodus 36:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 36.5-7)**

And they spoke unto Moses, saying, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work."

The followers of Christ are supposed to regard this as their favorite maxim, 'The greater the sinner, the greater the saint.' They are considered also as approving an inference that may be deduced from it, namely, that it is advisable to commit some gross crime, in order to augment our future piety. We trust however, that such calumnies, though often affirmed, are not really credited. The least consideration would convince a man, that such a sentiment could find no place in a religious mind.

But though we disclaim any such licentious tenets, (yes, and utterly abhor them,) yet we must say, that "he who has been forgiven much, will love much;" and that "godly sorrow," in proportion as it exists in the soul, "will work indignation and revenge" against all our spiritual enemies, and will lead us invariably to "bring forth works fit for repentance." This truth is strongly illustrated in the history before us.

The whole nation of the Jews had revolted from God, and worshiped the golden calf. For this God had threatened them with utter destruction; but, upon the intercession of Moses, had reversed his decree, and had received them again to his favor. Instead of forsaking them utterly, he had even determined to dwell among them as their God; and had ordered a tabernacle to be made for him, with everything else which would be needed for the services they were to present unto him. For the constructing of this he relied on the liberality of his people; and the outcome proved that his reliance was well placed; and that their sense of the obligations conferred upon them was sufficiently powerful for the occasion. The account given us of their zeal is truly edifying. It will be proper to notice,

I. The object of it.

They had lately shown an unhappy zeal in the service of a false God; and now they labored to evince their gratitude to Jehovah, and to exalt the honor of his name. This desire filled the whole nation, and was the mainspring of those exertions which they now made.

And who must not acknowledge this to have been an object worthy of their supreme attention? Survey the objects which occupy the minds of men, and to the pursuit of which they willingly devote their wealth and labor! The gratifications of sense, how base are they, in comparison with that which now animated the Jewish people. The attainment of honor, or the acquisition of wealth, how empty are they in comparison with that nobler end which Israel pursued! Theirs was worth ambition, and might well provoke them all to holy emulation. To have Jehovah resident among them. to provide for him a suitable habitation, to have proper means of access to him, and of communications from him, and, finally, to possess before their eyes a pledge of his continued care, and his eternal love. This was as much beyond the poor objects of common ambition, as the contemplations of reason and philosophy exceed the dreams of children!

Happy would it be for us, if we all formed the same judgment, and were all penetrated with the same desire!

II. The operation.

There are two things in their conduct which we cannot fail to notice and admire; namely, their liberality and their diligence. No sooner did they know what things would be accepted, than they vied with each other in supplying them. Whatever any man possessed that could be applied to the projected structure, he deemed it instantly, "Corban"; and without hesitation consecrated it to the service of his God. Their ornaments, of whatever kind, were stripped off; all, both men and women, being more desirous to beautify the sanctuary of their God, than to adorn themselves. Each seemed to think himself rich, not in proportion to what he retained for his own use, but to the supplies he was able to contribute. The poorest among them were as glad to give their wood, their rams' skins, or their brass, as the richest were their jewels and their gold.

Nor were they less solicitous to work, than to supply materials for working. The women engaged in spinning the goats' hair and in embroidering the linen, while the men were occupied in forming the wood and metals for their respective uses. Those who could teach were as glad to instruct others, as others were to receive instruction; and all desired, in whatever way they could, to advance the work.

Now it is in this way that genuine piety always operates. The converts in every age are represented as coming unto God, "their silver and their gold with them. Compare [Isaiah 60:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.17); [Acts 2:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.44-45); [2 Corinthians 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.1-4)." It is characteristic of them all, that they are "a peculiar people, zealous for good works".

III. The effect.

Such was the conduct of all who were "wise-hearted," and "whose spirits made them willing" to glorify their God. Mark how often these expressions occur in this and the preceding chapter. The effect was, that, in a very few days, the abundance of the gifts exceeded the occasion for them; and it became necessary to issue through the camp a prohibition against adding anything further to the store.

O what might not be done for the honor of God and the benefit of mankind, if all exerted themselves according to their ability! How easy would it be to erect places for the worship of God; to provide accommodations for the poor; to administer:

instruction to the ignorant,

consolation to the troubled,

and relief to the distressed!

Such a union of zealous exertions as we see exhibited on this occasion, would in a great measure drive affliction from the world, and turn this valley of tears into a paradise!

Improvement.

1. Let the cause of God be dear unto our souls.

We have not, it is true, any such edifice to raise, and therefore may be supposed to have no such call for zeal and diligence. But is there not a spiritual temple which God desires to have erected for him, and wherein he may be glorified? Yes, is not that temple infinitely more dear to him than any which can be formed by human hands? The material tabernacle was only a shadow of that better habitation wherein God delights to dwell.

Should not that then be an object of our concern? Should not the manifestations of his presence, and the establishment of his kingdom in the world, call forth our zeal, as much as the erection of that fabric in the wilderness did the zeal of Israel?

Well may it shame the world at large, that every trifle occupies their minds, more than this; and even the people of God themselves have reason to blush, that their feelings are so acute in reference to their own interests and honor—and so dull in what regards the honor and interests of their God.

2. Let us cordially and universally cooperate for the advancement of it.

It is generally thought that the duty of propagating Christianity pertains to ministers alone. But it is very little that a minister can do without the cooperation of his people. Multitudes will never come to hear him, or afford him any opportunities of benefitting their souls; and the greater part even of those who do attend his ministry, gain little from it, for lack of having the subjects which they hear impressed upon their minds in a way of private instruction.

All should contribute, according to their ability, to advance the salvation of those around them. Masters should take the superintendence of their families, and parents of their children. The more enlightened among the people should endeavor to instruct their unenlightened neighbors. The visiting of the sick, the relieving of the needy, the conducting of Sunday schools for the benefit of the poorer classes, these, and such like works, should be regarded by all, both men and women, as their common province, and followed by all according to their respective abilities. See [Romans 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.3); [Romans 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.12) and [Philippians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.3).

The people of Israel deemed it not so much their duty, as their privilege, to contribute to the raising of the tabernacle; and this is the light in which we should view our calls to exertion. Do any account it hard to sacrifice somewhat of their time and interest in such a cause? O "tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Askelon!" "Let not the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy." Let us rather unite, all of us, with willing hearts, in the service of our God; and, "whatever our hand finds to do, let us do it with all our might!"

#117

THE TABERNACLE SERVICE COMMENCED

**[Exodus 40:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 40.1-2)**

"The Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: On the first day of the first month shall you set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation."

The beginning of a new year is, not without reason, considered by professing Christians in general as a fit occasion for more than ordinary attention to religious duties. I say not, indeed, that the generality of Christians actually so employ that hallowed time; for, in fact, the whole season wherein we commemorate the incarnation of our blessed Lord is by the generality made rather a time for carnal mirth. But still, this is acknowledged by all to be rather an abuse of our religious privileges than a suitable improvement of them. There is in the minds of all a consciousness, that to review our past errors with penitence, and to prepare for a more diligent performance of our duty in future, is the proper employment of that period, when we are entering, as it were, upon a new scene of things.

In my text, "the first day of the first month" was appointed by God himself as the time for commencing the services of the tabernacle, after the Israelites had abode in the wilderness nearly a whole year. Doubtless, both Moses and the various workers had used great diligence to get every vessel ready for the service which it was destined to perform; and great exertion must have been made on the day here spoken of, wherein the tabernacle and all the vessels of it were not only got ready for their destined use, but were employed in the very service for which they had been formed. But the command of Jehovah animated the people on this occasion; and, I hope, their conduct will encourage us also to prosecute with befitting earnestness the labors which this season calls for at our hands.

For the advancement of this blessed object, I will set before you,

I. The work here assigned to Moses.

He was ordered now to set up the tabernacle with everything belonging to it, and to commence the service of it. A pattern of every part of it had been shown to him on Mount Sinai, and according to that pattern had everything been formed. No less than eight times in this one chapter is it said, that Moses did everything "as the Lord had commanded him."

For all this care, both in relation to the pattern given him, and to the execution of it by himself and all under his command, there was, no doubt, a very important reason. The very injunction given him at the time of showing to him the pattern, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount, [Exodus 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.40)," strongly marked, that, in the divine mind, there was some very important end to be accomplished by it. What that end was we are informed in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The tabernacle itself, and all its vessels, were intended to be "an example and shadow of heavenly things," that is, of the things revealed to us under the Christian dispensation. In a word, the law and its ordinances were intended to give a just representation of the Gospel and its mysteries; and the two were to accord with each other in every minutest part, even as an impression with the seal by which it was made, [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5). Behold, then, here was the work assigned to Moses, namely, to give to the Jewish people such an exhibition of the Gospel and its mysteries as would suffice for them under that shadowy dispensation, and prepare them for that fuller manifestation which would be given to the Church by the ministry of Christ and of his holy Apostles.

The tabernacle itself was a representation of Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)," and who in his incarnate state "dwelt (tabernacled) among us, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)."

The priests, the altar, and the sacrifices, shadowed him forth as "the Great High-Priest," through whom alone we can come to God, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22); and who, being himself the altar that sanctified the gift, [Hebrews 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.10), "offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, [Hebrews 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.12)," even "an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling savor [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)." The altar of incense also designated that same divine Savior as ever living to make intercession for us, [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24). The candlestick also, and the table of showbread, represented him as "the light of the world, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12)," and as "the bread of life, of which whoever eats shall live forever, [John 6:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.48); [John 6:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.58)." The lavers too represented him as "the fountain opened for sin [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1)," in which every one "who washes is cleansed from all sin, [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5)." The same may be said of every minute vessel in the sanctuary; they all shadowed forth the Lord Jesus in some part of his Mediatorial office.

But I must by no means omit to mention the ark, in which the tables of the Law were placed, and which was covered by the mercy-seat of precisely the same dimensions, and which represented him as fulfilling the Law for us, [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4), and as obtaining mercy for all who would come to God by him, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

Now all of these, whether the vessels, or the people who officiated in the use of them, "were anointed with oil, verses 13-15," to show, that even Christ himself, "being anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, [Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.7)," had "the Spirit given to him without measure for the performance of his work, [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34);" and that no person or service can ever be "acceptable to God," unless it id "sanctified by the Holy Spirit, [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16)."

Let us next turn our attention to,

II. The corresponding work that is now called for at our hands.

We are now called, every one of us,

1. To realize in our minds the things here shadowed forth.

The wonders of Redemption should occupy our attention every day; but on this day especially should we be coming to God in "that new and living way which Christ has opened for us through the veil." We should go to the Lord Jesus Christ as our sacrifice, and as the altar that sanctifies that sacrifice, and as the priest that offers it. Under all the characters that have been before contemplated concerning him, we should apply to him, "receiving everything out of his fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)." From day to day, as long as the Jewish polity existed, were the various sacrifices and services of the Mosaic ritual renewed; and as long as the world shall stand, must we look to Jesus as here shadowed forth:

feeding on him as our bread,

washing in him as our laver, and

living altogether by faith on him! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20).

Would to God that every one of you would this very day begin these services, if you have hitherto been strangers to them; or prosecute them with redoubled ardor, if you have already entered on this life of faith!

2. To get them spiritually wrought within our own souls.

We have said that Christ was mystically shadowed forth in all the services of that day. And this is true. But it is also true that the life of God in our own souls was spiritually represented. Yes, brethren, "we are temples of the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19);" and "God will come down and dwell in us, [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16);" yes, "Christ will dwell in our hearts by faith, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17)." And in us"the sacrifices of prayer and praise are to be offered to him continually, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15)." In truth, we ourselves are to be living sacrifices to him, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1); and, as a holy priesthood, we are to be offering ourselves to him, [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5).

Every faculty of our souls is to be sanctified to his service by the Holy Spirit, lightened by his light, and nourished by his grace. We are, in fact, to be "lights in this dark world, [Philippians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15)," and "witnesses for Jehovah, that he alone is God, [Isaiah 43:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.12)."

My dear brethren, this conformity to Christ is at once our duty and our privilege; and to "grow up into him in all things as our living Head," is the work of every day throughout our whole lives, [Ephesians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15). Now, then, I call you to commence this work, if it is not yet begun; or to proceed in it with augmented ardor, if, through the grace of God, it is already begun in your souls.

And for your encouragement, I will venture to affirm, that the tokens of God's approbation which were given to Moses, shall as really, if not so sensibly, be renewed to you; for "the glory of the Lord shall fill" your souls, and the most signal manifestations of his love shall abide with you, both in this world, and in the world to come!

And now I appeal to you, whether this will not be a good employment for the season on which we have just entered?

Who does not regret that he has lost so much time already? Moses, considering how many months had been consumed in the wilderness before he began his work, could not have well completed it before. But who among you might not have begun long before, and been now both serving and enjoying God in a tenfold greater degree, if he had duly improved his time, and prosecuted his work with unremitting care?

Let it then be your endeavor now to "redeem the time;" that, if this be the destined period that is to put an end to your earthly existence, you may enter with joy into the presence of your Lord, and be for ever happy in the bosom of your God.

#118

ERECTING OF THE TABERNACLE

**[Exodus 40:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 40.33-34)**

"And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

A union of many hands and much zeal must of necessity expedite any work that is undertaken. So it proved in the constructing of the tabernacle; the whole of which, notwithstanding the exquisite skill and workmanship with which every part of it was formed, was in about the space of seven months completely finished, so as to be capable of being all erected, and brought into use in one single day. Such activity could not but be highly pleasing to God, in whose service it was employed. Accordingly we find that he immediately testified his approbation of it by a most astonishing act of condescension and grace.

That we may see the subject in its true light, let us inquire into,

I. The work here referred to.

This was the constructing of the tabernacle; a work of singular excellency and importance, whether it is considered in itself, or in its typical design. Let us view it:

1. In itself.

It will be proper to notice briefly its form. There was a court about sixty yards long, and thirty yards broad, enclosed by linen curtains, suspended about nine feet high on brazen pillars. Within that, at the west end of it, was a structure, about eighteen yards long, and six broad, made with boards of Shittim wood, covered with gold, and fastened together by bars of the same materials. The boards were forty-eight in number, fixed in ninety-six sockets of silver, each of them about a hundred pounds weight. The whole was covered first with curtains of fine embroidered linen, and then with three other coverings, one of goats' hair, another of rams' skins dyed red, and another of badgers' skins.

This structure was divided into two apartments, called the holy place, and the holy of holies; the former being about twelve yards by six; and the latter six yards square, and as many high. The entrance to each of these was from the east, (as was that of the outward court also,) each leading to the other through a veil of embroidered linen.

The furniture of the whole was quite appropriate. In the outer court, (to which all clean Hebrews and proselytes had access,) was the brazen altar, on which the sacrifices were offered, and the brazen laver, in which the priests and Levites were to purify themselves. In the holy place (into which the priests were admitted) was the candlestick, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense. In the holy of holies (where the high-priest alone entered, and that only on one day in the year,) was the ark, covered by the mercy-seat; on which abode the Shechinah (the bright cloud, the symbol of the Deity), between cherubim. In the ark the tables of the law were deposited; and at a subsequent period, Aaron's rod that budded, and the golden pot that had the manna, were laid up before it. Compare [Hebrews 9:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.4-5) with [1 Kings 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.9).

We need not enter minutely into these things; it will be more instructive, after taking this summary view of the whole, to notice it,

2. In its typical design.

In interpreting the types, we must bear in mind that the greater part of them had reference to Christ in one view, and to his people in another view. This was particularly the case with respect to the tabernacle.

The tabernacle typified, in the first place, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord himself, speaking of his own body, says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); [John 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.21)." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, his body is represented as that "more perfect tabernacle in which he ministered, and which was not made with hands, as the other was, but by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, [Hebrews 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.2); [Hebrews 9:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9-11)." The correspondence between the two is obvious; for "in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;" and through his sin-atoning sacrifice, and sanctifying grace, and prevailing intercession, we all are brought into a state of acceptance with God. On the other hand, as there was no way to the Mercy-seat but through the Holy Place, "so no man can now come unto the Father but by him."

It further typified the Church, which, though base on the outside, "is all glorious within." In that alone is any acceptable sacrifice offered unto God. In that alone are the sanctifying operations of the Spirit experienced. In that alone is the bread of life administered, or the light of truth exhibited. In that alone does God manifest his glory, or communicate his saving benefits. Hence the beloved disciple, speaking of the Church in the latter days, says, "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God, [Revelation 21:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.3)."

Once more, it typified Heaven also. Remarkable is the language of the Apostle, who says, "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us! [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)." There, not the symbol of the Deity, but all the glory of the Godhead, is unveiled! There the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving ascend up with a sweet fragrance unto God continually. There the illumination, the nourishment, the purity of every soul is complete. No veil obstructs the view, or forbids the access, of any individual; the beatific vision is given to all, and the full fruition of their God is the portion of all the saints.

If we judged only from the minuteness of the orders which God gave respecting this work, we should conceive highly of its importance; but still more shall we see it, if we consider,

II. The testimony of his approbation with which God honored it.

We must bear in mind that Israel had sinned a grievous sin; that, at the intercession of Moses, God had turned away from his holy indignation, and promised to continue with them as their God. In token of his reconciliation, he ordered this tabernacle to be made for him; and the very day it was erected, he came down visibly to take possession of it as his peculiar residence, and so filled it with his glory, that Moses himself could no longer stand to minister there.

Now while this testified his approbation of their work, and of those who had been engaged in it—it showed to all future generations, that He will return to those in love and mercy, who return to him in a way of penitence and active obedience.

In this view, we are led to consider this event, not as relating to the Israelites merely, but as speaking to us. Where is the nation, where the church, where the individual, who has not given just occasion to the Lord to shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure? Yet where is there to be found, in the annals of the world, one single instance, wherein God has turned a deaf ear to the supplications of a real penitent? Instances to the contrary are without number.

God, as in the history before us, has seemed ambitious, as it were, to make "his grace abound, not only where sin had abounded," but (I had almost said) in proportion as sin had abounded. We must be careful not to "limit the Holy One of Israel," whose "ways and thoughts are as far above ours, as the heavens are above the earth." We are apt to forget that he is the same God now, as he was in the days of old; but "he changes not;" and if his manifestations be less visible than formerly, they are not a whit less real, or less gracious, [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16) and [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21).

APPLICATION.

The day on which this work was finished was the first day of the year. What a blessed commencement was it of the new year! How sweet must have been the retrospect to all who had been engaged in the work, when they saw that they had not spent the preceding year in vain! Each could call to mind some sacrifices which he had made for God, or some exertions used in his service; and they would enter on the new year with a determined purpose to serve and honor God more than they had ever yet done.

Beloved brethren, is it so with you? Have you in your consciences an evidence that you have lived for God, and made it a principal object of your life to serve and honor him? But, however the past year may have been spent, think now what work you have to do for him, and how you may perfect it with expedition and care. And O that we may speedily have such a day among us as the Israelites enjoyed; all of us presenting to him our souls and bodies for his habitation, and receiving from him undoubted tokens of his favorable regard!

Leviticus

#119

THE BURNT-OFFERING

**[Leviticus 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 1.3-4)**

"If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him."

The institution of sacrifices may be considered as nearly contemporaneous with the world itself. As soon as man had fallen, he needed an atonement; and an atonement was provided for him by God himself; who promised, that "the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head;" nor can we reasonably doubt, but that God himself, who, we are told, "clothed our first parents with skins," appointed the beasts whose skins were used for that purpose, to be offered up first in sacrifice to him. Whence, if God had not originally sanctioned it, would Abel think of offering up "the firstlings of his flock?" And why should that very sacrifice receive such a signal testimony of the divine approbation? Even the distinction between clean and unclean animals was known before the flood; and an additional number of the clean were taken into the ark, that there might be with which to offer sacrifice unto the Lord, when the deluge should be abated. Abraham also, and Melchizedek, and Job, all offered sacrifices, before the Mosaic ritual was known; so that Moses did not so much introduce new institutions, as regulate those which had existed before; and give such directions respecting them, as should suit the dispensation which his ritual was intended to prefigure.

Sacrifices are of two kinds: propitiatory sacrifices, and ceremonial sacrifices.

The propitiatory sacrifices to make atonement for sins committed.

The ceremonial sacrifices to render thanks for mercies received.

Of the propitiatory sacrifices we have an account of no less than six different sorts; (all of which are stated in the seven first chapters of Leviticus;) "the burnt-offering, the meat-offering, the sin-offering, the trespass-offering, the offering of consecrations, and the peace-offering, [Leviticus 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.37). They were not altogether propitiatory; but are numbered with the propitiatory sacrifices, because they were in part burnt upon the brazen altar." It is of the first of these that we are to speak at this time—the burnt-offering.

We shall notice,

I. The the burnt-offering itself.

The burnt-offering was the most ancient and dignified of all the sacrifices, and at the same time the most frequent; there being two every day in the year, except on the Sabbath-days, when the number was always doubled.

The things of which it consisted, varied according to the ability of the offerer; it might be taken from among the herd, or the flock, or of birds, see verses 10, 14; so that no one might have any excuse for withholding it at its proper season. By this accommodation of the offering to the circumstances of men, it was intended, that every one should evince the sincerity of his heart in presenting unto God the best offering that he could; and that no one should be discouraged from approaching God by the consideration that he was not able to present to him such an offering as he could wish.

"The turtle-dove or young pigeon "was as acceptable to God as the "ram" or "bullock"—provided it was offered with a suitable frame of mind. Indeed the directions respecting the poor man's offering were as minute and particular as any, verses 4–17; which showed, that God has no respect of persons; and that his ministers also must at their peril be as anxious for the welfare, and as attentive to the interests, of the poorest of their flock—as of the most opulent.

One thing was indispensable; that the offering, whether of the herd or of the flocks, must be "a male, and without blemish." It was to be the most excellent of its kind, in order the more fitly to shadow forth the excellencies of our incarnate God; who alone, of all that ever partook of our nature, was truly without sin. Had the smallest imperfection attached to him, he could not have been an atoning sacrifice for our sins. The utmost care therefore was to be taken in examining the offerings which prefigured him, that they might, as far as possible, exemplify his spotless perfection.

II. The manner in which the burnt-offering was presented.

Here also we notice very minute directions respecting:

1. The offerer.

He must bring his sacrifice "of his own voluntary will." He must feel his need of mercy, and be very desirous to obtain it. He must see that no mercy can be found, except by means of a sacrifice; and he must thankfully embrace the opportunity afforded him; not accounting God his debtor for the sacrifice offered to him, but himself a debtor to God, for his permission to approach him in such a way.

He must bring his sacrifice to "the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, before the Lord." While, in doing this, he acknowledged that the Lord dwelt there in a peculiar manner, he publicly, before all the people, acknowledged himself a sinner like unto his brethren, and needing mercy no less than the vilest of the human race. Not the smallest degree of self-preference could be allowed; but all must be made to see and feel that there was but one way of salvation for ruined man.

Further, he was to "put his hand upon the head of his offering." By this significant action, he still more plainly declared, that he must perish, if ever his sins should remain upon him; and that all his hope of acceptance with God was founded on the vicarious sufferings of this devoted victim.

2. The offering itself.

This must be "slain," (whether by the offerer or the priest, is uncertain, We apprehend it was by the priest, or some Levite assisting him. See verse 5. The same ambiguity as to the meaning of the word, "they," may be seen in [2 Chronicles 29:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.22); but it is plain, from verse 4 of that chapter, that neither the priests nor the offerers killed the sacrifices; but the Levites killed them, and the priests received the blood,) and its "blood be sprinkled round about upon the altar."

The slaughtered animal was then to be "flayed," and "cut into pieces," according to a prescribed rule, "the inwards and the legs," which might be supposed to need somewhat of purification, were "washed," and, together with the whole body, "burnt upon the altar." The skin alone remained, as a benefit of the priest, [Leviticus 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.8).

Do we not see in these things a striking exhibition of the sufferings of the Son of God, who was in due time to become a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world? Death was the wages due to sin, and that too under the wrath of an offended God. True it is, that the consuming of an animal by fire was but a faint representation of that misery, which we must to all eternity have endured; and of that which our blessed Lord sustained, both in his body and in his soul, when he died under the load of our iniquities.

The partial washing of the sacrifice might probably denote the perfect purity of Christ; or perhaps it might intimate the concurrence of the Holy Spirit, through whose divine agency he was fitted for a sacrifice, and by whose almighty aid he was enabled to offer himself up to God; for it was "through the eternal Spirit that he offered himself without spot to God."

III. The benefits resulting from the burnt-offering.

"It was accepted for the offerer, to make an atonement for him." As there were two kinds of guilt, ceremonial and moral, so there were two kinds of absolution, one actual in the sight of God, the other merely external and shadowy. We observe then in relation to these sacrifices, that they cleansed from ceremonial defilement really, and from real defilement ceremonially.

There were certain things, not evil in themselves, but made so by the special appointment of God, (such as the touching of a grave or a dead body;) and the people who had done them were to be accounted unclean, until they were purified in the way prescribed; and their observance of the prescribed forms did really purge them from the defilement they had contracted, so that no guilt would be imputed to them, nor any punishment inflicted, either in time or eternity.

On the other hand, there were things really evil, (as theft or perjury,) which subjected the offender to punishment by the laws of man. Now the guilt of these crimes was not purged away by the appointed sacrifices, any further than the exempting of the person from the punishment denounced by law; his conscience still remained burdened with guilt; and he must, notwithstanding all his sacrifices, answer for his crimes at the tribunal of God.

This is the distinction made for us by God himself, who says, that "the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, did really sanctify to the purifying of the flesh;" but they "never could make a man perfect as pertaining to the conscience;" in that sense, "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats could take away sins."

It may be asked then: What benefit was there to counter-balance the cost and trouble of the sacrifices? I answer, that an exemption from temporal judgments, whether inflicted by God or man, was a great benefit; but to be encouraged to come to God as a merciful and gracious God, and to have Christ so clearly and constantly exhibited before their eyes, was an unspeakable benefit, which would have been cheaply purchased by the cattle on a thousand hills.

In this ordinance we may find,

1. Much for our **instruction**.

Of all the subjects that can be offered to our view, there is not any that can bear the least comparison with that leading subject of the Gospel, Christ crucified; and I had almost said, that the New Testament itself scarcely unfolds it more clearly, than the ordinance before us. What would the most ignorant of the Jews imagine, when he saw the sacrifice led forth, the offerer putting his hand upon it, and the priest slaying it, and afterwards reducing it to ashes? Would he not see that here was a manifest substitution of an innocent creature in the place of the guilty, and that that very substitution was the means of reconciling the offender to his God?

I will grant, that a person ignorant of the typical nature of those ordinances, might be led to ascribe the benefit to the ordinance itself, without looking through it to the sacrifice which it shadowed forth; but he could not be so blind as not to see, that acceptance with God was by means of a vicarious sacrifice.

Yet, behold, we Christians, who live under the meridian light of the Gospel, need to be told, that we must be saved entirely through the atonement of Christ. Yes, after all that a minister, or God himself, can say—the great majority of us will seek acceptance, in whole or in part, by our own righteousness.

Go back to the Law; ask a Jew to teach you; let those whom you despise for their ignorance, be your preceptors. It is a shame and scandal that salvation by Christ is so little known among us, [1 Corinthians 15:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.34), and that the preachers of it are yet represented as setting forth a "new doctrine, [Acts 17:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.19)."

Be instructed then, you opposers of Christ crucified, who are yet ignorantly "seeking to establish your own righteousness;" learn, even from the Law itself, to embrace the Gospel; and "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way."

2. Much for our **imitation**.

Every one whose conscience convicted him of sin, offered, "of his own voluntary will," the best sacrifice he could; grudging nothing whereby he might honor God or promote his own salvation. An irreligious man might have asked, 'Why is all this waste of cattle, which, instead of being consumed by fire, might be sold, or given to the poor?' But the man who fears God, would reply, that nothing can be wasted which is in any way conducive to God's honor and our salvation. This is the spirit that should animate us.

We may be called to make sacrifices for God; our reputation, our interest, our liberty, our very lives, may be called for in his service; and shall we be backward to make the sacrifice? Alas! too many of us are rather for a cheap religion; and their chief concern is, to get to Heaven at as cheap a rate as possible, and to sacrifice for God as little as they can.

If they are poor, their little can't be spared; and if they are rich, their victim is too costly. Away with such low and niggardly thoughts; let the large and liberal spirit of Christianity possess your souls; let nothing that you have endured, move you; nor anything that you can endure; be willing to be bound, or even to die, for the Lord's sake.

As for your lusts, let them be sacrificed, and utterly consumed; the sooner they are mortified, the better. And those things, which, if not called for by God in the way of his providence, you might innocently retain—bring to the altar with your own hands, and, of your own voluntary will, offer them to God; spare not anything one moment, if it stands in competition with your duty, and the maintenance of a good conscience before God. In a word, "present your own selves to him a living sacrifice; for that is your reasonable service; and it shall be accepted by God! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

#120

THE GRAIN-OFFERING

**[Leviticus 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.1-3)**

"When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it and take it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire."

In order to a judicious exposition of the types, it is necessary that we should have certain rules of interpretation, to which we should adhere; for, without them, we may wander into the regions of imagination, and cast an obscurity over those Scriptures which we undertake to explain.

It must be remembered, that Christ and his Church, together with the whole work of salvation, whether as wrought by him, or as enjoyed by them, were the subjects of typical exhibition. Sometimes the type pointed more immediately at one part of this subject, and sometimes at another; and sometimes it applied to different parts at the same time.

The tabernacle, for instance, certainly represented Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;" and it represented the Church also in which God's presence is more especially manifested, and his service more eminently performed.

The types being expressly instituted for the purpose of prefiguring spiritual things, have a determinate meaning in their minutest particulars; and it is highly probable that they have always a two-fold accomplishment: one in Christ, and the other in the Church.

For instance; every sacrifice undoubtedly directs our views to Christ; yet we ourselves also, together with our services, are frequently represented as sacrifices acceptable to him; which shows, that the sacrifices have a further reference to us also. But here, it is of great importance that we distinguish between those expressions of the New Testament which are merely metaphorical, and those which are direct applications of the types.

Paul, speaking of the probability of his own martyrdom in the cause of Christ, says, "If I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Here he alludes to the drink-offerings, which were always poured out upon the sacrifices; and intimates that he was willing to have his blood poured out in like manner for the Church's good. This, as a metaphor, is beautiful; but if we were to make the sacrifices typical of faith, and the drink-offerings typical of martyrdom, and from thence proceed to explain the whole type in like manner, we would bring the whole into contempt.

The rule then that we would lay down is this; to follow strictly the apostolic explanations as far as we have them. And, where we have them not, to proceed with extreme caution; adhering rigidly to the analogy of faith, and standing as remote as possible from anything which may appear fanciful, or give occasion to cavilers to discard typical expositions altogether.

The foregoing observations are particularly applicable to the subject of our present consideration. We apprehend that the grain-offering might be applied in every particular both to Christ and his Church; but in some instances the application would appear forced; and therefore we think it better to omit some things which may possibly belong to the subject, than to obscure the whole by anything of a doubtful nature. Besides, there are in this type such a multitude of particulars, that it would not be possible to speak satisfactorily upon them all in one sermon, if we were to take them in the most comprehensive view; we shall therefore confine ourselves to such observations as will commend themselves to your judgment, without perplexing you by too great a diversity on the one hand, or by anything fanciful or doubtful on the other.

That we may prosecute the subject in a way easy to be understood, we shall distinguish the grain-offering by its great leading feature, and consider it in that view only.

The burnt-offering typified exclusively the atonement of Christ.

The grain-offering typified our sanctification by the Spirit.

As for the grain-offerings which accompanied the stated burnt-offerings, they, together with their attendant drink-offerings, were wholly consumed upon the altar. But those which were offered by themselves, were burnt only in part; the remainder being given to the priests for their support. It is of these that we are now to speak. The different materials of which they consisted, will serve us for an easy and natural distribution of the subject.

The first thing to be noticed is, "The fine flour".

Whatever we see burnt upon the brazen altar, we may be sure was typical of the atonement of Christ; whether it were the flesh of beasts, or the fruits of the earth—there was no difference in this respect; it equally typified his sacrifice. This appears not only from the grain-offering being frequently mentioned together with the burnt-offering in this very view, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8) and [Hebrews 10:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-8); but from its being expressly referred to as a means of expiating moral guilt, [1 Samuel 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.14); 1 Samuel 26:19. It is on this account that we number it among the propitiatory sacrifices, notwithstanding its use in other respects was widely different.

There is indeed, in the mode of treating this fine flour, something well suited to shadow forth the sufferings of Christ; it was baked (in a pan or oven) or fried, and, when formed into a cake, was broken and burnt upon the altar. Who can contemplate this, and not see in it the temptations, conflicts, and agonies of the Son of God? We cannot but recognize in these things, him, "who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities;" who himself tells us, that "He was the true bread, of which whoever ate, should live forever."

In the close of the chapter we are told, that, notwithstanding the first-fruits, when offered as the first-fruits, might not be burnt upon the altar—yet, if offered as a grain-offering, they would be accepted 4–16; and that in that case the ears must be dried by the fire, and the corn be beaten out, to be used instead of flour. The mystery in either case was the same; the excellency of Christ was marked in the quality of the corn, and his sufferings in the disposal of it.

The next thing that calls for our attention is, "The oil".

Though the sacrifice of Christ is the foundation of all our hopes—yet it will not avail for our final acceptance with God, unless we be "renewed in the spirit of our minds," and be rendered "fit for the heavenly inheritance." But to effect this, is the work of the Holy Spirit, by whose gracious operations alone we can "mortify the deeds of the body," and attain the divine image on our souls.

Hence, in approaching God with their grain-offering, they were to mingle oil with the flour, or to anoint it with oil, after having previously made it into a cake. We do not deny but that this part of the ordinance might represent, in some respect, the endowments of Christ, who was anointed to his work, and fitted for it, by a superabundant measure of the Holy Spirit, [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18) and [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34); but, as it seems designed more particularly to mark the sanctification of our souls, we the rather confine it to that sense. And in this we have the sanction of two inspired people, a Prophet, and an Apostle, both of whom, refer to the offering as expressive of this very idea. Isaiah, speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles in the latter days, says, "Men shall bring them for an offering unto the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord [Isaiah 66:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.20)."

And Paul, speaking of that event as actually fulfilled under his ministry, goes yet further into the explanation of it, and says, that the sanctification of their souls by the Holy Spirit corresponded with the unction with which that offering was anointed, "I am," says he, "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16)."

Here then we are warranted in saying, that all who would find acceptance with God, must "have an anointing of the Holy One, even that anointing which shall abide with them and teach them all things, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27)." We should "be filled with the Spirit," and "live and walk under" his gracious influences, [Ephesians 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.18); [Galatians 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.25).

In a subsequent part of this chapter there is an especial command to add to this, and indeed to every sacrifice, a portion of "Salt".

Here we have no difficulty; for the very terms in which the command is given, sufficiently mark its import, "You shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain-offering." Had salt been mentioned alone, we might have doubted what meaning to affix to it; but, being annexed to the covenant of God, we do not hesitate to explain it as designating the perpetuity of that covenant. It is the property of salt to keep things from corruption; and the Scriptures frequently apply it to the covenant, in order to intimate its unchangeable nature, and duration, See [Numbers 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.19); [2 Chronicles 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 13.5).

In this view of it, we are at no loss to account for the extreme energy with which the command is given, or the injunction to use salt in every sacrifice; for we cannot hope for pardon through the sacrifice of Christ, nor for sanctification by the Spirit, but according to the tenor of the everlasting covenant. Nay, neither the one nor the other of these, nor both together, would have availed for our salvation, if God had not covenanted with his Son to accept his sacrifice for us, and to accept us also as renewed and sanctified by his Spirit. We must never therefore approach our God without having a distinct reference to that covenant, as the ground and measure, the pledge, of all the blessings that we hope for.

Even Christ himself owed his exaltation to glory to this covenant; it was "through the blood of the everlasting covenant that his God and Father brought him up again from the dead! [Hebrews 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20)." And it is because "that covenant is ordered in all things and sure," that we can look up with confidence for all the blessings both of grace and glory.

Together with these things that are enjoined, we find some expressly prohibited; there must be "No leaven, nor honey, [Leviticus 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.11)."

LEAVEN, according to our Lord's own explanation of it, was considered as an emblem of corruption, either in doctrine or in principle, [Matthew 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.12); [Luke 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.1). HONEY seems to have denoted sensuality. Now these were forbidden to be blended with the grain-offering.

There were occasions, as we shall see hereafter, whereon leaven at least might be offered; but in this offering not the smallest measure of either of them was to be mixed.

This certainly intimated, that, when we come before God for mercy, we must harbor no sin in our hearts. We must put away evil of every kind, and offer him only "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." The retaining "a right hand or a right eye," contrary to his commands, will be as effectual a bar to our acceptance with God, as the indulgence of the grossest lusts. If we would obtain favor in his sight, we must be "Israelites indeed, and without deceit."

There was however one more thing to be added to this offering, namely, "Incense (or Frankincense)".

The directions respecting this were singularly precise and strong. This was not to be mixed with the offering, or strewed upon it, but to be put on one part of it, that, while a small portion only of the other materials was put upon the altar, the whole of this was to be consumed by fire, verse 16.

Shall we say, that this was enjoined, because, being unfit for food, it was not to be kept for mere gratification to the priests, lest it should be brought into contempt? This by no means accounts sufficiently for the strictness of the injunction. We doubt not but that its meaning was of peculiar importance; that it was intended to intimate "the delight" which God takes in the services of his upright worshipers, [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8); of those especially who come to him under the influences of his Spirit, trusting in the Savior's merits, and in the blood of the everlasting covenant.

Yes, their every prayer, their every tear, their every sigh and groan, comes up with acceptance before him, and is to him "a fragrance of a sweet savor," "a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable unto him through Jesus Christ." As the sacrifice of Christ himself was most pleasing unto God, so are the services of all his people for Christ's sake. Compare [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2) with [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16); [Philippians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18) and [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5).

There is yet one thing more which we must notice, namely, that a part only of this offering was burnt, and that:

"The remainder" was given to the priests, verse 10.

The handful which was burnt upon the altar, is repeatedly called "a memorial;" and it was justly called so, especially by those who had an insight into the nature of the offering which they presented; for it was a memorial of God's covenant-engagements, and of their affiance in them.

Such also is, in fact, every prayer which we present to God; we remind God (so to speak) of his promises made to us in his word; and we plead them as the grounds of our hope, and the measure of our expectations.

"The remnant was given to Aaron and his sons." This, to the Israelites, would intimate, that all who would obtain salvation for themselves, must at the same time be active in upholding the interests of religion, and promoting the glory of their God.

To us, it unfolds a deeper mystery. We are frequently spoken of in the New Testament as being ourselves "made priests unto God, [Isaiah 66:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.21) with [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5) and [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6); [Revelation 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.6)." Since the veil of the temple was rent in twain, there is a way, "a new and living way, opened for us into the Holy of Holies, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22);" and all of us, as "a kingdom of priests," have free and continual "access there with boldness and with confidence, [Ephesians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.12);" and we also have a right to all the provisions of God's house.

It is our blessed privilege to feed upon that bread of life, the Lord Jesus, who has emphatically said, "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed [John 6:51-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.51-57)." We may richly participate in all the influences of the Spirit, and claim all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. Indeed, "if we feed not on these things, there is no life in us; but if we live upon them by faith, then have we eternal life."

Behold then, brethren, "the remainder" of the offering; here it is, reserved for us in this sacred treasury, the book of God. Take of it; divide it among yourselves; eat of it, "eat and drink abundantly, O beloved! [Song of Solomon 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.1);" eat of it, and live forever. It is that "feast of fat things," spoken of by the prophet, which all true Christians invited to partake of, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6). Only let not any hidden abomination turn it into a curse. If the bread is received even from the Savior's hands, and you partake of it with an unsanctified heart—it will only prove an occasion of your more entire bondage to Satan, and your heavier condemnation at the last! [John 13:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.26-27). But, if you "draw near to God with a true heart, and full assurance of faith," then "he will abundantly bless your provision [Psalm 132:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.15)," and "your soul shall delight itself in fatness! [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2)."

#121

THE GRAIN-OFFERING A TYPE OF CHRIST

**[Leviticus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.13)**

"Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings."

There certainly is need of much sobriety and caution in interpreting the typical parts of Scripture, lest, instead of adhering to the path marked out for us by the inspired writers, we be found wandering in the regions of imagination and conjecture. But there are some types, which, notwithstanding they be soberly explained, appear at first sight the mere creatures of one's own imagination; which, however, on a more full investigation, evidently appear to have been instituted of God for the express purpose of prefiguring the truths of the Gospel. Of this kind is the ordinance now under our consideration; for the elucidating of which, we shall,

I. Explain the grain-offering.

The directions respecting it were very minute.

Grain-offerings were annexed to many of the more solemn sacrifices, and constituted a part of them Numbers 28 throughout. But they were also frequently offered by themselves. They were to consist of fine flour, mixed with oil, and accompanied with incense Note:, 2, 5. The quantity offered was at the option of the offerer, because it was a free-will offering. The wheat might be presented either simply dried and formed into flour, or baked as a cake, or fried as a wafer Note:, 7, 14; but, in whatever way it was presented, it must by all means have salt upon it 3. It was on no account to have any mixture in it, either of honey, or of leaven 1. A part, or a memorial of it, was to be taken by the priest (but with all the incense), and to be burnt upon the altar 6; and the remainder was for the maintenance of the priest himself, as holy food. "When it was duly offered in this manner, it was most pleasing and acceptable to God.

And this was altogether typical of things under the gospel dispensation.

It was typical,

1. Of Christ's sacrifice.

The grain-offering, or mincha, is often spoken of in direct reference to Christ, and his sacrifice. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have a long passage quoted from the Psalms, to show that neither the grain-offering (mincha) nor any other sacrifice was to be presented to God, after that Christ should have fulfilled those types by his one offering of himself upon the cross Compare [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8) with [Hebrews 10:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-10). And it is of great importance in this view to remember, that though the grain-offering was for the most part eucharistical, or an expression of thankfulness, it was sometimes presented as a sin-offering, to make an atonement for sin; only, on those occasions, it was not mixed with oil, or accompanied with incense, because everything expressive of joy was unsuited to a sin-offering [Leviticus 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.11); [Leviticus 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.13). See also [1 Samuel 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.14). This is a clear proof, that it must typify the sacrifice of Christ, who is the true, the only atoning sacrifice for sin [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2).

Now there was a peculiar suitableness in this offering to represent the sacrifice of Christ. Was it of the finest quality, mixed with the purest oil, and free from any kind of leaven? this prefigured his holy nature, anointed, in a superabundant measure, with the oil of joy and gladness [Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.7); [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34), and free from the smallest particle of sin 1 Peter 2:22. Its destruction by fire on the altar denoted the sufferings he was to endure upon the cross; while the consumption of the remainder by the priests, marked him out as the food of his people's souls, all of them being partakers of the sacerdotal office, a kingdom of priests [Exodus 19:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.6) with 1 Peter 2:9. The incense also, which ascended in sweet fragrances, intimated the acceptableness of his sacrifice on our behalf.

2. Of our services.

The services of Christians are also frequently mentioned in terms alluding to the mincha, or grain-offering. Their alms are spoken of as a sacrifice well pleasing to God [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16), a fragrance of a sweet smell [Philippians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18). Their prayers are said to be as the evening sacrifice, that was always accompanied with the grain-offering [Psalm 141:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 141.2) with [Numbers 28:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 28.4-5); and the prophet Malachi, foretelling that, under the Gospel, "all men," Gentiles as well as Jews, "should pray everywhere 1 Timothy 2:8," uses this language, "I have no pleasure in you (Jews) says the Lord, neither will I receive an offering (a mincha) at your hand; for from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering (mincha); for my name shall be great among the heathen, says the Lord of hosts [Malachi 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.10-11)." In a word, the conversion of sinners, and their entire devoting of themselves to God, is represented under this image, "They shall bring all your brethren, says the prophet, for an offering (mincha) unto the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering (mincha) in a clean vessel unto the Lord [Isaiah 66:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.20)." And Paul (alluding to the flour mixed with oil) speaks of himself as ministering the Gospel to the Gentiles, "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16)."

Nor is it without evident propriety that our services were prefigured by this ordinance. Was the flour to be of the best quality, and impregnated with oil? we must offer unto God, not our body only, but our soul; and that too, anointed with a holy unction [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23); 1 [John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27). Was neither honey, nor leaven, to be mixed with it? our services must be free from carnality If we are to annex any other idea than that of leaven to "honey," that of carnality seems the most appropriate. [Proverbs 25:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.16); [Proverbs 25:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.27), or hypocrisy [Luke 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.1); 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. Was a part of it, together with all the "incense, to be burnt upon the altar, and the remainder to be eaten as holy food? thus must our services be inflamed with divine love, and be offered wholly to the glory of God; and, while they ascend up with acceptance before God, they shall surely tend also to the strengthening and refreshing of our own souls [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11).

There is, however, one circumstance in the grain-offering, which, for its importance, needs a distinct consideration; which will lead us to,

II. Notice the strict injunction respecting the seasoning of it with salt.

It surely was not in vain, that the injunction respecting the use of salt in this, and in every other offering, was so solemnly thrice repeated in the space of one single verse. But not even that injunction should induce one to look for any peculiar mystery (at least, not publicly to attempt an explanation of the mystery) if the Scriptures did not unfold to us its meaning, and give us a clue to the interpretation of it.

The whole ordinance being typical, we must consider this injunction,

1. In reference to Christ's sacrifice.

Salt, in Scripture, is used to denote savouriness and perpetuity. In the former sense, our Lord compares his people to good salt, while false professors are as "salt that has lost its savor [Matthew 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.13)." In the latter sense, God's covenant is often called "a covenant of salt [Numbers 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.19), and [2 Chronicles 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 13.5)." Apply then these ideas to the sacrifice of Christ, and the reason of this reiterated injunction will immediately appear.

How savory to God, and how sweet to man, is the atonement which Christ has offered! In the view of its acceptableness to God, and in direct reference to the grain-offering, it is thus noticed by Paul, "He gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)." And, as having laid, by his own death, the foundation of his spiritual temple, he is said to be "precious unto man also, even unto all them that believe [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7)."

Moreover the efficacy of his atonement is as immutable as God himself. In this, as well as in every other respect, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8)." The virtue of his blood to cleanse from sin, was not more powerful in the day when it purified three thousand converts, than it is at this hour, and shall be to all who trust in it [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7).

2. In reference to our services.

Let the ideas of savouriness and perpetuity be transferred to these also, and it will appear that this exposition is not dictated by fancy, but by the Scriptures themselves.

A mere formal service, destitute of life and power, may be justly spoken of in the same humiliating terms as a false professor, "It is not fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill [Luke 14:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.34-35)." Hence our Lord says, in reference to the very injunction before us, "Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good; but if the salt have lost its saltiness, with which will you season it? Have salt within yourselves [Mark 9:49-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.49-50)." What can this mean, but that there should be a life and power in all our services, a heavenliness and spirituality in our whole deportment? We should have in ourselves [Matthew 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.23), and present to God [2 Corinthians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.15), and diffuse on all around us [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.14), a "savor of the knowledge of Christ."

Nor is the continuance or perpetuity of our services less strongly marked; for in addition to the remarkable expressions of our Lord before cited [Mark 9:49-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.49-50), Paul directs, that our "speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt [Colossians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.6)." There never ought to be one hour's intermission to the divine life, not one moment when we have lost the savor and relish of divine things.

In order to a due improvement of this subject, let us reduce it to practice.

1. Let us take of Christ's sacrifice, and both present it to God, and feed upon it in our souls.

All the Lord's people are "kings and priests unto God [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6);" all therefore have a right to present to him this offering, and to feed upon it; both of these things may be done by faith; and both must be done by us, if ever we would find acceptance with God. Let us think what would have been the state of the Jewish priests, if they had declined the execution of their office. Let us then put ourselves into their situation, and rest assured, that a neglect of this duty will bring upon us God's heavy and eternal displeasure [John 6:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53). On the other hand, if we believe in Christ, and feed on his body and blood, we shall be monuments of his love and mercy for evermore [John 6:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.54).

2. Let us devote ourselves to God in the constant exercise of all holy affections.

All we have is from the Lord; and all must be dedicated to his service. But let us be sure that, with our outward services, we give him our hearts [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26). "What if a man, having good corn and oil, had offered that which was damaged? Should it have been accepted [Malachi 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.8). Or, if he had neglected to add the salt, should it have had any savor in God's estimation? So neither will the form of godliness be of any value without the power [2 Timothy 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5); but, if we present ourselves [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1), or any spiritual sacrifice whatever, it shall be accepted of God through Christ [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5), to our present and eternal comfort.

#122

GREEN EARS OF CORN TO BE OFFERED

**[Leviticus 2:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.14-16)**

"If you bring a grain offering of firstfruits to the LORD, offer crushed heads of green ears of corn roasted in the fire. Put oil and incense on it; it is a grain offering. The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the LORD by fire.

As there was a great variety of offerings under the Law, such as burnt-offerings, peace-offerings, trespass-offerings, sin-offerings, grain-offerings, so was there a variety of those which I have last mentioned. the grain-offerings. Some of these were constantly offered with and upon the burnt-offerings; some of them were offered separately by themselves; and these also were of two different kinds; some of them being ordinary, and appointed on particular occasions; and others of them extraordinary, and altogether optional, and presented only when people particularly desired to "honor God with their substance." The ordinary and appointed grain-offerings are spoken of in the beginning of this chapter Compare –3 with chapter 23:9–14; the extraordinary and optional are spoken of in my text. It is to the latter that I would draw your attention at this time. And for the purpose of bringing the ordinance before you in the simplest and most intelligible manner, I will set before you,

I. Its distinguishing peculiarities.

In some respects this grain-offering agreed with those which were common.

It consisted of corn; it was accompanied with oil; incense also was put upon it. A part of it and of the oil were burnt upon the altar, together with all the incense, as a memorial to the Lord; and the remainder of the corn and oil was given to the priests, for their subsistence.

Thus far it was an expression of gratitude to God for the mercies he had begun to impart, and of affiance in him for a complete and final bestowment of the blessings so conferred.

In other respects it differed from those which were common.

In the common grain-offerings the corn used was ripe, and ground into flour; but in this the corn was unripe, and incapable of being ground into flour, until a certain process had been used in relation to it. "The ears of corn were" cut when "green;" they were then to be "dried with fire;" and then were they to be offered in the way appointed for common grain-offerings Compare, 3 with the text.

Contenting myself with barely specifying the peculiarities under my first head, I proceed to explain them under my second head; and to mark, in relation to this ordinance,

II. Its special import.

As far as its observances accorded with those of the common grain-offering, its import was the same.

Burnt-offerings referred entirely to Christ, and shadowed forth him as dying for the sins of men. But the grain-offerings represented rather the people of Christ gathered out from the world, anointed with the Holy Spirit, and offered up upon God's altar, as consecrated to his service, and inflamed with holy zeal and love, for the advancement of his glory in the world. In this view the Prophet Isaiah speaks of the whole Gentile world, who shall be consecrated to the Lord in the last day, "They shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord [Isaiah 66:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.20)." (The Mincha, or grain-offering, is that which is here particularly referred to.) To the same effect Paul also speaks in the New Testament of this very conversion as actually begun under his ministry, "I am," says he, "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16)." Here is not only the same mention of the grain-offering as we observed in the Prophet Isaiah, but a more distinct reference to it as accompanied with oil, and as denoting the sanctification of believers by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This, then, may be considered as marking the import of this ordinance, so far as it agreed with the common grain-offerings.

But so far as this grain-offering was peculiar, its import was peculiar also.

We cannot, indeed, speak with the same confidence on this part of our subject as respecting the grain-offerings in general; because the inspired writers of the Old and New Testament are silent respecting it; yet I cannot but feel assured in my own mind, that "the green ears" are intended to denote the younger converts, who by reason of their tender age seem almost incapable of being so dedicated to the Lord. God would have such to be presented to him; and, that their supposed incapacity to serve him might be no discouragement either to them or us, they are ordered to be gathered in, so that they may be prepared for the honor that is to be conferred upon them. Additional pains are to be taken with them, in order to supply by artificial means, as it were, what nature has not yet done for them; and to God are they to be presented, without waiting for that maturity which others at a more advanced period of life have attained. They are not to be desponding in themselves, as though it were not possible for them to find acceptance with God; nor are they to be overlooked by others, as though it were in vain to hope that any converts should be gathered from among them. God would have it known, that he is alike willing to receive all; and that he will be glorified in all, "the least as well as the greatest [Jeremiah 31:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.34)," in "little children, as well as in young men and fathers 1 [John 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.12-14)."

Having elsewhere explained the different parts of the grain-offering, I forbear to dwell on them See the Discourse on [Leviticus 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.1-3), having no intention to speak of that ordinance any further than it is peculiar, and appropriate to the present occasion Confirmation, or Sunday Schools. But, as in that view it is very interesting,

I proceed to point out,

III. The instruction to be derived from it.

Assuredly it is highly instructive,

1. To Parents.

Does it not show you, that you should present your children to the Lord in early life? Yes; you should dedicate them to him even from the womb. See the examples of Hannah [1 Samuel 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.22); [1 Samuel 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.24); [1 Samuel 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.28), and Elizabeth [Luke 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.15), and Lois, and Eunice [2 Timothy 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.5); are not these sufficient to guide and encourage you in this important duty? And is it no encouragement to you to be assured by God himself, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it [Proverbs 22:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.6)." I say, then, labor with all diligence to promote the spiritual edification of your offspring; and while they are yet so green and young as to appear incapable of serving God with intelligence and acceptance, devote them to him, in the hope that, with the oil and incense put upon them, they may prove an offering well pleasing to God, and may come up with a sweet savor before him.

2. To ministers.

"The pastor after God's own heart" will "feed the lambs," as well as the sheep, of Christ's flock. And we rejoice in the increased attention that has of late years been paid to the rising generation. But, after all, there is abundant occasion for augmented efforts in their behalf. Even the Apostles themselves had but very inadequate views of their duty in reference to people in early life. When parents brought their children to Christ that he might bless them, the Apostles, judging that this was an unprofitable wasting of their Master's time, forbade them. But our blessed Lord was much displeased with them, and said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them [Mark 10:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.13-16)." And who can tell what a blessing may attend the efforts of ministers, in reference to young people, even while the older and more intelligent reject their word? Certainly the appointment of the ordinance which we have been considering proclaims loudly the duty of ministers, and affords them all the encouragement that their hearts can desire.

3. To young people.

Persons in early life, though taken to God's house that they may serve the Lord in his instituted ordinances, rarely imagine that they have any personal interest in any part of the service. They think that religion is proper for those only who have attained a certain age; and that it will be time enough for them to serve the Lord, when their understandings are more matured. But the corn cannot be too green, provided only "the ears be full 4." There must be integrity, whatever be the age; for a hypocrite can never find acceptance with God. But as to intellectual capacity, God both can and will supply that to the youngest child in the universe that has a desire to surrender himself up to him; yes, "the things which are hidden from the wise and prudent, he will reveal to babes; for so it seems good in his sight [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26)." Nay more, to those in early life God has given an express promise, a promise made exclusively to them, "They that seek me early shall find me [Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.17)." Why, then, should young people despond, as though they were incapable of serving God? I have no hesitation in saying, that they are as acceptable an offering as can possibly be presented to the Lord; yes, in some respects God is more glorified in them than in people at a more adult age; because the power of divine grace is more conspicuous in proportion as it is seen to be independent of man. Nor am I sure that such early monuments of divine grace do not render peculiar service to the Church; because their exhortations and examples are preeminently calculated to affect both the old and young; the old, as putting them to shame; and the young, as showing them the practicability of God's service even at their tender age. I say, then, that this ordinance is particularly instructive to the young, and should inspire them with a holy zeal to surrender up themselves to God at the earliest period of their lives.

ADDRESS.

1. The young.

Methinks I see you with your heads erect, and yourselves in all the greenness of early life; and I hear you saying, 'Leave me to myself; at least leave me until many more suns and showers have brought me to a maturity better suited to your use.' But no, my young brethren; I would not leave you another day. God has appointed that the green ears be dried by the fire, and so be fitted for his use; and gladly would I use all possible means to qualify you for the honor to which he calls you; nor can I doubt but that, if you be willing, you shall be accepted by him. And think, I beg you, of the advantage of being consecrated to the Lord in early life; think how many sins you will avoid; think what an advance you may hope to have made in the divine life, while others are only beginning their Christian course. Above all, think what an honor it will be to serve the Lord; and what happiness to be regarded by him as his peculiar people. O, let me not speak in vain; but now vie, as it were, with each other, who shall be foremost in this blessed race, and who shall consecrate himself to God at the earliest period of his life. Happy am I to assure you, that the oil and incense are ready, and that the fire is already kindled on God's altar. Only be willing to be the Lord's, and this very hour shall your offering come up with acceptance before him.

2. Those who are more advanced in life.

If the green ears be sought for the Lord, surely you can have no doubt respecting the proper destination of those that are more matured. Affect, then, the honor which is now offered you, of being the Lord's. And remember, that, as a part only of the offering was consumed upon the altar, and the rest was given to the priests for their subsistence, so must you gladly give yourselves to the Lord for the advancement of his glory, and the establishment of his kingdom in the world. It is for this that so many suns have shone upon you, and so many showers have been given; and know, that in giving to God, you give only what you have received from him; and that, instead of conferring any obligation upon him, the more you do for him, the more you are indebted to him. Yes, know, that if the honor to which we call you were duly appreciated, there is not an ear in the whole field of nature that would not be anxious to attain it. May the grain-offerings, then, this day be multiplied on God's altar; and his name be increasingly glorified among us, for Christ's sake! Amen and Amen.

#123

THE SIN AND TRESPASS-OFFERINGS COMPARED

**[Leviticus 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.5-6)**

NKJV "And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin."

NIV "When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin."

In the words before us, the terms "sin-offering," and "trespass-offering" are used as signifying precisely the same thing; and in the 11th and 12th verses the trespass-offering is thrice mentioned as "a sin-offering." But they are certainly two different kinds of offerings; though learned men are by no means agreed respecting the precise marks of difference between them. Indeed, almost all who have undertaken to explain them, confess, that they are not satisfied with what others have written upon the subject. The difficulty seems to lie in this: that the sin-offering seems to have respect to a lighter species of sin, and yet to require the more solemn offering; while the trespass-offering relates to considerably heavier offences, and yet admits of an easier method of obtaining forgiveness; for in the trespass-offering, pigeons or turtle-doves might be offered, or, in case of extreme poverty, a measure (about five pints) of flour; but in the sin-offering no such abatement, no such commutation, was allowed. This leads many (contrary to the plain letter of the Scripture) to represent the sin-offering as relating to the lighter, and the trespass-offering to the heavier, transgressions.

But we apprehend that sufficient stress has not been laid on some peculiarities respecting the trespass-offering, which give by far the most satisfactory solution to the difficulties that occur in it. As for those things which the sin-offering has in common with the burnt-offerings or peace-offerings, we forbear to touch upon them, they having been already noticed in our discourses on those subjects; nor shall we enter very fully into the trespass-offering, because that is reserved for a future occasion. See Discourse on [Leviticus 5:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.17-19).

We shall contract our present discussion into as short limits as possible, by omitting all that would lead us over ground already trodden, and fixing our attention on those few points, which will mark the peculiar features of these offerings, together with their distinctive differences.

We will,

I. Compare them together.

They agree in many things, each requiring that the blood of an animal should be shed and sprinkled as an atonement for sin. But they also differ very materially,

1. In the occasions on which they were offered.

The sin-offerings were evidently presented on account of something done amiss through ignorance or infirmity, see the whole fourth chapter; but the trespass-offering was for sins committed through inadvertence or the power of temptation. Among these latter were sins of great enormity, such as violence, and fraud, and lying, and even perjury itself. Note verse 4 and [Leviticus 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.2), [3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Leviticus 6.3). There must of course be very different degrees of criminality in these sins, according to the degree of information the person possessed, and the degree of conviction against which he acted. It might be that even in these things the person had sinned through ignorance only; but, whatever circumstances there might be to extenuate or to aggravate his crime, the trespass-offering was the appointed means whereby he was to obtain mercy and forgiveness.

2. In the circumstances attending the offerings.

In the sin-offering, there was particular respect to the rank and quality of the offender. If he was a priest, he must offer a bullock; which was also the appointed offering for the whole congregation; if he was a ruler or magistrate, he must offer a kid, a male; but if he was a common individual, a female goat or lamb would suffice.

The blood of the victim, in the priest's offering, was to be sprinkled before the veil, and to be put upon the horns of the altar of incense; while the blood of the ruler's, or common person's sacrifice, was not sprinkled at all, nor put on the horns of the golden altar, the altar of incense; but was put on the horns of the altar of burnt-offering only, (that is, the brazen altar,) and poured out at the bottom of that altar.

In the trespass-offering, no mention is made of a bullock for any one, but only of a female goat or lamb; even turtle-doves or young pigeons might be presented; or, in the event of a person not being able to afford them, he might offer about five pints of flour, which would be accepted in their stead. Note verses 7, 11.

This is the excepted case which Paul refers to, when he says, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22)."

Now thus far it does appear, that the heavier sins were to be atoned for by the lighter sacrifices; and this is the source of all the difficulty that expositors find in the subject. But there were three things required in this offering, which had no place in the sin-offering, namely:  
confession of the crime,  
restitution of the property,  
and compensation for the injury.

Suppose a person had "robbed God" by keeping back a part of his tithes, (whether intentionally or not,) as soon as it was discovered, he must present his offering, confess his fault, restore what he had unjustly taken, and add one-fifth more of its value, [Leviticus 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.5), as a compensation for the injury he had done.

The same process was to take place if by fraud or violence he had injured a man. If the person injured could not be found, restitution was to be made to the priest, as God's representative, [Numbers 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 5.6-8). This gives a decided preponderance to the trespass-offering; and shows, that the means used for the expiation of different offences bore a just proportion to the quality of those offences.

We shall now proceed to state,

II. What they were both designed to teach us.

The spiritual instruction to be derived from the sacrifices themselves, and the particular rites that accompanied them, we pass over, for the reasons before assigned. But there are some lessons of an appropriate nature which we may dwell upon to great advantage:

1. Sin, however trivial it may appear to us, is no light evil to God.

There are many branches of moral duty which are regarded as of but little importance. Truth, though approved and applauded as a virtue, is almost universally violated in the way of trade, and that too without any shame or remorse. Who that has ever bought or sold a commodity of any kind, has not seen that character realized, "It's no good, it's no good!" says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase!" [Proverbs 20:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.14).

Persons who would not rob or steal, will yet run in debt, when they know that they have not the means of satisfying their creditors. They will also defraud the revenue by every device in their power; purchasing goods that have not paid the customs, avoiding stamps where they are positively enjoined, and withholding, where they think they can do it without detection, the taxes which by law they are bound to pay. Such is the morality of many, who yet would be very indignant to be called thieves and liars. But God has given them no such licence to dispense with his laws; nor do they applaud such conduct when they themselves are the victims of deceit and fraud. Let them know therefore, that however partial they may be in estimating their own character and conduct, God "will judge righteous judgment;" and that, if sins of ignorance and infirmity were not pardoned without an atonement, much less shall such flagrant sins as theirs! It is true, they may plead custom; but before they venture to rest upon that plea, let them be well assured that God will accept it.

2. There may be much guilt attaching, where there is but little suspicion of it.

It is supposed in the sin-offering, that priests, and rulers, and common individuals, and whole congregations, may have committed sins, without being aware that they have done so. And may not the same thing occur among us?

Let ministers, the priests of God, look back; let them consider the nature of their office, the responsibility attaching to it, the multitudes who have been, and yet are, committed to their care; the consequences of a faithful or unfaithful discharge of their duty; let them then compare their lives and ministrations with the lives and ministry of Christ and his Apostles, or with the express injunctions of Holy Writ; will they find no sins which they have overlooked? Will they see no occasion for the atonement of Christ?

Truly, if it were not for the hope of mercy which we have through his atoning blood, we would be of all men most miserable; so great is the guilt which the most diligent among us has contracted by his defective ministrations.

Let rulers proceed to make similar inquiries respecting their diligence, their impartiality, their zeal; let them see whether they might not have promoted in many instances a more active cooperation for the suppression of evil, and for the propagation of true religion; will they see no cause for shame and sorrow, when they see how little they have done for God, and in what a degree they have borne the sword in vain?

Let any private individual institute a similar inquiry into:  
all the motives by which he has been actuated,  
the dispositions he has manifested,  
the tempers he has exercised, and  
the use he has made of his time, his property, his influence  
—and will he find nothing to condemn?

Lastly, let whole congregations or communities be made to examine the maxims embraced, the habits countenanced, and the conduct pursued among them—will there be no room for them to acknowledge a departure from the ways of God? Is society in such a state, that all which we see and hear will stand the test, if tried by the requisitions of God's holy law?

Yet where are the consciences that are burdened with guilt?

Where are the penitents applying to the blood of atonement?

Are not the great mass of mankind, whether rulers or subjects, whether ministers or people, blessing themselves as having but little, if any, occasion to repent?

Ah! well might David say, and happy would it be for us if it were the language also of our hearts, "Lord, who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from my secret faults, [Psalm 19:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.12). See also [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)." And let none think that his ignorance is any excuse for him before God; for our ignorance arises only from inconsideration; and God expressly warns us, that that plea shall avail us nothing, [Ecclesiastes 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.6).

3. The moment we see that we have sinned, we should seek for mercy in God's appointed way.

As soon as the fault or error was discovered under the law, the proper offering (whether sin or trespass offering) was to be brought; and, if the offender refused to bring his offering, his sin became presumptuous; and he subjected himself to the penalty of death. Compare [Numbers 15:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.27-31), with [Hebrews 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28). To infinitely sorer punishment shall we expose ourselves, if we neglect to seek for mercy through the sin-atoning blood of Christ, [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29). The declaration of God is this, "He who covers his sins, shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy, [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)."

But let us beware of one delusion which proves fatal to thousands; we are apt to content ourselves with general acknowledgments that we are sinners, instead of searching out our particular sins, and humbling ourselves for them. Doubtless it is right to bewail the whole state of our souls; but he who never has seen any individual evils to lament, will have but very faint conceptions of his general depravity. We should therefore "search and try our ways;" and not only say with Achan, "I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel," but proceed with him to add, "Thus and thus have I done! [Joshua 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.20)." This is the particular instruction given in our text; the person who had transgressed any law of God. whether ceremonial or moral, was, as soon as he discovered it, to "confess, that he had sinned in that particular thing." O that we were more ready to humble ourselves thus! But we love not the work of self-examination; and the evils which we cannot altogether hide from ourselves, we endeavor to banish from our minds; and hence it is that so many of us are "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

4. We never can be truly penitent for sin, if we are not desirous also to repair it to the utmost of our power.

It is certain that no reparation for sin can ever be made to *God*. It is the precious blood of Christ, and that only, that can ever satisfy the offended Majesty of Heaven.

But injuries done to our fellow-creatures, may, and must, be requited. If we have defrauded any, whether individuals or the public, it is our bounden duty to make restitution to the full amount; and, if we cannot find the individuals injured, we should make it to God, in the people of the poor. To pretend to repent of any sin, and yet hold fast the wages of our iniquity, is a solemn mockery; for the retaining of a thing which we have unjustly acquired, is, in fact, a continuation of the offence.

Let us make the case our own, and ask whether, if a man had defrauded us, we should give him credit for real penitence, while he withheld from us what he had fraudulently obtained? We certainly should say, that his professions of repentance were mere hypocrisy; and therefore the same judgment we must pass on ourselves, if we do not to the utmost of our power repair every injury we have ever done.

Look at Zaccheus, and see what were the fruits of penitence in him, "Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wronged any man, I restore four-fold! [Luke 19:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.8)." See also the effect of godly sorrow in the Corinthian Church, "What indignation against themselves, yes, what zeal, yes, what revenge, yes, what a determination to clear themselves" of the evil in every possible way, [2 Corinthians 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.11).

Look to it, beloved, that the same proofs of sincerity be found in you. Yet do not presently conclude that all is right, because you have made restitution unto man; (this is a mistake by no means uncommon,) the guilt of your sin still remains upon your conscience, and must be washed away by the sin-atoning blood of Christ; that is the only "fountain opened for sin and impurity," nor, until you are washed in that, can you ever behold the face of God in peace!

#124

THE TRESPASS-OFFERING A TYPE OF CHRIST

**[Leviticus 5:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.17-19)**

"If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible. He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven. It is a guilt (trespass) offering; he has been guilty of trespassing against the LORD."

The ceremonial law was intended to lead men to Christ, and was calculated to do so in a variety of ways. It exhibited Christ in all his work and offices, and directed every sinner to look to him. Moreover, the multitude of its rites and ceremonies had a tendency to break the spirits of the Lord's people, and to make them anxiously look for that period, when they should be liberated from a yoke which they were not able to bear, and render unto God a more liberal and spiritual service.

It is in this latter view more especially that we are led to consider the trespass-offering, which was to be presented to God for the smallest error in the observation of any one ordinance, however ignorantly or unintentionally it might be committed. In order to elucidate the nature and intent of the trespass-offering, we shall,

I. Show the evil of sins of ignorance, and the remedy prescribed for them.

It is often said that the intention constitutes the criminality of an action. But this principle is not true to the extent that is generally supposed.

It is certain that ignorance diminishes the guilt of an action.

Our Lord himself virtually acknowledged this, when he declared that the opportunities of information which he had afforded the Jews, greatly enhanced the guilt of those who rejected him, [John 9:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.41); [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22). And he even, urged the ignorance of his murderers as a plea with his heavenly Father to forgive them, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do, [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34)." Peter also palliated their crime upon the very same principles, "I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers, [Acts 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.17)." And Paul speaks of himself as obtaining mercy because what he had done was done ignorantly and in unbelief, [1 Timothy 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13); whereas if he had done it, knowing whom he persecuted, he would most probably never have obtained mercy.

But it is equally certain that ignorance cannot excuse us in the sight of God.

A man is not held blameless when he violates the laws of the land because he did it unwittingly; he is liable to a penalty, though from the consideration of his ignorance that penalty may be mitigated. Nor does any man consider ignorance as a sufficient plea for his servant's faults, if that servant had the means of knowing his master's will; he rather blames that servant for negligence in not showing greater solicitude to ascertain and perform his duty.

With respect to God, the passage before us shows in the strongest light, that even the slightest error, and that too in the observance of a mere arbitrary institution, however unintentionally committed, could not be deemed innocent. On the contrary, it is said, "He shall bring his offering; he has certainly trespassed against the Lord."

Much more therefore must every violation of the moral law be attended with guilt, because there is an inherent malignity in every transgression of the moral law; and because man's ignorance of his duty, as well as his aversion to duty, is a fruit and consequence of the first transgression. Hence is there an eternal curse denounced against everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them! [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10).

It is yet further evident that ignorance is no excuse before God, because Paul calls himself a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor, yes, the very chief of sinners, for persecuting the Church, notwithstanding he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus, [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9) with [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15). And God declares that men perish for lack of knowledge, [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.6), and that, because they are of no understanding, he will therefore show them no favor, [Isaiah 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.11).

The only remedy for sins, however light they may appear to us, is the atonement of Christ.

The high-priest was appointed particularly to offer for the errors of the people, [Hebrews 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7) with [Ezekiel 45:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 45.19-20). And as soon as ever an error, or unintentional transgression, was discovered, the person guilty of it was to bring his offering. The offering was to be of proper value according to the priest's "estimation." [Leviticus 27:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 27.2-8), and to seek for mercy through the blood of atonement.

There was indeed a distinction in the offerings which different people were to bring; which distinction was intended to show that the degrees of criminality attaching to the errors of different people, varied in proportion as the offenders enjoyed the means of information.

If a priest erred, he must bring a bullock for an offering, [Leviticus 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.3).

If a ruler erred, he must offer a male goat, [Leviticus 4:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.22-23).

If one of the common people erred, he must bring a female kid, or a female lamb, [Leviticus 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.27-28); [Leviticus 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.32), or, if he could not afford that, he might bring two young pigeons.

And, to mark yet further the superior criminality of the priest, his offering was to be wholly burnt, and its blood was to be sprinkled seven times before the veil of the sanctuary, and to be put upon the horns of the altar of incense. Whereas the offerings of the others were to be only in part consumed by fire; and their blood was not to be sprinkled at all before the veil, and to be put only on the horns of the altar of burnt-offering, [Leviticus 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.6-7); [Leviticus 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.12) comp with [Leviticus 4:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.25-26); [Leviticus 4:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.30-31).

Further still, if a person were so poor as not to be able to afford two young pigeons, he might be supposed to have still less opportunities of information, and was therefore permitted to bring only an ephah of fine flour; part of which, however, was to be burnt upon the altar, to show the offerer what a destruction he himself had merited. And this is the excepted case to which the Apostle alludes, when he says, with his usual accuracy, that "almost all things are by the law purged with blood, [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22)."

But, under the Gospel, there is no distinction whatever to be made. We must now say, without any single exception, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." We need Christ as much to bear the iniquity of our holy things, as to purge our foulest transgressions! [Exodus 28:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.38).

There is no other fountain opened for sin! [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1).

There is no other way to the Father! [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6).

There is no other door of hope! [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.9).

There is no other name whereby we can be saved! [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12).

Christ alone, must be our substitute and surety, whether our guilt be extenuated by ignorance, or aggravated by presumption.

This point being clear, we proceed to,

II. Suggest such reflections as naturally arise from the subject.

A more instructive subject than this cannot easily be proposed to us. It leads us naturally to observe,

1. What a tremendous load of guilt is there on the soul of every man!

Let but the sins, which we can remember, be reckoned up, and they will be more than the hairs of our head. Let these be added, which we observed at the time, but have now forgotten, and oh, how awfully will their numbers be increased! But let all the trespasses which we have committed through ignorance, be put to the account; all the smallest deviations and defects which the penetrating eye of God has seen, (all of which he has noted in the book of his remembrance,) and surely we shall feel the force of that question that was put to Job, "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your iniquities infinite? [Job 22:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.5)." If we bring everything to the touchstone of God's law, we shall see, that "there is not a just man upon earth who lives and sins not, [Ecclesiastes 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.20);" and that "in many things we all offend, [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2); [Proverbs 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.16);" so that there is but too much reason for every one of us to exclaim with the Psalmist, "Who can understand his errors? O cleanse me from my secret faults! [Psalm 19:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.12)." Let none of us then extenuate our guilt, or think it sufficient to say, "It was a mistake! [Ecclesiastes 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.6)." But let us rather humble ourselves:  
as altogether filthy and abominable, [Psalm 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.3),  
as a mass of corruption, [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18); [Isaiah 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.5-6),  
as a living body of sin, [Romans 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.14); [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24).

2. How awful must be the state of those who live in presumptuous sins!

If the evil of sins committed ignorantly, and without design, is so great, that it cannot be expiated but by the blood of atonement—then what then shall we say of presumptuous sins? How heinous must they be! Let us attend to the voice of God, who has himself compared the guilt contracted by unintentional sin, and by presumptuous sin; and who declares that, though provision was made under the law for the forgiveness of the former, there was no remedy whatever for the latter; the offender was to be put to death, and to be consigned over to endless perdition! [Numbers 15:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.27-31). Let none then think it a light matter to violate the dictates of conscience, and the commands of God; for, in so doing, they pour contempt upon God's law, yes, and upon God himself also, [Numbers 15:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.27-31). The time is quickly coming, when God shall repay them to their face! [Deuteronomy 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.10); [Ecclesiastes 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.9); and shall beat them, not like the ignorant offender, with few stripes, but, as the willful delinquent, with many stripes! [Luke 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.48).

Let this consideration make us cry to God in those words of the Psalmist, "Keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; so shall I be undefiled and innocent from the great offence, [Psalm 19:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.13)."

3. How desperate is the condition of those who make light of Christ's atonement!

Under the law, there was no remission even of the smallest error, but through the blood of atonement. Nor can any sin whatever be pardoned, under the gospel dispensation, but through the sacrifice of Christ. Yet, when we speak of Christ as the only remedy for sin, and urge the necessity of believing in him for justification, many are ready to object, 'Why does he insist so much on justification by faith?' But the answer is plain; 'You are sinners before God; and your one great concern should be to know how your sins may be forgiven; now God has provided a way, and only one way, of forgiveness; and that is, through the atonement of Christ; therefore we set forth Christ as the one remedy for sin; and exhort you continually to believe in him.'

Consider then, I beg you, what the true scope of such objections is; it is to rob Christ of his glory, and your own souls of salvation. Remember this, and be thankful, that the atonement is so much insisted on, and so continually set before you. Pour not contempt upon it; for, if "they who despised Moses' law died without mercy," "of how much more severe punishment shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing! [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29)." Yes, to such willful transgressors, "there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume them! [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27)."

4. How wonderful must be the efficacy of the blood of Christ!

Let only one man's sins be set forth, and they will be found as numberless as the sands upon the sea-shore; yet the blood of Christ can cleanse, not him only, but a whole world of sinners, yes, all who have ever existed these six thousand years, or shall ever exist to the very end of time.

Moreover, his one offering can cleanse them, not merely from sins of ignorance, but even from presumptuous sins, for which no remedy whatever was appointed by the law of Moses, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39). What a view does this give us of the death of Christ! O that we could realize it in our minds, just as the offender under the law realized the substitution of the animal which he presented to the priest to be offered in his stead! Then should we have a just apprehension of his dignity, and a befitting sense of his love.

Let us then carry to him our crimson sins, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18), not doubting but that they shall all be purged away, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7); and we may rest assured that, in a little time, we shall join the heavenly choir in singing, "Unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever and ever! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)."

#125

FIRE ON THE ALTAR NOT TO GO OUT

**[Leviticus 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.13)**

"The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out."

It is a matter of deep regret that religious people do not enter more fully into the Jewish Ritual, and explore with more accuracy the mysteries contained in it. I am not sure that ministers, whose office properly leads them to unfold the sacred volume to their people, are not chargeable with a great measure of this remissness, in that they are not more careful to bring forth to their view the treasures of wisdom that are hidden in that invaluable mine.

Of course, it will not be expected that on this occasion I should attempt anything more than to illustrate the subject that is immediately before me. But I greatly mistake, if that alone will not amply suffice to justify my introductory observation; and to show, that an investigation of the Law in all its parts would well repay the labors of the most diligent research.

The point for our present consideration is the particular appointment, that the fire on the altar should never be allowed to go out. I will endeavor to set forth,

I. Its **typical import**, as relating to the GOSPEL.

Every part of the Ceremonial Law was "a shadow of good things to come." This particular ordinance clearly shows,

1. That we all need an atonement.

This fire which was to be kept burning, was given from Heaven [Leviticus 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.24); and it was given for the use of all Israel without exception. There was not one for whom an atonement was not to be offered. Aaron himself must offer an atonement for himself, before he can offer one for the people, [Hebrews 7:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.27).

Who then among us can hope to come with acceptance into the divine presence in any other way? Our blessed Lord has told us, "No man comes unto the Father, but by me." And Paul assures us, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." We must all, therefore, bring our offering to the altar; and lay our hands upon the head of our offering; and look for pardon solely through the sin-atoning blood of Jesus.

The fire, too, was for the daily use of all. And daily, yes, and hourly, all of us have occasion to come to God in the same way. There is not an offering that we present to God, but it must be placed on his altar; and then only can it ascend with a sweet fragrance before God, when it has undergone its appointed process in that fire.

2. That the sacrifices under the Law are insufficient for us.

Thousands and myriads of beasts were consumed on God's altar; and yet the fire continued to burn, as unsatisfied, and demanding fresh victims. Had the offerings already presented effected a complete satisfaction for sin, the fire might have been extinguished. But the repetition of the sacrifices clearly showed that a full atonement had not yet been offered. In fact, as the Apostle tells us, they were no more than "remembrances of sins made from year to year;" and "could never take away sin," either from God's register of crimes, or from the conscience of the offender himself, [Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-4); [Hebrews 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.11); [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9). Thus, under the very Law itself, the insufficiency of the Law was loudly proclaimed; and the people were taught to look forward to a better dispensation, as the end of that which was, after a time, to be abolished.

3. That God himself would in due time provide a sacrifice with which he would be perfectly satisfied.

From the beginning, God had taught men to look forward to a sacrifice which would in due time be offered. It is probable that the beasts, with whose skins our first parents were clothed, were by God's command first offered in sacrifice to him.

We are sure that Abel offered in sacrifice the firstling of his flock; and it is probable that fire was sent from Heaven, as it certainly was on different occasions afterwards, to consume it; and that it was this visible token of God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, that inflamed the envy and the rage of Cain, [Genesis 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4-5).

From Noah's offerings, also, "God smelled a sweet savor," as shadowing forth that great sacrifice which should in due time be offered, [Genesis 8:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.20-21).

To Abraham the purpose of God was marked in a still more peculiar manner. He was commanded to "take his son, his only son, Isaac," and to offer him up upon an altar, on that very mountain where the Temple afterwards was built, and where the Lord Jesus Christ himself was crucified.

The fire, therefore, that was burning upon the altar, and the wood with which it was kept alive, did, in effect, say, as Isaac so many hundred years before had done, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?"

Yes, it gave also the very answer which Abraham had done, "My son, God himself will provide a lamb for a burnt-offering! [Genesis 22:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.7-8)."

Thus, by keeping up the expectation of the Great Sacrifice which all the offerings of the Law prefigured, it declared, in fact, to every successive generation, that in the fullness of time God would send forth his own Son, to "make his soul an offering for sin," and, by bearing in his own person the iniquities of us all, "to take them away from us, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)."

In short, this fire, and every offering that was consumed by it, directed the attention of every true Israelite to that adorable "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29)," and who in actual efficiency, as well as in the divine purpose, has been "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world! [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8)."

4. That all who should not be savingly interested in that great sacrifice must expect His sorest judgments.

The victims consumed by that fire were considered as standing in the place of men who deserved punishment. This was clearly marked, not only by their being set apart by all Israel, and offered with that express view, but by the offenders themselves putting their hands on the heads of their victims, and transferring their sins to the creatures that were to be offered in sacrifice to God, [Leviticus 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.4); [Leviticus 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.15); [Leviticus 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.24); [Leviticus 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.29); [Leviticus 4:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.33).

The fire that consumed them was expressive of God's indignation against sin, and declared the doom which the sinner himself merited at God's hands. Yes, and the doom, too, which he himself must experience, if sin should ever be visited on him. It declared, what the New Testament also abundantly confirms, that "God is a consuming fire, [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29);" and that those who shall be visited with his righteous indignation, must be "cast into a lake of fire, [Revelation 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.15)," where "their worm never dies, and the fire never shall be quenched! [Mark 9:43-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-46); [Mark 9:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.48) five times."

Methinks, then, the fire burning on the altar gave to every person that beheld it this awful admonition, "Who can dwell with the devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings! [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14)."

In considering this ordinance, it will be proper yet further to declare,

II. Its **mystical import**, as relating to the CHURCH.

The different ordinances of the Jewish Law had at least a two-fold meaning, and, in many instances, a still more comprehensive import.

The tabernacle, for instance, prefigured the body of Christ, "in which all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt;" and the Church, where God displays his glory; and Heaven, where he vouchsafes his more immediate presence, and is seen face to face.

Just so, the altar fitly represents the cross on which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, [Hebrews 13:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.10-12); and the heart of man, from whence offerings of every kind go up with acceptance before God, [Hebrews 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15-16). In the former sense we have its typical, and in the latter its mystical import.

Now in this mystical, and, as I may call it, emblematical sense, the ordinance before us teaches us,

1. That no offering can be accepted by God, unless it is inflamed with heavenly fire.

"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD! [Leviticus 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.1-2)."

And shall we hope for acceptance with God, if we present our offerings with the unhallowed fire of mere natural affections? Our blessed Lord has told us, that he would "baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire, [Matthew 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.11);" and every sacrifice which we offer to him should be inflamed with that divine power, even the sacred energy of his Holy Spirit, and of his heavenly grace. Let us not imagine that formal and self-righteous services can be pleasing to him; or that we can be accepted by him while seeking our own glory. Hear the declaration of God himself on this subject, "But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment!

[Isaiah 50:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.11)."

2. That if God has kindled in our hearts a fire, we must keep it alive by our own vigilance.

I well know that this mode of expression is objected to by many; but it is the language of the whole Scriptures; and therefore is to be used by us. We are "not to be wise above what is written," and to abstain from speaking as the voice of inspiration speaks, merely from a jealous regard to human systems. True it is, we are not to attempt anything in our own strength; (if we do, we shall surely fail,) but we must exert ourselves notwithstanding; and the very circumstance of its being "God alone who can work in us either to will or do," is our incentive and encouragement to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling! [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13)."

If we cannot work without God, neither will God work without us. We must "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, [2 Peter 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10)." We must "keep ourselves in the love of God, [Jude 1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jude 1);" we must "stir up (like the stirring of a fire) the gift of God that is in us, 2 Timothy 1:6. We must from time to time "be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain in us, that are ready to die, [Revelation 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.2)." In a word, we must be "keeping up the fire on the altar, and never allow it to go out."

This, indeed, was the office of the priests under the Law; and so it is under the Gospel; and this is, indeed, the very end at which we aim in all our ministrations.

We never kindled a fire in any of your hearts; nor ever could; that was God's work alone. But we would bring the word, and lay it on the altar of your hearts; and endeavor to fan the flame; so that the fire may burn more pure and ardent, and every offering which you present before God may go up with acceptance before him. But let me say, that, under the Christian dispensation, you all are "a royal priesthood;" there is now no difference between Jew and Greek, or between male and female; you therefore must from morning to evening, and from evening to morning, be bringing fresh fuel to the fire:  
by reading,  
by meditation,  
by prayer,  
by conversation,  
by an attendance on social and public ordinances,  
by visiting the sick,  
and by whatever may have a tendency to quicken and augment the life of God in your souls.

The sacred fire must either languish or increase; it never can continue long in the same state. See to it, then, that you "grow in grace," and "look to yourselves that you lose not the things that you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, [2 John 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 John 1.8)."

3. That every sacrifice which we offer in God's appointed way shall surely be accepted by him.

There is the fire—see it blazing on the altar. Why is it thus kept up? Kept up, too, by God's express command? Why? that you may know assuredly that God is there, ready to accept your every offering. You think, perhaps, that you have no offering worthy of his acceptance. But do you not know, that he who was not able to bring a goat, or a lamb, or even two young pigeons, might bring a small measure of fine flour; and that that should be burnt upon the altar for him, and be accepted as an atonement instead of a slaughtered animal, [Leviticus 5:5-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.5-13).

Be assured that the sigh, the tear, the groan shall come up with acceptance before him, as much as the most fluent prayer that ever was offered! Be assured that the widow's mite will be found no less valuable in his sight, than the richest offerings of the great and wealthy. Only "draw near to God;" and be assured, "He will draw near to you;" and, as he gave to his people formerly some visible tokens of his acceptance, so will he give to you the invisible, but not less real, manifestations of his love and favor, "shedding abroad his love in your hearts," giving you "the witness of his Spirit" in your souls, and "sealing you with the Holy Spirit of promise as the pledge of your inheritance, until the time of your complete redemption!"

In concluding this subject, I would yet further say,

1. Look to Jesus' finished atonement as your only hope.

I wish you very particularly to notice when it was that God sent down this fire upon the altar. It was when Aaron had offered a sacrifice for his own sins, and a sacrifice also for the sins of the people. It was then, while a part of the latter sacrifice was yet unconsumed upon the altar, that God sent down fire from Heaven and consumed it instantly! [Leviticus 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.8); [Leviticus 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.13); [Leviticus 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.15); [Leviticus 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.17); [Leviticus 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.24). When this universal acknowledgment had been made of their affiance in the great atonement, then God honored them with this signal token of his acceptance.

Just so, it is only when you come to him in the name of Christ, pleading the merit of his blood, and "desiring to be found in him, not having your own righteousness but his," it is then I say, and then only, that you can expect from God an answer of peace. It is of great importance that you notice this; for many people are looking first to receive some token of his love, that they may afterwards be emboldened to come to him through Christ. But you must first come to him through Christ; and then "he will send the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, whereby you shall cry, Abba, Father!"

2. Surrender up yourselves as living sacrifices unto God.

On the Jewish altar slain beasts were offered. But under the Christian dispensation you must offer yourselves, your whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, as a living sacrifice unto the Lord. This is the sacrifice which God looks for; and this alone he will accept. This too, I may add, is your spiritual act of worship, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). This must precede every other offering, [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5). God will never accept a divided heart. Let the whole soul be his; and there shall not be any offering which you can present, which shall not receive a testimony of his approbation here, and an abundant recompense hereafter; for, "if there is only a willing mind, it shall be accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not."

#126

THE PEACE-OFFERING

**[Leviticus 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.11)**

"These are the regulations for the peace offerings a person may present to the LORD"

In the order in which the different offerings are spoken of, the peace-offering occurs the third; but, in the third chapter, the law of the peace-offerings is no further stated than it accords with the burnt-offering; and the fuller statement is reserved for the passage before us. Hence in the enumeration of the different offerings in verse 37, the peace-offering is fitly mentioned last. That we may mark the more accurately its distinguishing features, we shall state,

I. The particular regulations of this law.

Many of them were common to those of the burnt-offering; the sacrifices might be taken from the herd or from the flock; the offerer was to bring it to the door of the tabernacle, and to put his hands upon it; there it was to be killed; its blood was to be sprinkled upon the altar, and its flesh, in part at least, was to be burnt upon the altar. Of these things we have spoken before; and therefore forbear to dwell upon them now.

But there were many other regulations peculiar to the peace-offering; and to these we will now turn our attention. We notice,

1. The **matter** of which they consisted.

Though the sacrifices might be of the herd or of the flock, they could not be of birds; a turtle-dove or pigeon could not on this occasion be offered. In the burnt-offering, males only could be presented; but here it might be either male or female. In the grain-offering, either cakes or wafers might be offered; but here must be both cakes and wafers; in the former case, leaven was absolutely prohibited; but here it was enjoined; leavened bread was to be used, as well as the unleavened cakes and wafers, [Leviticus 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 3.1); [Leviticus 7:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.12-13).

2. The **manner** in which they were offered.

Particular directions were given both with respect to the division of them, and the consumption. The meat-offering was divided only between the altar and the priests; but, in the peace-offering, the offerer himself had far the greatest share. God, who was in these things represented by the altar, had the fat, the kidneys, and the caul, which were consumed by fire, [Leviticus 3:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 3.3-5).

The priest who burned the fat was to have the bosom and the right shoulder; the bosom was to be waved by him to and fro, and the shoulder was to be heaved upwards by him towards Heaven. By these two significant actions, God was acknowledged both as the Governor of the universe, and as the source of all good to all his creatures; and from them these portions were called "the wave-offering, and the heave-shoulder." One of the cakes also was given to the priest who sprinkled the blood upon the altar, who, after heaving it before the Lord, was to have it for his own use.

All the remainder of the offering, as well of the animal as the vegetable parts of it, belonged to the offerer; who together with his friends might eat it in their own tents. Two cautions however they were to observe; the one was, that the people partaking of it must be "clean," (that is, have no ceremonial impurity upon them;) and they must eat it within the time prescribed.

We will not interrupt our statement by any practical explanations, lest we render it perplexed; but shall endeavor to get a clear comprehensive view of the subject, and then make a suitable improvement of it.

Let us proceed then to notice,

II. The occasions whereon the offering was made.

There were some fixed occasions by the divine appointment, and some altogether optional occasions.

The fixed occasions were, at the consecration of the priests [Exodus 29:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.28); at the expiration of the Nazarites' vow, [Numbers 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.14); at the dedication of the tabernacle and temple, [Numbers 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 7.17); [1 Kings 8:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.63); and at the feast of first fruits, [Leviticus 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.19).

But besides these, the people were at liberty to offer them whenever a sense of gratitude or of need inclined them to it.

1. They were offered as acknowledgments of mercies received.

It could not fail but they must sometimes feel their obligations to God for his manifold mercies; and here was a way appointed wherein they might render unto God the honor due unto his name. In the 107th Psalm we have a variety of occurrences mentioned, wherein God's interposition might be seen; for instance, in bringing men safely to their homes after having encountered considerable difficulties and dangers; in redeeming them from prison or captivity, after they had by their own faults or follies reduced themselves to misery; in recovering people from sickness, after they had been brought down to the chambers of the grave; in preserving mariners from storms and shipwreck; in public, family, or personal mercies of any kind. For any of these David says, "Let them sacrifice the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing! [Psalm 107:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.22)."

2. They were offered as supplications for mercies desired.

These might be offered either as free-will offerings, or as vows; between which there was a material difference; the one expressing more of a sincere spirit, the other arising rather from fear and terror. We have a striking instance of the former, in the case of the eleven tribes, who, from a zeal for God's honor, had undertaken to punish, the Benjamites for the horrible wickedness they had committed. Twice had the confederate tribes gone up against the Benjamites, and twice been repulsed, with the loss of forty thousand men; but being still desirous to know and do the will of God in this matter, (for it was God's quarrel only that they were avenging,) "they went up to the house of God, and wept and fasted until even, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings unto the Lord;" and then God delivered the Benjamites into their hand; so that, with the exception of six hundred only, who fled, the whole tribe of Benjamin, both male and female, was extirpated, [Judges 20:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.26).

Of the latter kind, namely, the vows, we have an instance in Jonah and the mariners, when overtaken with the storm. Jonah doubtless had proposed this expedient to the seamen, who, though heathens, readily adopted it in concert with him, hoping thereby to obtain deliverance from the destruction that threatened them, [Jonah 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.16). And to the particular vows made on that occasion, Jonah had respect in the thanksgiving he offered after his deliverance, [Jonah 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.9).

Between the peace-offerings which were presented as thanksgivings, and those presented in supplication before God, there was a marked difference; the tribute of love and gratitude was far more pleasing to God, as arguing a more heavenly frame of mind; and, in consequence of its superior excellence, the sacrifice that was offered as a thanksgiving must be eaten, on the same day; whereas the sacrifice offered as a vow or voluntary offering, might, as being less holy, be eaten also on the second day. But, if any was left to the third day, it must be consumed by fire.

Having stated the principal peculiarities of this law,

We shall now come to its **practical improvement**.

We may find in it abundant matter,

1. For reproof.

The Jews, if they wished to express their humiliation or gratitude in the way appointed by the law, were under the necessity of yielding up a part of their property (perhaps at a time when they could but ill afford it in sacrifice to God.

But no such necessity is imposed on us, "God has not made us to serve with an offering, nor wearied us with incense;" the offerings he requires of us are altogether spiritual; it is "the offering of a free heart," or "of a broken and contrite spirit," that he desires of us; and that he will accept in preference to "the cattle upon a thousand hills."

Well therefore may it be expected that we have approached God with the language of the Psalmist, "Accept, I beseech you, the free-will offerings of my mouth, [Psalm 119:108](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.108)."

But has this been the case?

Have our sins brought us unto God in humiliation?

Have our necessities brought us unto God in prayer?

Have our mercies brought us unto God in thankfulness?

What excuse have we for our neglects?

These sacrifices required no expense of property, and but little of time. Moreover, we would never have brought our sacrifice, without feasting on it ourselves. Think, if there had not been in us a sad aversion to communion with God, what numberless occasions we have had for drawing near to him in this way! Surely every beast that was ever slaughtered on those occasions, and every portion that was ever offered, will appear in judgment against us to condemn our ingratitude and obduracy!

2. For direction.

Whether the peace-offering was presented in a way of thanksgiving or of supplication, it equally began with a sacrifice in the way of atonement. Thus, whatever be the frame of our minds, and whatever service we render unto God—we must invariably fix our minds on the atonement of Christ, as the only means whereby either our persons or our services can obtain acceptance with God. Moreover, having occasion to offer sacrifice, we must do it without delay, even as the offerers were to eat their offerings in the time appointed, [Hebrews 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13-15); [Psalm 119:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.60); [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.2). We must be attentive too to our after-conduct, "lest we lose the things that we have wrought, instead of receiving a full reward, 2 John."

However carefully the offerers had observed the law before—yet, if any one presumed to eat the smallest portion of his offering on the third day, instead of being accepted of God, his offering was utterly rejected; and he was considered as having committed a deadly sin. O that those who spend a few days in what is called 'preparing themselves' for the Lord's supper, and after receiving it return to the same worldly courses as before, would consider this! For no service can be pleasing to God which does not issue in an immediate renunciation of every evil way, and a determined, unreserved, and abiding surrender of the soul to God.

In coming to God, we must, at least in purpose and intention, be "clean;" else we only mock God, and deceive our own soul; and, after having come to him, we must proceed to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

3. For encouragement.

On these occasions a female offering was received, as well as a male, and leavened bread together with the unleavened. What a blessed intimation was here, that "God will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss!"

A similar intimation is given us in his acceptance of a mutilated or defective beast, when presented to him as a free-will offering, [Leviticus 22:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 22.23). Our best services, alas! are very poor and defective; corruption is blended with everything we do; our very tears need to be washed from their defilement, and our repentances to be repented of!

But, if we are sincere and without allowed deceit, God will deal with us as a parent with his beloved children, accepting with pleasure the services we render him, and overlooking the weakness with which they are performed, [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8); [Psalm 147:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.11).

#127

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE SACRIFICES

**[Leviticus 9:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.23-24)**

"Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down!"

When we see the great variety of ordinances instituted by Moses, and the multitudes of sacrifices that were, either in whole or in part, to be consumed upon the altar, we are ready to ask: Of what use was all this? and what compensation could be made to the people for all the expense and trouble to which they were put? But in the text we have a ready, and a sufficient answer.

God did not long withhold from them such communications, as would abundantly recompense all that they did, and all that they could, perform for his sake; he gave them such testimonies of his acceptance as made all their hearts to overflow with joy.

Let us consider,

I. The testimonies of God's acceptance.

Of these there were different kinds;

1. Ministerial.

Moses and Aaron, having finished all that they had to do within the tabernacle, came forth, and "blessed the people;" and in this action they were eminent types of Christ, and examples to all future ministers to the end of time.

As types of Christ, they showed what he should do as soon as he should have completed his sacrifice. The acceptance of all his believing followers being now certain, he blessed them; and was in the very act of blessing them, when he was taken up from them into Heaven, [Luke 24:50-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.50-51). Scarcely had he taken possession or his throne, before he "sent down upon them the blessing of the Father," even the Holy Spirit, [Acts 2:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.33); [Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26), to be their Guide and Comforter; and, when he shall have finished his work of intercession within the veil, he will come forth to pronounce upon them his final blessing, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" When on earth, he offered himself a sacrifice, and died as a sinner under the malediction of the law; but at the day of judgment he will, "unto those who look for him, appear the second time, without sin, to their complete salvation! [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28)."

As examples to ministers, they showed what all ministers are authorized and empowered to declare unto those who rely on the great sacrifice. They are to stand forth, and, in the very name of God, to proclaim pardon and peace to every one of them without exception, [Acts 13:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.38-39).

2. Personal.

In two ways did God himself, without the intervention of any human means, condescend to manifest his acceptance of the sacrifices which were now offered.

He first displayed his glory before all the people. This on some occasions was done in testimony of his displeasure, and in support of his servants who acted under his authority, [Numbers 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.10); [Numbers 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.19); [Numbers 16:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.42); but here, as also on other occasions, it was altogether a token or his favor. In what precise manner this was done, we are not informed; but we are well assured, that it must have been in a way suited to his own glorious majesty, and in a way that carried its own evidence along with it.

Of course, such exhibitions of the divine glory are not now to be expected; but there are others, which, though not visible to mortal eyes, are very perceptible to the believing heart; and which shall be given to those who come to God by Jesus Christ. Our blessed Lord has assured his believing followers, that "he will manifest himself unto them as he does not unto the world;" which promise would be nugatory, if the manifestations referred to did not carry their own evidence along with them. It is not easy indeed to mark with precision the agency of the Holy Spirit, so as to distinguish it from the operations of our own mind; but in the effects we can tell infallibly, what proceeds from God, and what from ourselves. The views which we may have of God and his perfections, may, as far as relates to the speculative part, arise from human instruction; but the humility, the love, the peace, the purity, with all the other sanctifying effects produced by those views upon the soul, can proceed from God alone; they are the fruits of the Spirit, and of him alone. Hence, though no man can conceive aright of the manifestations of God to the soul, unless he has himself experienced them, nor can know exactly what it is to have "the Spirit of God witnessing with his spirit," or "shedding abroad the love of God in his heart," yet we are in no danger of error or enthusiasm, while we look for these things as purchased for us through the sacrifice of Christ, and judge of them, not by any inexplicable feelings, but by plain and practical results.

In addition to this display of his glory, God sent fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice. By this he showed the people what fiery indignation they themselves merited, and that he had turned it from them, and caused it to fall on the sacrifice which had been substituted in their stead.

The observations just made, will apply also to this part of our subject. We are not to expect such a visible token, that our great sacrifice is accepted for us; but all the assurances of it which God has given us in his word, shall be applied with power to our souls, and be impressed with as strong a conviction upon our minds, as if we had seen a demonstration of it exhibited before our eyes.

From the testimonies themselves let us turn our attention to,

II. The **effects** produced by the testimonies of God's acceptance.

It is common for visible objects to affect us strongly. Accordingly the people were deeply impressed by what they now saw.

1. They were filled with **exalted joy**.

Had they not been taught to expect some extraordinary expressions of God's regard, they would probably have been terrified, as Gideon and Manoah were, [Judges 6:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.21-22); [Judges 13:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.19-22); but being prepared, they were filled with triumphant exultation, and rent the air with their shouts. See a similar instance in [Ezra 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 3.11).

How far a similar mode of expressing our religious feelings at this time would in any case be proper, we will not absolutely determine; but we apprehend that in the general it would not. Such manifestations as those we are considering, are calculated to make a strong impression on the mind, and to call forth the affections into violent and immediate exercise. But the truths of the Gospel, and the communications of God to the soul, affect us rather through the medium of the understanding; and, consequently, are both more slow, and more moderate, in their operation. Yet doubtless somewhat of the same emotions must be right, especially in our secret chamber, where our communion with God is usually most intimate; and where others who are strangers to our feelings, cannot be offended by what they would deem enthusiastic or hypocritical expressions of them. The inward triumph of the Apostle Paul seems more suited to our dispensation, [Romans 8:31-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31-39); and that it is both the privilege and duty of every one of us to enjoy.

2. They were filled with **profound reverence**.

"They fell upon their faces," in humble adoration of their God and King. This union of humility and joy was exactly what one would have wished to see in them; and happy would it be if some who talk most of spiritual joys would learn from them! Even the seraphim before the throne cover both their faces and their feet, from a consciousness of their unworthiness to behold or serve their God; and the glorified saints, from similar feelings, cast their crowns at his feet.

How much more therefore should we have our most exalted joys tempered with humility! This should never for one moment be forgotten; our trust, our love, our gratitude, our assurance, our very triumphs, will all prove vain, if they be not chastised and softened with humiliation and contrition. If we look at the most eminent saints, and mark the effects of God's condescension to them, we find them invariably expressing their acknowledgments in a way of reverence and self-abasement, [Genesis 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.3); [Exodus 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.6); and the more our devotion resembles theirs, the more acceptable it will be to the Supreme Being.

Let us learn from this subject,

1. To lay no stress on transient affections.

One would have thought that such a frame of mind as the people experienced at this time, must have had a holy outcome; and that they would henceforth approve themselves faithful to their God. But these were mere transient emotions, which were forgotten as soon as any temptation arose to call forth their unsubdued corruptions.

And thus it is with multitudes under the Gospel; whom our Lord compares to seed sown upon stony ground, which springs up with great rapidity, but withers away as soon; because it has no depth of earth to grow in, nor any roots to nourish it, [Matthew 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.5-6); [Matthew 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20-21). We ought indeed to have our affections called forth into exercise; nor is that religion of any value that does not engage them in its service; but that religion which is seated only in the affections, will never be of any long duration.

The understanding must be informed,  
the judgment convinced,  
and the will determined,  
upon the subject of religion; and then the affections will operate to advantage; but, unless the whole heart and the whole soul are engaged in the work, it will come to nothing.

2. To be thankful for the advantages that we enjoy.

We are apt to envy the Jews their exalted privileges, and to imagine, that, if we had enjoyed the same, we would have made a better improvement of them; but we see how fleeting and inefficacious are the impressions made by sensible manifestations, when of that whole nation, two only were admitted into the promised land. They "walked by sight;" but we are "to walk by faith."

This is the principle which we are to cultivate; we must look by faith to the great sacrifice; we must see our great High-Priest entered within the veil for us, and coming forth to "bless us with all spiritual blessings." Then shall we find, that, in proportion as this principle is brought into exercise, it will work by love, and purify the heart, and overcome the world, and render us fit for our everlasting inheritance.

#128

DEATH OF NADAB AND ABIHU

**[Leviticus 10:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.1-3)**

"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'" Aaron remained silent."

In all that we behold around us there is a great degree of obscurity, so that we can judge but very imperfectly either of the motives and actions of men, or of the dispensations of God. For lack of an insight into the motives of men's conduct, we cannot form a correct estimate of their character. Nor can we, without a revelation from Heaven, distinguish those events which come directly from God, and those which, though ultimately referable to him, proceed rather from secondary causes.

But in the Bible we find certainty. In Scripture we learn:  
the principles by which men are actuated;  
the hand of God accomplishing his own unerring purpose;  
sin in all its diversified forms;  
virtue in all its various degree;  
mercies in all their rich extent;  
and judgments in all their tremendous consequences!

Had the event of which we read in our text, happened in our day, we would probably have admired the zeal of Nadab and Abihu, and have represented their death as a translation from the service of God in an earthly tabernacle, to the enjoyment of him in the tabernacle above. It is possible too that we might have ascribed the silence of Aaron to a lack of parental affection. But, through the light which the Scripture casts upon these things, we behold in the death of the former, a judgment inflicted; and, in the silence of the latter, a virtue exercised. Under these two heads we shall consider the history before us.

I. The judgment inflicted.

Nadab and Abihu were the two eldest sons of Aaron. They had been just consecrated, together with their father, to the priestly office.

But they committed a grievous sin.

It would seem that they were elated with the distinction conferred upon them, and impatient to display the high privileges they enjoyed. Hence, without waiting for the proper season of burning incense, or considering in what manner God had commanded it to be done, they both together took their censers (though only one was ever so to officiate at a time) and put unauthorized common fire upon them, and went in to burn incense before the Lord.

Now this was a great and heinous sin; for God had just before sent fire from Heaven, which he commanded to be kept always burning on the altar for the express purpose of being exclusively used in the service of the tabernacle. Their conduct therefore showed, that they had made no just improvement of all the wonders they had seen; and that they were unconscious of the obligations which their newly-acquired honors entailed upon them. It even argued a most criminal contempt of the Divine Majesty, in opposition to whose express commands they now acted.

For this, they were visited with a most awful judgment.

God, jealous of his own honor, punished their transgression, and marked their sin in their punishment. They had slighted the fire which God had given them from Heaven; and he sent fresh fire to avenge his quarrel! They neglected to honor God; and He got honor for himself in their destruction. They, by their example, encouraged the people to disregard the laws that had been promulgated; and He, by executing judgment on the offenders, showed the whole nation, yes and the whole world also, that "he will by no means clear the guilty!" Thus did God maintain the honor of his law, as he afterwards did the authority of his Gospel, [Acts 5:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.1-11).

While in them we behold with grief the enormity and desert of sin, in their afflicted father Aaron, we are constrained to admire,

II. The submission exercised.

Doubtless the affliction of Aaron was exceeding great.

These were his own sons, just consecrated to the high office they sustained. In them he had promised himself much comfort; and had hoped that the whole nation would receive permanent advantage from their ministrations. But in a moment he beheld all his hopes and expectations blasted. He sees his sons struck dead by the immediate hand of God, and that too in the very act of sin, as a warning to all future generations! It they had died in any other way, his grief must have been pungent beyond expression; but to see them cut off in this way, and with all their guilt upon their heads, must have been a trial almost too great for human nature to sustain!

But he submitted to it without a murmuring word or thought.

The consideration suggested to him by Moses, composed his troubled bosom. God had given repeated warning that he would punish with awful severity any willful deviations from his law, [Exodus 19:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.22); [Leviticus 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 8.35); [Leviticus 22:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 22.9). Now, as a Sovereign, he had a right to enact what laws he pleased; and they, as his creatures, were bound to obey them. It befit him to enforce the observance of his laws, and to vindicate the honor of his insulted majesty, if any should presume to violate them. What would have been the effect if such a flagrant violation of them, in those who were to be examples to the whole nation, were overlooked? Would not a general contempt of the divine ordinances be likely to ensue? For prevention then, as well as punishment, this judgment was necessary.

And the consequence of it would be, that God would henceforth be honored as a great and awesome God, and that the whole assembly of the people would learn to tremble at his word, and to obey it without reserve. Thus, however painful the stroke was to him, he submitted humbly to it, because it was necessary for the public good, and conducive to the honor of his offended God.

It is probable too, that he would recollect the forbearance exercised towards him in the matter of the golden calf; and that, while he deplored the fate of his children, he magnified the mercy that had spared him.

From this subject we may learn,

1. To reverence God's ordinances.

Well may all, both ministers and people, learn to tremble when they approach God in the institutions of his worship.

Were this example of divine vengeance duly considered, surely *ministers* would never dare to seek their own glory when they stand up to address their audience in the name of God. They would look well to their ministrations, and be sure that they presented before God no other fire than what they had previously taken from his own altar.

The people too would never venture to come to the house of God in a thoughtless or irreverent manner, but would reflect on the holiness and majesty of the Supreme Being, and endeavor to approve themselves to him in all the services they offered, [Psalm 89:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.7).

Beloved brethren, it is no legal argument which we offer, when we remind you that God is jealous of his own honor, and exhort you from that consideration to take heed to yourselves whenever you approach his house, his altar, or his throne of grace. It is the very argument urged by an inspired Apostle, and that too in reference to the history before us, "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire! [Hebrews 12:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.28-29)."

2. To submit to his dispensations.

It pleases God sometimes to try in a peculiar manner his most favored saints. But from whatever quarter our trials come, we should view the hand of God in them, and say, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes! [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18). See also [Psalm 38:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.13) and [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21)." It does not befit us to "complain against God;" or "the clay to strive with the potter." As a Sovereign, he has a right to do with us as he will; and, if only he is glorified, we should be content, whatever we may suffer for the attainment of that end.

The recollection of our own deserts should always stop our mouths, or rather prevent even the rising disposition to murmur against him. He never did, nor can in this world, punish us more than our iniquities deserve; and therefore a living man can never have occasion to complain! [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39).

Let us then, whatever our afflictions be, submit with meekness to his chastising hand, "let us be still, and know that he is God!" Yes, let us be thankful that "he is magnified in our body, whether it be by life or by death! [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20)."

#129

THE LAWS RELATING TO LEPROSY

**[Leviticus 13:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.45-46)**

"The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp."

Among the various disorders with which the Jews were afflicted, the leprosy was marked as the most odious and disgraceful; and the rules for distinguishing it from all similar disorders were laid down by God himself with very extraordinary accuracy and precision. As existing in garments and in houses, it seems to have been peculiar to the Jews; and to have entirely vanished with their dispensation. But there doubtless was some important end for which God visited them with this disorder; and what that was, may be gathered from the various ordinances relating to it.

In all the differences which God commanded to be put between things clean and unclean, he designed to teach us the evil and bitterness of sin; but from the leprosy more particularly may these things be learned. We may learn, I say,

I. We may learn from leprosy, the evil of sin.

Whatever resemblance the leprosy might bear to some other disorders, it differed materially from all others.

1. Leprosy was universally judicial.

This disorder was not, as some have thought, acquired by contagion; for it was not at all infectious; but it proceeded immediately from the hand of God; and was always considered as a punishment for sin. Miriam was smitten with it for her rebellion against Moses, [Numbers 12:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 12.10-15); and Gehazi, for his covetous and dishonest conduct towards Naaman the Syrian, [2 Kings 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.27).

In this light also should sin be viewed. True, it first entered through the device of Satan; but from that time it has been, more or less, judicially inflicted by God, on those who have disregarded the divine commands. Frequently is God said to "blind the eyes," and "harden the hearts" of men. We must not indeed suppose, that he ever does this by a positive infusion of sin into the soul; this would not consist with his own glorious perfections; but he abandons men to the evil of their own hearts, and withholds from them that grace whereby alone they can overcome their corruptions. Multitudes are "given up by him to a reprobate mind, because they abhor to retain him in their knowledge, [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28)." And he tells us plainly, that this punishment shall be inflicted on us, if we do not guard against sin in its first beginnings, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; he shall eat of the fruit of his own ways, and be filled with his own devices! [Proverbs 1:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.30-31); [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.14)."

Who indeed has not found the truth of these declarations? Who does not see, that, if we harbor pride, covetousness, impurity, sloth, or any other evil principle in our hearts—it will gain such an ascendant over us, as at once to chastise us for our folly, and to augment our guilt? The truth is, that the very heaviest judgment which God can inflict upon us in this world, is, to give us over to the evil of our own hearts, and to say, "He is joined to idols; let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)."

2. Leprosy was pre-eminently hateful.

If there were but the smallest appearance of the leprosy on anyone, he must instantly have it examined with all possible care. He must not trust to his own judgment, but must apply to those whom God had authorized to determine the point, according to the rules prescribed for them. If the disorder existed, though in ever so low a degree, the person was instantly visited with all its painful consequences; and if only a doubt of its existence was entertained, he must be quarantined, and re-examined, week after week, until the point could be determined. Surely nothing could more strongly declare its odiousness in the sight of God.

In this respect it most emphatically marks the hatefulness of sin. "Sin is that abominable thing which God hates! [Jeremiah 44:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.4)." He charges us to abhor it, [Romans 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.9), and to abstain from all appearance of it! [1 Thessalonians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.22). He solemnly assures us, that, if we harbor it in our hearts, it shall not go unpunished, [Exodus 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.7) and [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21). He requires us to "search and try our ways;" and to bring everything to the touchstone of his word, [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20). Nor would he have us satisfied with our own judgment, lest our self-love should deceive us; we must come to our great High-Priest, "whose eyes are a flame of fire;" and beg of him to "search and try us, and to see if there be any wicked way in us, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)." However clear we may be in our own eyes, we must say with Paul, "I judge not my own self; for I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he who judges me is the Lord, [1 Corinthians 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3-4)."

3. Leprosy was absolutely incurable.

There was nothing prescribed, nor indeed anything to be attempted, for the cure of this disorder. Nothing but the hand that inflicted it, could remove it. Hence the removal of it is most generally expressed by the term cleansing; and those who were relieved from it are said to have been cleansed, [Luke 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.14); [Luke 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.17).

Just so, it is certain that none but God can deliver us from sin! No superstitious devices have ever been able to root it out, no human efforts to subdue it. The blood of Christ alone can wash away sin's guilt; and the grace of Christ alone can suppress sin's operation!

Clearly as the evil of sin is seen in this disorder, we behold yet more strongly marked,

II. We may learn from leprosy, the bitterness of sin.

The person afflicted with the leprosy was put out of the camp or city in which he had dwelt, and was forced to live alone, being cut off from all fellowship with his dearest relatives, [2 Kings 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.3); [2 Kings 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 15.5). How inexpressibly painful must this have been!

Here then we see shadowed forth the miserable state of men by reason of sin. When it shows itself only in unallowed infirmities, it will consist with the divine favor; just as the leprosy, when it was turned to a kind of scurf that covered the whole body from head to foot, was considered as no longer rendering the person ceremonially unclean, verses 2, 13; but, as long as it continues "deeper than the skin," with "quick raw flesh rising," and "white or yellow hair;" in other words, while it reigns within, and produces its accustomed fruits.

1. Sin incapacitates us for fellowship with God's Church on earth.

Social fellowship indeed with the Lord's people is not prohibited; but that fellowship which the saints enjoy with each other in spiritual exercises is altogether beyond the reach of those who live in willful sin. The Apostle justly asks, "What communion has light with darkness, or righteousness with unrighteousness, or he who believes with an unbeliever? [2 Corinthians 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-15)." The views, desires, and pursuits of the ungodly are altogether different from those which characterize the children of God; and they make for themselves that separation, which under the law was the subject of an express command.

Strictly speaking perhaps, the separation begins on the side of the Lord's people, because they are commanded to "come out from the world, and be separate, and not to touch the unclean thing, [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17);" but the effect is the same; in the one case, the unclean were but few, and therefore were separated from the mass; but in the other case, the mass are the unclean; and the clean are separated from them.

2. Sin incapacitates us for admission into his Church in Heaven.

The apostle Paul appeals to us respecting this as a thing plain, obvious, and undeniable, [1 Corinthians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9); and our blessed Lord repeatedly affirms it with the strongest asseverations that it was possible for him to utter, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3); [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5). When king Uzziah was smitten with leprosy in the temple, all the priests with one accord rose upon him, and thrust him out of the temple; yes, and he himself also hastened to go out, 2 Chronicles 26:20.

And thus it would be in Heaven, if by any means an unrenewed sinner were admitted there; he would be thrust out, [Luke 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.28), as unworthy of a place among that blessed society; and he would hasten to flee out, from a consciousness that nothing but redoubled misery could await him there! [Psalm 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.5).

ADDRESS.

1. Let us entertain a godly jealousy over ourselves.

Men are very apt to "think themselves something, when they are nothing." But we should diligently "prove our own work, that we may have rejoicing in ourselves alone, and not in another, [Galatians 6:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3-5)." As in the leprosy, so in the dispositions of the heart, it is often difficult to distinguish with certainty; the lines of distinction between unbelief and fear, presumption and faith, worldliness and prudence, and between a variety of other principles existing in the mind, are more easily defined on paper, than discerned in the heart. Truth and error often so nearly resemble each other, that none but our great High-Priest can enable us to discern them apart. Yet if an evil principle is admitted into the mind, it will produce a thousand evils in the life. Hence a peculiar stigma was put upon the leprosy, when detected in the head; then the person was declared "utterly unclean!" This expression does not occur anywhere else in Scripture.

Be on your guard therefore, beloved brethren; and beg of God, that you may never be permitted to deceive your own souls. When doubts arose about the leprosy, the person was quarantined for seven days; and this was repeated, until the point could be ascertained.

If you would occasionally retire from the world, and spend a day in fasting and self-examination, you would detect many evils of which at present you have very little conception, and acquire a strength of character not to be attained in any other way.

2. Let us humble ourselves for our remaining imperfections.

However we may have been cleansed from our leprosy, there is, as was before observed, the leprous scurf still over us from head to foot, verses 2, 13. We still therefore have occasion to cry with the prophet, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips! [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5)." "Our very righteousnesses are, in fact, but filthy rags! [Isaiah 64:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.6);" so that we still have reason, like holy Job, to "loath and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes, [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

The external signs of sorrow which were prescribed to the leper, we should commute for those which indicate true contrition, "Rend your heart," says the prophet, "and not your garments, [Joel 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.13)." We should "walk humbly with God," and so much the more when we find that "he is pacified towards us, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63)."

As they who had only been suspected of the leprosy were required to wash their garments, so let us, who yet retain such awful memorials of it, "wash ourselves from day to day in the fountain opened for sin and for impurity!"

#130

PURIFICATION OF THE LEPER

**[Leviticus 14:3-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.3-9)**

"The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease (leprosy), the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields. "The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for seven days. On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair; he must shave his head, his beard, his eyebrows and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean."

There is an indissoluble connection between duty and privilege, though that connection is, for the most part, but little understood. Our privileges are in general supposed to arise out of the performance of our duties. Whereas the reverse of this is more generally true; privileges are freely bestowed upon us by God according to his own sovereign will and pleasure; and these operate as incentives to love and serve him. The blessings of election, redemption and effectual calling are not given to us on account of our antecedent merit, but in order that we may show forth the praises of Him that has called us.

We see this exemplified in the laws relating to the leprosy. Nothing was prescribed whereby people should first of all heal themselves; but, when God of his infinite mercy had first healed them, then were they to come and offer their acknowledgments in the way appointed.

The ordinances to be observed by them are here laid down; and from them we see, that the purification of the leper was two-fold:

I. Initial purification.

Two birds were to be taken; one of which was to be killed over a vessel of spring-water; and the other, dipped in the bloody water, was to be let loose.

Some interpret this as signifying, that Christ should die for us, and that the sinner, dipped as it were in his blood, should be liberated from sin and death, and be enabled to soar above this lower world, both in heart and life.

But we apprehend that both the birds equally designate Christ. And, inasmuch as the living bird was dipped in the blood of that which was killed, this intimated, that all that Christ should do for us after his resurrection, was founded upon the atonement which he had offered; by which he obtained a right to justify us, and to send us his Holy Spirit, and to save us with an everlasting salvation, [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12); [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10).

As for the cedar-wood, the scarlet yarn, and the hyssop, which were also dipped in the bloody water, and used in sprinkling the leper, we forbear to specify the spiritual import of each, because it must rest on mere conjecture, and will not prove satisfactory after all.

But the circumstance of the blood being mixed with living water, most assuredly was designed to teach us, that Christ saves us no less by his Spirit than by his blood. By his Spirit, from the power of sin; and by his blood, from its guilt. Moreover, these are never separated. When his side was pierced, "there came out (as John, who was an eye-witness, testifies) both blood and water, [John 19:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.34-35)." On which circumstance he lays great stress; assuring us, that "Christ came not by water only, but by water and blood, [1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.6)." These two then being sprinkled upon the sinner, "the priest of God is fully authorized to pronounce him clean".

In confirmation of this statement we need only to refer to the two goats offered on the great day of annual expiation;

that which was slain, and that which carried the sins of the people into the wilderness, equally prefigured Christ, [Leviticus 16:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.21-22); the one, as "dying for our sins; and the other, as rising again for our justification, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25)."

The two birds presented by the leper were in this respect precisely similar; and equally point us to that blessed Jesus, who says, "I am He who lives, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore! [Revelation 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.18)."

We only add further on this point, that it was the "sprinkling" of this blood and water upon the leper, that rendered the ceremony effectual for his good. In vain would the one bird shed his blood, or the other be dipped in it and let loose, unless there were an application of that blood and water to the leper himself. But being "sprinkled seven times," he was perfectly clean; so far at least as to be brought into the camp, and put into a discipline for that sanctification which was,

II. Progressive purification.

The leper was to wash both himself and his clothes, and to shave off all his hair, and then to come into the camp. But he was not fully restored to his place in society at once; he was not admitted into his tent, but was to live in some place alone for seven days more; and then, after again washing his body and his clothes, and shaving off all his hair, even to his eyebrows, he was reinstated in all his former privileges and comforts.

This was designed to show that the defiling effects of sin yet remain, even after we are cleansed in the blood of Christ, and renewed by the Spirit. We need still to be renewed, both in our outward and inward man, day by day. Sin cleaves to us, yes, it spontaneously rises up in us; so that though we are washed ever so clean, we shall need to be washed again; and though we are shaved ever so close, we shall not be many days without manifesting that the work of sanctification is not yet perfect.

Besides, there are higher degrees of holiness to which the regenerate are to be constantly aspiring. They are "not to account themselves to have yet attained; but, forgetting the things which are behind, they are to press forward for that which is ahead, [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14)." They are to be continually "putting off the old man, and putting on the new, even until they be renewed after the very image of their God in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.22-24)." Instead of regarding their restoration to the divine favor as a reason for resting satisfied with their attainments, they are to make their interest in the promises an occasion, and a stimulus, to "cleanse themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)." "Having this hope in them," they are to stop short of nothing that can be attained in this life, but to "purify themselves even as God is pure, 1 [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3)."

Among Israel of old, the great mass of the population had never been infected with the leprosy at all; but that is not the case with us. The leprosy of sin has infected every human being; and there are now but two classes, under the one or the other of which we must all be arranged.

We will therefore address ourselves,

1. To those who are yet infected with the leprosy.

What was done at the time of pronouncing the lepers clean, is the very thing which must be done to make you clean. You must be sprinkled with the blood and Spirit of Christ, even of "Him who died for you and rose again." This is necessary; nor can any human being be saved without it; and it shall be effectual; so that no human being shall ever perish, provided he apply to his soul this divinely appointed remedy, "The blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse him from all sin! [John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.7);" and the Spirit of Christ shall "cleanse him from all his filthiness and impurity! [Ezekiel 36:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25)." The priests of old could not heal the leper, but only declare him healed. But our High-Priest can heal us. Only cry to him, as the lepers did in the days of his flesh, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" and God himself shall acknowledge and pronounce you clean. The hyssop is even now at hand, with which you may sprinkle your own souls. Use it now by faith, and you shall experience with David both its initial and progressive efficacy, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow, [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7)." But sprinkle not yourselves once or twice only, but "seven times;" then shall you be "washed thoroughly from your iniquity, and be cleansed from your sin! [Psalm 51:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.2)."

2. To those who have been cleansed from it.

Your state is beautifully represented by that of the healed leper. You are not yet admitted to your home, where your more perfect brethren enjoy their Father's smiles without any intermission their Father's smiles. But you are brought into the camp; you are acknowledged as clean, notwithstanding your remaining imperfections; and there is yet only a single week before you will be brought into the full "liberty of the children of God." True, the intervening time must be spent in humiliating and painful exercises; but those exercises are all preparing you for the richer enjoyment of the promised bliss, "they are rendering you fit for the inheritance of the saints in light, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12)."

Look forward then to the happiness that awaits you; and carefully attend to everything that God has enjoined; lest, when the appointed time shall arrive, you shall be found to have neglected the duties of the present moment. Labor then to the uttermost to get rid of sin, "Wash and be clean! [Isaiah 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.16)." As for the deep-rooted evils that spring up within you from time to time, if they cannot be eradicated, let them be shaved off the very moment that they appear. And let the time now appropriated to mortification and self-denial, be sweetened by the anticipation of that blessed hour when you shall enter into the joy of your Lord, and rest forever in the bosom of your God!

#131

THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER

**[Leviticus 14:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.14-18)**

"The priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. The priest shall then take some of the log of oil, pour it in the palm of his own left hand, dip his right forefinger into the oil in his palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of it before the LORD seven times. The priest is to put some of the oil remaining in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering. The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed and make atonement for him before the LORD."

If people sought nothing more than entertainment in their studies, we know of no book that would afford them so much gratification as the Bible. Not to mention any particular beauties, such as the sublimity of its poetic parts, or the simplicity of the historical, there is something inexpressibly grand in the general harmony of the whole, and the fitness of every part to answer the ends for which it was designed.

The great edifice that was to be erected, was Christianity.

The model that was formed for the purpose of exhibiting it to the world in types and shadows, was Judaism.

The correspondence between the model and the structure in all its parts affords an inexhaustible fund of pleasing and useful instruction.

Let us take, for example, the ceremonies observed at the cleansing of the leper; and we shall find that they set forth in a very striking light the most essential doctrines of the Gospel. They teach us more particularly:

I. The ends for which the blood and Spirit of Christ are to be applied to our souls.

It is scarcely needful to observe, that the blood of the sacrifices typically represented the blood of Christ; and that the oil which was used on various occasions with the sacrifices, represented the Spirit of Christ, with which every true Christian is, and must be, anointed, [2 Corinthians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.21); [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27).

The end for which they were put upon the leper is said to be, to "make an atonement for him. We might suppose from the concluding words of the text, that the priest was to make some other atonement for him; but in verse 19 the matter is put beyond a doubt; for there it is expressly said, that these ceremonies were performed "to make an atonement for him."

But, in order to understand this aright, we must consider the state of the leprous person. He was banished from the house of God, and from all communion with his dearest friends; but, when he was healed, and the ceremonies appointed for his purification were performed, then he was restored completely to fellowship with God, and with his Church. The word atonement therefore is here used in a lax sense; strictly speaking, it was the blood of the sacrifice alone that made atonement; but the whole ceremony is said to make an atonement, because it was that which availed for the complete restoration of the leper to the enjoyment of all his privileges.

Moreover, he is said "to be cleansed" by these ceremonies, when, in fact, he was healed of his leprosy before any of these ceremonies could be used; so this was not an actual, but a declarative cleansing of his leprosy. Nevertheless it was intended to typify that which is actually effected by the blood and Spirit of Christ; these really cleanse our souls, and restore us perfectly to the service and enjoyment of God. The two together have a combined effect, to bring us to God; but they have separate and very distinct offices, which we ought carefully to notice:

1. The **blood** of Christ must be applied to purge away our guilt.

There is no possibility of cleansing our souls from guilt by anything that we can do. As the blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin, so neither if we could shed rivers of tears, would they suffice to expiate one single offence; much less could they wash out the stain which we have contracted by a whole life of sin. It was because of the insufficiency of all other means, that God sent his only dear Son to die for us. The blood of Him who was "Jehovah's fellow," was an ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. No other atonement was necessary; nothing can add to the perfection of it. By means of it, God is reconciled to sinners; and nothing is lacking, but that the sinner himself should dip the hyssop in that precious blood, and sprinkle it upon his own conscience, [Hebrews 9:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12-14). This is the use which we are to make of the blood of Christ; and if we apply it thus to our souls in faith, it will "purge us thoroughly from our iniquity, and cleanse us from our sin."

2. The **Spirit** of Christ must be applied to renovate our nature.

As the leprosy defiled the whole man, so does sin pollute our whole souls! Our nature is altogether corrupt; and we must be renewed in every part, before we can enter into the kingdom of God! [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3); [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5). In our present state, we would not be capable of enjoying the divine presence, even if we were admitted to it. But how can this new nature be obtained? We can no more create ourselves anew, than we could create ourselves at first. We can no more give ourselves a spiritual nature, than vegetables can endue themselves with animation, or animals with reason. The spiritual life is, if we may so speak, a higher scale of existence; for though our faculties remain the same, they acquire a totally new direction as soon as ever the spiritual life is infused into our souls. Hence the true Christian is unequivocally called "a new creature, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17);" and hence arises our need of a divine Agent to bring us to this state. For this purpose therefore the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the ever blessed Trinity, is given to us; he is offered to us, to sanctify us throughout, [Titus 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.5). To this end we must seek his influence, and submit to his operations. Thus shall the effectual working of his power transform our souls into the divine image, [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23-24), and make us "fit for the inheritance of the saints in light, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12)."

But these points will receive additional light, while we consider,

II. The manner in which the blood and Spirit of Christ are to be applied, in order to their being effectual for the ends proposed.

From the rites used in cleansing the leper, we learn that:

1. The application both of the blood and Spirit of Christ must be PARTICULAR.

Doubtless our whole man needs purification both from the guilt and pollution of sin. But the application of the blood and oil to the ear, the thumb, and the toe of the leper—seems to intimate that every member of the body, and every faculty of the soul, whereby we either receive or execute the will of God, needs a special purification from guilt and corruption.

Great is the guilt we have contracted in hearing, since we have not been obedient to the voice of God. Great is the guilt we have contracted in the whole of our walk and conduct, since we have walked in our own way rather than in God's, and done our own will rather than his. Now it is proper that we should call these things to mind, and humble ourselves before God on account of them, imploring mercy for every particular offence, and seeking a renovation of every particular faculty and member; so that our abilities may all become "instruments of righteousness unto God, [Romans 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.13)."

Not that we are to be so occupied with the consideration of our particular offences as to forget that we need a thorough renovation. No! after having put the blood and oil on the parts which seem most to need their influence, we should "pour the remainder of the oil upon our head," that it may flow over our whole body! verse 18, and that we may "be sanctified wholly in body, soul, and spirit, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)."

2. The application both of the blood and Spirit of Christ must be UNITED.

Neither the blood nor the oil were on any account to be omitted in the purification of the leper; nor can either of them be omitted in the restoration of our souls to God.

In vain shall we profess to be justified by the blood of Christ, if we are not also sanctified by his Spirit.

Just so, in vain shall we profess to have experienced a renovation of our souls by the influences of the Spirit, if we do not trust entirely in the blood of Christ for pardon and acceptance.

In the consecrating of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, almost the same services were performed as at the purification of the leper; the blood was to be put on their ears, thumbs, and toes, and then, together with the oil, to be sprinkled on their bodies and their garments, [Exodus 29:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.20-21).

The same idea was suggested by the sprinkling of blood mixed with water in the preparatory part of the leper's publication; and it was also intimated by the effusion of blood and water from our Savior's side, when he was pierced by the spear, [John 19:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.34-35). John, who alone records that remarkable fact, lays great stress upon it in his first epistle, reminding us that "he came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and blood, [1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.6)."

Doubtless these things were designed to teach us that God has united the pardoning virtue of Christ's blood, with the sanctifying operations of his Spirit; and that "what he has joined together, no man should presume to put asunder."

3. The application both of the blood and Spirit of Christ must be ORDERLY.

It is by no means an indifferent matter what order we observe in applying the blood and Spirit of Christ to our souls, or, in other words, whether we seek justification or sanctification in the first place. It is true, that, in speaking of them, our words need not always be placed with accuracy and precision; for even Paul himself, when speaking to the Corinthians, says, "You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, 1 Corinthians 6:11." But it is highly necessary that we should have clear and determinate ideas on the subject.

The order relative to the leper was, that the oil should be put upon the ear, thumb, and toe: "upon the blood of the trespass-offering;" and to prevent our imagining this to mean only that it should be applied in addition to the blood, it is added afterwards, that the oil must "be put upon the place of the blood of the trespass-offering." Surely this was not so minutely ordered for nothing; it plainly shows us that the blood of Christ must be first applied for our justification; and that then the Spirit will be given for our sanctification. And this is the more carefully to be observed, because it is the very reverse of what men, of themselves, are disposed to do. We are apt to seek sanctification first; and then to make our proficiency in it the ground (in part at least) of our justification; but we must come to God as sinners to be "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [Romans 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.24);" and, being united thus by faith to Christ as the living vine, we shall derive virtue from him for the bringing forth this fruits of righteousness and true holiness, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4).

4. The application both of the blood and Spirit of Christ must be BELIEVING.

At the purification of the leper, the priest was to "sprinkle the oil seven times before the Lord." This denoted that, while in the performance of these ceremonies they sought the glory of the Lord, they expected from him an abundant supply of those blessings which were typically represented by them.

Just so, in applying the blood and Spirit of Christ to our souls, we must feel a persuasion that we are using the instituted means of our salvation; and that, in the use of them, we shall receive from God the blessings we stand in need of.

Such a confidence is not to be called presumption. Presumption is the expectation of benefits in a way wherein God has not warranted us to expect them; but the most assured expectation of them, when accompanied with a diligent discharge of our duty, and a humble dependence on his promises—is in the highest degree pleasing to God, and profitable to man.

The "stronger we are in faith, the more do we give glory to God, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)," and ensure the accomplishment of his promises to our souls, [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40); [2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20).

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are **conscious of their leprous state**.

The lepers were not left to judge of their own state; they were examined by the priest, and necessitated to abide by his decision. Do you think then, that, when our great High-Priest shall inspect your souls, he will not find out the marks of leprosy that are upon you? Be assured that, however they may be covered from the eye of man, they are all "naked and open (as the sacrifices were when flayed and cut down to the back-bone) before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13)."

O search out your iniquities, and "rend your hearts, and cover your lips, and, with the convicted leper, cry, Unclean, unclean! [Leviticus 13:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.45) with [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5)." If you are not conscious of your disorder, you will never feel your need of purification from it; and consequently you will neglect the means prescribed for your recovery, and perish in your sins! May God avert from you so heavy a calamity, and incline you to accept with gratitude his offered mercy!

2. To those who desire deliverance from the leprosy of their souls.

For the true state of a leper, see [Numbers 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 12.12). The lepers, though in a most afflicted state, had reason to be resigned to their lot, because their disorder came from the hand of God. But your disorder comes from yourselves; and therefore you should not be satisfied with its continuance one day or hour. You do well to be solicitous about the removal of it; and we entreat you never to relax your solicitude about it, until the desired healing has been imparted to your souls!

Know then for your comfort, that the blood and oil are already prepared, and that your great High-Priest is at this moment ready to apply them to your souls! Only go to him, and he will rejoice to minister to your necessities. Go humbly—yet boldly to him; present your ear, your hand, your foot—yes, and your whole person before him—that he may put upon them the blood and oil; and doubt not but that instantly you shall be restored to God, and stand "faultless before his presence with exceeding joy! [Jude 24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jude 24)."

#132

THE SCAPE-GOAT A TYPE OF CHRIST

**[Leviticus 16:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.21-22)**

"He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert."

Of all the types under the Mosaic dispensation, there was not one more plain in its import, or more useful in its tendency, than that before us. Most other types receive light from their accomplishment in Christ; this type reflects light on the Gospel itself. The high-priest, having before offered a bullock and a ram, was to take two goats; and, having determined by lot which of them should be killed, and which be kept alive, was to kill the one, and to sprinkle its blood, with the blood of the bullock, within the sanctuary, and then to present the other before the Lord in the manner described in the text. He was to confess over it the sins of the people, and, by putting his hands upon its head, to transfer to it the people's sins; and then to send it into the wilderness that it might never more be seen!

This ceremony pointed out to them the true and proper object of faith; the operation of it on the believer's mind; and the fruit and benefit of it to his soul.

I. The true and proper object of faith.

When the high-priest put his hands on the head of the scape-goat, the eyes of all present must of necessity be turned towards that devoted creature. They indeed who were endued with a spiritual discernment, would look through the type unto Christ the great Antitype. But still the goat would be regarded by all as the immediate instrument used by God for the removal of their sins; their faith terminated on that as the instituted means of their deliverance.

Thus is Christ the one object to whom the eyes of all must be directed! He has been chosen by God from all eternity to bear in his own person, and to take away from his people, all their sins, [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8). In due time he was exhibited to the world in this very character, [Romans 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25). See also [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29); [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21); the iniquities of all his people were laid upon him, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); and his command to every living creature is, Look unto Me and be saved! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22).

There was indeed under the law another goat, whose blood was shed for the remission of their sins; which was therefore to be considered by them as a joint object of their faith. But the two together were, in fact, but one sacrifice, the one representing the death of Jesus, and the other his resurrection. While therefore we view Christ as dying for our offences, we must also, in conformity with the type before us, regard him as rising again for our justification! [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25).

II. Its operation on the believer's mind.

The high-priest confessed over the scape-goat the sins of all Israel with their several aggravations, at the very time that he transferred them to the scape-goat by the imposition of his hands. By this significant ordinance he clearly showed how faith always operates.

It leads us in the first place to transfer all our guilt to the sacred head of Jesus. While we see the impossibility of removing our sins in any other way, faith will incline us to avail ourselves of that inestimable privilege of carrying them to the Savior, and thereby securing to ourselves an everlasting deliverance from them.

But will it therefore cause us to think lightly of our iniquities, because they may be cancelled by such means? No! it will rather make them to appear exceeding sinful; and will dispose us to humble ourselves for them in dust and ashes. A true believer will not so much as desire pardon, without being made to feel the evil and bitterness of sin; and the more sincerely he looks to Christ, the more sincerely will he bewail his manifold transgressions, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63). While, with Mary, he boldly confesses Christ, with her he will kiss his feet, and wash them with his tears, [Luke 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.37-38).

III. The fruit and benefit of it to his soul.

No sooner was the ordinance before us duly performed, than the sins of all Israel were taken away, and God was reconciled to his offending people. This indeed being only a typical institution, the pardon obtained by means of it was neither perfect nor durable, except to those who looked through the type to Christ himself. But faith in Christ, whether exercised by them or us, will obtain a full and everlasting remission of all our sins. Under the law indeed, there were some sins for which no sacrifice was appointed, and which therefore could not be purged away by any ceremonial oblations whatever. But there is no sin from which we shall not be justified by faith in Jesus, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39). From the very instant that we are enabled to lay them upon his head, they shall be carried into the land of oblivion, and never more be remembered against us! [Isaiah 43:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.25); [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12); yes, they shall be cast into the very depths of the sea, [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19), and be put away from us far as the east is from the west, [Psalm 103:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.12).

From hence we may **learn**:

1. The different offices of repentance and faith.

Repentance can never make atonement for sin. However penitent we are, by faith we must lay our hands upon the head of the scape-goat, and transfer our guilt to him.

On the other hand, faith does not supersede repentance, but rather encourages and invites us to it. We must repent, in order to prepare our hearts for a grateful acceptance of pardon, and a diligent improvement of it in our future life; but we must believe in order to obtain pardon; that being bestowed solely on account of Christ's vicarious sacrifice.

Repentance stirs us up to exercise faith in Christ; and faith stimulates us to further acts of penitence, for:  
the honoring of the law,  
the justifying of God,  
the exalting of Christ,  
the purifying of the heart,  
the adorning of our profession,  
and the rendering of us fit for glory.

To be in a state pleasing to God, we must be believing penitents, and penitent believers.

2. The folly of delaying to repent and believe.

Impenitence and unbelief keep us from Christ, and rivet our sins upon us! We must all resemble either the oblation, or the offerer. We must either, like the goats, die under the wrath of God, and be forever banished, as accursed creatures, from his presence; or we must go with penitence and contrition to our living Surety, and cast our iniquities on him.

Can there be a doubt which state we should prefer? Or would we continue another hour under the guilt of all our sins, when there is such a way provided for the removal of them? Let us then behold the Scape-goat, as in our immediate presence, and go instantly to lay our sins on him.

It cannot, as under the law, be done by the priest for us; it must be done by every one of us for himself. Let us then go to him with penitence and faith, and rest assured that we shall not repent or believe in vain.

#133

DUTIES REQUIRED ON THE GREAT DAY OF ATONEMENT

**[Leviticus 16:29-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.29-33)**

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must humble your souls [by fasting with penitence and humiliation] and not do any work—whether native-born or an alien living among you— because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins. It is a sabbath of rest, and you must humble your souls [by fasting with penitence and humiliation]; it is a lasting ordinance. The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people of the community."

The wisdom and piety of the Church in early ages appointed, that a considerable portion of time at this season of the year should be devoted annually to the particular consideration of Our Savior's sufferings; and that the day on which he is supposed to have died upon the cross, should be always observed as a solemn fast. In process of time many superstitious usages were introduced; which, however, in the Reformed Churches, have been very properly discontinued. But it is much to be regretted, that, while we have cast off the yoke of Popish superstition, we have lost, in a very great measure, that regard for the solemnities which our Reformers themselves retained; and which experience has proved to be highly conducive to the spiritual welfare of mankind.

The Nativity of our Lord indeed, because it is a feast, is observed by almost all people with a religious reverence; but the day of his death, being to be kept as a fast, is almost wholly disregarded; insomuch that the house of God is scarcely at all attended, and the various vocations of men proceed almost without interruption in their accustomed channel. We are well aware that the Jewish institutions are not to be revived; but, though the ordinances themselves have ceased, the moral ends for which they were instituted should be retained; nor should any means, whereby they may, in perfect consistency with Christian liberty, be attained, be deemed unworthy of our attention.

The great day of annual expiation (Day of Atonement) was the most solemn appointment in the whole of the Mosaic economy. Its avowed purpose was to bring men to repentance, and to faith in the atonement which would in due time be offered. Now these are the sole ends for which an annual fast is observed on this day; and, if they be attained by us, we shall have reason to bless God forever that such an appointment has been preserved in the Church.

In considering the passage before us there are two things to be noticed:

I. The objects for which atonement was made.

To have a just view of this subject, we must not rest in the general idea of an atonement for sin, but must enter particularly into the consideration of the specific objects for which the atonement was made.

1. The atonement was made for **the High-Priest**.

The people who filled the office of the priesthood were partakers of the same corrupt nature as was in those for whom they ministered; and, being themselves sinners, they needed an atonement for themselves, [Hebrews 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.1-3); nor could they hope to interpose with effect between God and the people, unless they themselves were first brought into a state of reconciliation with God. Hence they were necessitated to "offer first of all for their own sins."

And this is a point which reflects peculiar light on the excellency of the dispensation under which we live. Our High-Priest was under no such necessity. He had no sin of his own to answer for, [1 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.22); and hence it is that his atonement becomes effectual for us, [1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.5); [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21). For, if he had needed any atonement for himself, he never could have procured reconciliation for us, [Hebrews 7:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.26-28).

2. The atonement was made for **the people**.

"All the people of the congregation" were considered as sinners; and for all of them indiscriminately was the atonement offered. None are so holy so as not to need salvation.

None are so vile so as to be beyond salvation.

But here again we are reminded of the superior excellency of the Christian dispensation. For though, among the Jews, the atonement was offered for all, it did not suffice for the removal of guilt from all. It took off the dread of punishment for ceremonial defilements; but left the people at large, and especially all who had been guilty of presumptuous sin, under the dread of a future reckoning at the tribunal of God! "It could not make any man perfect as pertaining to the conscience, [Hebrews 9:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9-10)."

The very repetition of those sacrifices from year to year showed that some further atonement was necessary, [Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-4). But under the Gospel the reconciliation offered to us is perfect; it extends to all people and all sins, in all ages, and quarters, of the world. No guilt is left upon the conscience, no dread of future retribution remains—where the atonement of Christ has had its full effect, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14); there is peace with God, even "a peace that passes all understanding." He "perfects, yes, perfects forever, all those who are sanctified! [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14); [Hebrews 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.17); [Hebrews 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.21-22)."

3. The atonement was made for "the sanctuary itself and the altar".

Even the house of God, and the altar which sanctified every thing that was put upon it, were rendered unclean by the ministrations of sinful men. The very touch or presence of such guilty creatures communicated a defilement, which could not be purged away but by the blood of atonement. The high-priest, even while making atonement for the holy place, contracted pollution, from which he must wash himself, before he could proceed in his priestly work. In like manner, the person who led away the scape-goat into the wilderness, and the person who burnt the sin-offering without the camp, must wash, both their body and their clothes, before they could be re-admitted into the camp [Leviticus 16:6-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.6-28).

What an idea does this give us of the corruption of human nature, when even the most holy actions, performed according to the express appointment of God, were, by a painful necessity, the means and occasions of fresh defilement!

From the atonement required for the sanctuary we learn, that Heaven itself, so to speak, is defiled by the admission of sinners into it; and that on that very account it could not be a fit habitation for the Deity, if it were not purified by the sin-atoning blood of Christ, [Hebrews 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.23).

A just view of these things will discover to us the connection between the atonement itself, and:

II. The duty especially enjoined at the time of that atonement.

To humble the soul is our duty at all times.

As for the penances which men have contrived for the afflicting of the body, they are neither acceptable to God, nor beneficial to man; they tend to keep men from true repentance, rather than to lead them to it. Doubtless such a measure of fasting and bodily self-denial as shall aid the soul in its operations, is good; but still it is the soul chiefly that must be humbled. The soul is the principal seat of sin, and therefore should be the principal seat of our sorrows. Indeed, it is the soul alone which possesses a capacity for real and rational humiliation.

Now as there is "no man who does not in many things, yes, in everything to a certain degree offend," there is no man who does not need to humble his soul, and to humble himself before God on account of his defects.

But it may be asked, How is this to be done? How can we reach our soul, so as to humble it?

I answer, By meditating deeply on our sins! We should call to mind all the transactions of our former lives, and compare them with the holy commands of God. We should, as far as possible, make all our sins pass in review before us. We should consider:  
their number and variety,  
their constancy and continuance,  
their magnitude and enormity.

We should search out all the aggravating circumstances with which they have been committed, as being done:  
against light and knowledge,  
against mercies and judgments,  
against vows and resolutions,  
and, above all, against redeeming love!

We should contemplate our desert and danger on account of them, and our utter loathsomeness in the sight of God. This is the way to bring the soul to "a broken and contrite" state; and this is the duty of every living man.

But it was peculiarly proper on the great day of atonement.

The exercise of godly sorrow would further in a variety of views a just improvement of all the solemnities of that day.

It would dispose the person to justify God in requiring such services.

Those who felt no sense of sin would be ready to complain of the ordinances as burdensome and expensive; but those who were truly contrite, would be thankful that God had appointed any means of obtaining reconciliation with him

It would prepare the person for a just reception of God's mercy.

An obdurate heart would reject the promises, just as the trodden path refuses to receive the seed that is cast upon it. The fallow ground must be broken up before the seed can be sown in it to good effect.

It would lead the person to acknowledge with gratitude the unbounded goodness of God.

A person unconscious of any malady, would pour contempt on any prescription that was offered him for the healing of his diseases; but one who felt himself languishing under a fatal, and, to all appearance, incurable disorder—would accept with thankfulness any remedy which he knew would restore his health. Thus it is the penitent sinner, and he alone, who will value the offers of mercy through the blood of atonement.

Lastly, it would stimulate him to greater watchfulness and diligence in the future.

Suppose a person was pardoned; if he did not feel the evil and bitterness of sin, he would be as remiss and careless as ever. But, if his heart had been altogether broken with a sense of sin, if he had groaned under it as an intolerable burden—he would be doubly careful lest he should subject himself again to the same distress and danger. The more assured he was of pardon and acceptance with God, the more desirous he would be to "render unto God according to the benefits received from him".

The **reflections** to which this subject will naturally give rise, are such as these:

1. How vain is the idea of "establishing a righteousness of our own!"

If the most holy actions of the most holy men, done expressly according to the divine appointment, rendered the people unclean, yes and the very sanctuary of God and the altar itself unclean, so that the washing of water and the sprinkling of blood were necessary for their purification, then who are we, that we should be able so to live as to claim a reward on the ground of merit? Let us lay aside this vain conceit, which, if not corrected, will infallibly outcome in our own destruction.

We need one to "bear the iniquity of our holy things, [Exodus 28:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.38)," no less than the iniquity of our vilest actions; and, from first to last, we must receive "eternal life as the free unmerited gift of God through Jesus Christ! [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23)."

2. How transcendent must be the efficacy of our Redeemer's blood!

All these sacrifices which were repeated from year to year could never purge the conscience of one single individual; but the blood of Jesus Christ, once shed on Calvary, is sufficient to cleanse the whole world. Stupendous thought! Let us endeavor to realize it, and to get the evidence of it in our own souls.

3. How blessed is the outcome of true repentance!

Men imagine that to humble the soul is the way to be miserable; but the very reverse is true; to "sow in tears is the sure way to reap in joy, [Psalm 126:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5)." How beautifully was this represented on the day of atonement! It was on that day (every fiftieth year) that the Jubilee was to be proclaimed, [Leviticus 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.9). What a blessed termination of the day was this! What a balm to every humbled soul! Think of the joy which pervaded the whole country, when every man was rendered free, and all returned to their lost inheritance, [Leviticus 25:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.10).

Such shall be the happy experience of all who humble their souls for sin and rely upon the sin-atoning blood of Christ. "Those who go on their way weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them! [Psalm 126:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.6)."

#134

THE PROHIBITION TO EAT BLOOD

**[Leviticus 17:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 17.10-12)**

"Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood—I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites: "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood."

There were many ordinances among the Jews, of which we cannot see the reason, though doubtless there was not one which Infinite Wisdom did not institute for some gracious end. But the particular enactment before us was of much longer standing than most others, having been given to Noah directly after the flood. The flesh of beasts and of birds was then given to man for food; but he was at the same time forbidden to eat the blood of either, [Genesis 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 9.4). In the foregoing parts of this book of Leviticus also, the prohibition had been repeatedly renewed [Leviticus 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 3.17); [Leviticus 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.26); and here the reason for such a repeated enactment of the same statute is assigned. Indeed from the peculiar strictness with which the law is here enforced, we might be sure that there was some very important reason for it, though none had been specified. But God, in this passage, has condescended to state the grounds of this solemn charge; namely, that "the blood was the life of the flesh, and that it had been given to man to make an atonement for his soul!"

To elucidate this ordinance, I shall,

I. Confirm the fact here stated.

God had from the beginning appointed the blood of animals to be offered by man as an atonement for his soul.

This appears throughout all the Mosaic history.

If we go back to the time of Cain and Abel, we shall find Abel offering of the firstlings of his flock, and of his receiving on that account a testimony of God's acceptance, which was denied to Cain, who offered only of the fruits of the ground, [Genesis 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.3-5). This, we are assured, was done "in faith;" which shows, that it was done in consequence of an ordinance to that effect having been previously given by God, with a promise of acceptance annexed to it, [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4).

Noah likewise after the flood offered of every clean beast, and of every clean bird, upon an altar; and in that act was approved of his God, [Genesis 8:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.20-21).

The Patriarchs also built altars to the Lord from time to time, and presented their offerings upon them.

Job also lived in the habitual practice of the same rite, [Job 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.5).

As for Moses, the whole of his law was one continued system of sacrifices, appointed as means of obtaining forgiveness with God; every kind of sin having its distinct sacrifices appointed to atone for it. In all of these sacrifices, blood was shed, and poured out before the altar, and sprinkled on the altar; and on the great day of annual expiation, blood was carried within the sanctuary, and was sprinkled before the mercy-seat, and upon the mercy-seat. "There was no remission of sins without shedding of blood! [Hebrews 9:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.21-22)."

If a man was so poor as not to be able to offer a lamb or a pair of turtle-doves for his transgression, he was to offer some fine flour; a part of which was to be burnt upon the altar, in token that he had merited destruction by his iniquities, and that he escaped destruction only by that being destroyed in his stead, [Leviticus 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.11).

The same is found throughout the whole New Testament.

It had been foretold by Daniel, that Jesus would "make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity." But how was this to be done? It was, as another prophet testifies, by being "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities," or, in a word, by "making his soul an offering for sin, [Isaiah 53:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5); [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)."

Accordingly our blessed Lord himself tells us that he came to "give his life a ransom for many." And, when he instituted his last supper, he took the cup, and said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins, [Matthew 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.28)."

The Apostles continually represent the blessings of salvation as being solely the purchase of his blood. "He has made peace for us through the blood of his cross," and "we have redemption through it, even the forgiveness of sins, [Colossians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.14); [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20)."

Are we "washed from our sins?" It is "by his blood! [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5)."

Do we wash our robes and make them white? It is in the blood of the Lamb! [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14).

Do we overcome our enemies? It is by the blood of the Lamb! [Revelation 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.11).

Are we justified? It is by his blood! [Romans 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.9).

In a word, all on earth and all in Heaven bear testimony to this blessed truth, that "Jesus has redeemed us to God by his blood! [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9)."

This fact then being undeniable, that "God has given us the blood as an atonement for the soul." We proceed to,

II. Consider the prohibition as founded on it.

Scarcely is such energy to be found in any other prohibition throughout the whole Scriptures, as in that before us. And how is it to be accounted for? What is there in the fact alleged that can justify such tremendous threatenings as are annexed to this injunction? I answer:

1. The prohibition was most beneficial for them, as tending to excite in them reverence for their sacrifices.

The Jews saw continually the same animals slaughtered for their own use as were slain for sacrifice; and, if no restraint had been imposed upon them in relation to the blood, they would soon have lost their reverence for the sacrifice altogether. Even the daily repetition of the same sacrifices had of itself a tendency to familiarize their minds with the offerings, and to weaken the reverence which a more sparing use of them might have generated. But when they were so strictly charged to abstain from the use of the blood themselves, and saw the blood of the sacrifices consecrated exclusively to the Lord, they could scarcely fail to reverence the blood, and consequently to reverence those ordinances in which the welfare of their souls was so deeply concerned.

2. The prohibition was most beneficial for them, as tending to bring continually to their remembrance the way of salvation.

With the prohibition was communicated the reason of it, namely, that the blood was the life, and was given as an atonement for their souls.

Now we are but too prone to forget the concerns of our souls; the mind naturally revolts from them, and puts the consideration of them far away. But this ordinance brought continually to their recollection that they were sinners, needing an atonement; and that they were to be saved only through the intervention of a vicarious sacrifice.

Of what incalculable value was the prohibition in this point of view! Not a day, or scarcely an hour, could pass, but they were reminded of these most essential articles of their faith, and taught how alone they were to obtain favor in the sight of God. Various other ordinances were appointed by God for reminding them of the way in which they should serve him; but here only one ordinance was instituted for bringing constantly to their remembrance the way in which they were to be saved by him.

3. The prohibition was most beneficial for them, as tending to direct their attention to the great sacrifice.

All the more pious among the Jews saw that their sacrifices shadowed forth some sacrifice that was of infinitely greater value. It is true, their notions respecting Christ's sacrifice were not distinct; yet they could not but see that the blood of bulls and of goats was insufficient to take away sin; and that consequently they must look forward to some other atonement which these typical sacrifices prefigured.

To these views they would be further led by the prophecies which represented Christ as bearing on himself, and taking away from us, the iniquities of us all.

And even at this hour, I conceive that the prohibition, which is strictly observed by every religious Jew, is well calculated to lead the minds of the Jewish nation to the contemplation of their Messiah, and to the acknowledgment of Jesus in that character.

From the foregoing subject then we may learn,

1. How plain is the way of salvation!

A Jew who had any reflection at all, could not be ignorant that he must be saved by blood—by blood shed in a way of atonement for his sins. He would not dream that he was to make an atonement by his own tears, or alms-deeds, or observances of any kind. Every sacrifice which he saw offered, yes, and every meal which he made on the flesh of animals, would remind him, that his soul could be saved by nothing but an atonement made for sin.

Yet, as strange as it must appear, Christians without number are ignorant of this fundamental article of our religion, and have no better hope towards God than that which is founded on their own repentances and reformations. Alas! that any who have the Christian Scriptures in their hands should be thus ignorant! And yet thus it is even with many who in other respects are well instructed and intelligent.

But know you assuredly, that there is but one way of salvation either for Jews or Gentiles; and that, the shadowy sacrifices having all passed away, "Christ is now set forth as an atoning sacrifice for sin through faith in his blood," and that he is "an atoning sacrifice , not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

2. How awful is the state of those who reject the way of salvation!

We tremble for those who despised Moses' law, and in contempt of the divine command ate of blood. But how much more must we tremble for those who make light of Christ! For, "if they who despised Moses' law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment suppose you shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified a common thing! [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29)!"

The command given to us to drink of the blood of our great sacrifice is not a whit less urgent than the prohibition given to the Jews. Our Lord expressly tells us, that "except we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we have no life in us!" Paul gives us this solemn warning, "How can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!"

Truly, if God set his face against the disobedient Jew, much more will he against the disobedient and unbelieving Christian. I charge you then, my brethren, to comply with the divine command in this respect; for if you do not, O consider "what shall the end be of those who obey not the Gospel of Christ! "Truly, God has told us, and plainly too, that "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven in flaming fire, it shall be to take vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us now then avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded us, and both take of the blood of Christ, and "sprinkle it on our consciences, that it may purge us from dead works to serve the living God!"

#135

FEAST OF FIRST-FRUITS (FEAST OF WEEKS)

**[Leviticus 23:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.15-17)**

"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD."

There is no blessing which is not enhanced by a sense of reconciliation and acceptance with God. An ungodly man has his very provisions cursed unto him, [Deuteronomy 28:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.16-19); while to the righteous, "God has given all things richly to enjoy." Indeed, it is to present, no less than to future happiness, that God calls his people. He bids us to weep, it is true; but he nowhere bids us to be always mourning. On the contrary, he commands us to "rejoice in him always, yes, to "rejoice evermore;" and assures us, that though our "weeping may endure for a night, joy shall come in the morning."

We have this beautifully exemplified in the appointments under the law. One day in the year was appointed for national humiliation, namely, the day of atonement, wherein all were commanded to humble their souls. But the very next day, and the whole week following it, was appointed for a feast by which appointment it was clearly intimated, that they who had obtained reconciliation with God through the atonement of Christ, had reason to rejoice throughout the whole remainder of their lives.

The week succeeding the Passover was called "the feast of unleavened bread;" on the first day of which they were to present to God a sheaf of newly reaped barley; and, fifty days after that, two loaves of wheaten bread; both of them being the first-fruits, the one of the barley harvest, and the other of the wheat harvest. Hence these two periods were called the feasts of "first fruits;" and the appointment of them may be considered in a three-fold view, as:

I. Commemorative.

The day on which the sheaf of barley was to be presented unto God, was that on which they had come out of Egypt; and it was to be kept in commemoration of that event; that, when they were enjoying the peaceful fruits of industry, they might call to mind the labor and travail they had endured in the land of their captivity.

The fiftieth day after that, was the day on which the law of God had been delivered to them from Mount Sinai. This was no less a mercy than the former; for while by the former they were rescued from bondage to men, by the latter they were brought into the service of God. The two are spoken of precisely in this way, as equaled by each other, but by nothing else, [Deuteronomy 4:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.32-35).

Both of these events were to be remembered on the days thus set apart, [Deuteronomy 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.9); [Deuteronomy 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.12), in order that He who had done such great things for their bodies and their souls, might have the glory due unto his name.

And here we cannot but observe how beneficial it is to the Church to have particular times set apart for the special remembrance of the various wonders of redemption. If indeed the observance of such institutions were required of us as necessary to salvation, or inculcated as contributing to work out for us a justifying righteousness, or represented as superseding the necessity of a more frequent remembrance of them, or enjoined, as Jeroboam's was, in opposition to the commands of God, [1 Kings 12:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.33)—then we would be ready to join with those who reprobate such appointments.

But experience proves, that the appointment of seasons for the distinct consideration of particular subjects, has been productive of the greatest good; and that the more solemnly those seasons are devoted to the special purposes for which they are set apart—the more will humility, and every Christian grace, flourish in the soul.

If the annual remembrance of an earthly deliverance was pleasing and acceptable to God—then there can be no reasonable doubt, but that the annual commemoration of infinitely richer mercies (provided only that we guard against self-righteousness and superstition) must be pleasing to him also.

But these feasts derived a still greater importance from being,

II. Typical.

Two of the greatest events which ever happened from the foundation of the world, and which are the source and warrant of all our hopes, occurred on the days appointed for these feasts, and were typically prefigured by them.

On the former of those days, that I mean on which the Israelites came out of their graves in Egypt, (which was the first-fruits of their deliverance, as the wave-sheaf was of the barley harvest,) Christ rose from the dead, and rose, not as an individual, but "as the first-fruits of those who slept, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20);" and has thereby assured to us the resurrection of all his people to a life of immortality and glory! 1 Corinthians 15:21-23.

On the latter of those days, namely, the fiftieth day, on which the law was given, (which, like the first-fruits of the wheat harvest, was the pledge of those mercies which they were afterwards to enjoy under the immediate government of God,) on that day, I say, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Apostles, [Acts 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.1). "Pentecost" means the fiftieth day; for which, it is evident, the communication of this blessing was reserved; and it was communicated when that day "was fully come", who then "received the first-fruits of the Spirit, [Romans 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.23)."

As on that day God had proclaimed his law, so on that day he promulgated his Gospel; and gathered to himself three thousand souls, who were the first-fruits of that glorious harvest, [Revelation 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.4), which shall in due time be reaped, when "all shall know the Lord from the least even to the greatest," and "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ!"

In these views the feasts of which we are speaking become exceedingly important. It is true, they were but shadows, and very obscure shadows too; but to us who have the substance, and on whom "the true light shines," they are worthy of most attentive consideration; as being the first crude drafts or models of that glorious edifice which we inhabit.

But these feasts are of further use to us, as,

III. Instructive.

There is not anything which we are more interested to know than our obligations to God, and our consequent duty towards him; yet these are clearly and strongly represented to us in the ordinances before us.

Behold our obligations to God. In each of these feasts the first-fruits were "waved" before God, in token that every earthly blessing was derived from him. This was done in the name of the whole congregation; so that, whatever diligence or skill any had used in the cultivation of their land, they did not arrogate anything to themselves, but gave glory to Him "from whom alone proceeds every good and perfect gift." Happy would it be for us, if we also learned this lesson, so as to have our minds duly impressed with the goodness of our God!

Corresponding with our obligations to God is our duty towards him. If we have received everything from him, it is our bounden duty to devote everything to him, and improve everything for the honor of his name. And, as at the former of these feasts they offered only one sheaf, and one lamb; but at the latter they presented two loaves, and seven lambs—so, in proportion as God has multiplied his mercies towards us—we also should enlarge our exercises of gratitude, liberality, and devotion.

Shall these opinions be thought an undue refinement on the subject before us? They are the very opinions which God himself suggests in reference to these very institutions. We are expressly told in this view to honor him with all that we have, and all that we are.

Have we property? "We must "honor the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase;" and, lest that should be thought likely to impoverish us, and it should be deemed advisable rather to gather in our harvest first, and then give him out of our abundance; he particularly guards us against any such covetous and distrustful thoughts, and tells us that a believing and thankful dedication of our first-fruits is the most likely way to ensure to ourselves an abundant harvest, [Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10). Alas! how melancholy it is that, when we are receiving so many harvests at God's hands, many of us are found to grudge him even a sheaf!

But it is not our property only that we should devote to God; we should give him our whole selves. We are told that "God has set apart him that is godly for himself, [Psalm 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.3)," exactly as he did the first-fruits of old, of which it would have been sacrilege to rob him; and everyone who professes a hope in Christ is called upon to consider himself in that very view, namely, "as a kind of first-fruits of his creatures, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18)." Yes, Beloved, "we are not our own; we are redeemed, and bought with a price; and therefore are bound to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20)."

Only let these instructions be impressed upon our minds, and exemplified in our lives—and then we shall make the best possible improvement of these typical institutions. Yes, whether we contemplate the types or the things typified—the improvement of them must be the same.

From the resurrection of Christ, we must learn to rise again to newness of life.

From the outpouring of the Spirit, we must learn to nourish and obey his sanctifying operations.

Thus will both Law and Gospel be transcribed into our lives, and God be glorified in all his dispensations!

#136

THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

**[Leviticus 23:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.23-25)**

The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire.'"

The ordinances of the Mosaic law, though dark in themselves, are, for the most part, rendered luminous by the Gospel. Their true meaning is opened to us by inspired expositors; and little room is left for the exercise of imagination or conjecture. This however is not universally the case—the ordinance before us is a remarkable exception to the general rule; Moses himself does not inform us on what occasion, or for what particular end it was appointed; nor do the New Testament writers give us any explanation of the subject. But as it was one of the great annual feasts among the Jews, it must of necessity be instructive. We shall endeavor therefore to search out the meaning as well as we can, and to show:

I. For what end this feast was instituted.

Some have referred it to the blowing of the trumpet on Mount Sinai. Others have supposed that it referred to all the different occasions whereon the trumpet was blown. But the former of these does not appear a proper foundation for a joyful feast; (when it made all Israel, not excepting Moses himself, to "tremble and quake") and the latter opinion refutes itself; for if they were used on a variety of occasions, as:  
the summoning of the people to the tabernacle,  
the directing of them in their journeys,  
the stirring of them up against their enemies,  
and the proclaiming of the year of jubilee,  
it is reasonable to suppose, that the appointment of a feast, called the feast of trumpets, was for some special and peculiar purpose. Accordingly, though the purpose is not specified, we may form a good judgment respecting it, from the peculiar day on which it was to be observed. That which in our text is called the seventh month, had been always deemed the first month of the year; but when God brought his people out of Egypt, he ordered them, in remembrance of that event, to reckon their year differently, and to begin it in the spring, instead of the autumn, [Exodus 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.2). Still however, in their civil and political matters, they retained the original mode of reckoning; and, except in their ecclesiastical concerns, this continued to be the first month in the year. This day then was the first day in the new year; and the feast of trumpets was to them "a memorial;" a memorial of mercies received, and of mercies promised.

1. A memorial of mercies **received**.

It is possible that the creation of the world, which was supposed to have been in the autumn, (when so many of the fruits are ripe,) was then particularly commemorated. But we apprehend that the mercies of the preceding year were then reviewed; and grateful acknowledgments were made to God for them. This seems to be a fit employment for the commencement of a new year; and every succeeding year must of necessity bring with it many renewed occasions for praise and thanksgiving. Even though the nation would have been visited with judgments, still those judgments are so disproportioned to men's ill desert, and are always blended with so many mercies, that there could not fail of being always abundant reason for joy and gratitude.

The blowing of the trumpets would awaken the attention of the people to the duties of the day, and bring to their recollection some at least of those mercies, which they were now called upon to acknowledge.

2. A memorial of mercies **promised**.

In this sense the term "memorial" is often used in Scripture. The stones on Aaron's breastplate were a "memorial," to remind the people, that God regarded them as his peculiar care, and bore them upon his heart, [Exodus 28:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.12); [Exodus 28:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.29). The atonement-money, which was to be paid on numbering the people, was also a "memorial" of the security which was assured to them under God's protecting hand, [Exodus 30:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.16). The incense which from week to week was put upon the showbread, [Leviticus 24:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 24.7), was of a similar nature; for while it reminded God of his people and their necessities, it was a pledge to them that he would supply Their needs.

Moreover, the Psalmist, expressly referring to this feast, says, "it was ordained for a testimony, [Psalm 81:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.1-5). Compare also [Numbers 10:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.9-10)."

Now when this "memorial" sounded in their ears, the various temporal mercies which they would need, would of course occur to their minds. But there were spiritual blessings, which probably came but little into the contemplation of the people, which yet were of principal importance in the sight of God, and were particularly shadowed forth on this occasion. I mean, the prosperity of Zion, and the enlargement of the Church of Christ.

That this was intended, an inspired Apostle assures us; for speaking of this very feast among others, he says, "Which things are a shadow of good things; but the body is of Christ, [Colossians 2:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.16-17)."

The language used in reference to the Gospel, strongly confirms this truth. It is emphatically called, "the joyful sound;" and they who preach it are said, to "lift up their voice as a trumpet;" and when the fullness of time shall come for the universal establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world—the sound of this trumpet shall be heard to the remotest corners of the earth, and all, from the least even to the greatest, shall come up to his temple. Even "Assyria and Egypt," the most determined enemies of God's people, shall be stirred up by it to "come and worship in the holy mount in Jerusalem, [Isaiah 27:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.13)."

Such a prospect was a solid ground of joy. We rejoice in the partial accomplishment of this event that has already taken place; and we look forward with joy to its full and final accomplishment.

Let us proceed to consider.

II. In what manner this feast was to be observed.

The three great feasts, the Passover, the feast of Pentecost, and the feast of tabernacles, were greater than this; because, on them, all the males were required to assemble at Jerusalem; but next to them was the feast of trumpets. It was more holy than a common Sabbath; because no servile work at all might be done on this day; whereas on common Sabbaths an exception was made for preparing their necessary provision.

Moreover on this day they were to be fully occupied in offering sacrifices to God. Besides the daily sacrifices, and those appointed at the beginning of every month, there were many peculiar to this occasion; and an express order was made, that neither the daily nor monthly offerings should be superseded, but that those for this day should be presented in addition to all the others, [Numbers 29:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 29.1-6).

Now from this feast, so peculiarly prefiguring the Gospel, and being observed with such extraordinary strictness:

1. We may learn the scope and tendency of the Gospel.

When the gospel reaches the ears and hearts of men, it calls them from the world to serve and delight in God, and that without intermission, from the morning to the evening of their lives. Not that it forbids all servile work; on the contrary, it requires "every man to abide in the calling wherein he is called," and to fulfill the duties of his station with assiduity. But while it leaves our hands at liberty, it forbids that our hearts should be enslaved; they must be reserved for God, and fixed on him alone.

The one occupation of our lives must be to offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15), "Rejoice in the Lord always!" says the Apostle, "and again I say, Rejoice!" Every blast of the trumpet should remind us of the infinite obligations conferred upon us, and of the assurances which God has given us of final and everlasting happiness.

It is not a deliverance from temporal bondage, or victory over earthly enemies, that we have to rejoice in, but in deliverance from the wrath of God, and in victory over sin and Satan, death and Hell. All this, too, is given us, not by a mere exertion of God's power, but by the death of his Son, and the influences of his Spirit. Shall not we then rejoice? Again I say, that the Gospel trumpet sounds these things in our ears continually; and therefore we should keep throughout our whole lives a feast unto the Lord.

2. We may learn the duty of those who embrace the Gospel.

We have already seen what abstraction from the world, and what devotedness to God, were required of the Jews on that day. If they then, who had only the shadow of heavenly things, were to serve God in this manner—then how ought we, who enjoy the substance! Surely we should serve him without grudging, without weariness, and without distraction. If they grudged their numerous and costly sacrifices, or were weary of their long and lifeless services, or had their minds diverted from these poor and "beggarly elements"—we should not wonder at it; their very feasts, though suited to the ends for which they were appointed, were burdensome in the extreme.

But ours is a spiritual service. True, it may require some sacrifices; but none that are worthy of a thought, when we consider for whom they are made.

As for sin, the mortifying of that should be deemed no sacrifice at all; it is rather like the removal of a leprosy, or the healing of a wound.

As for time, or self-interest, there is nothing to be sacrificed in relation to these, that will not be repaid a hundred-fold even in this life, and with everlasting life in the world to come! If we engage heartily in the Lord's service, we shall find, that the more we are employed in it, the more delightful it will be; it is wearisome only to those who are formal and hypocritical in their duties. Doubtless "the flesh will often evince its weakness, even when the spirit is most willing;" but the more we seek to rejoice in God, the more we shall rejoice in God.

Let us be on our guard against those worldly cares or pleasures that are apt to divert the mind from its proper duties. Paul particularly tells us, that "he would have us without carefulness;" and recommends us so to order our matters, that we may "serve the Lord without distraction, [1 Corinthians 7:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.35)." These things then are our duty. Duty, do I say? They are our privilege, our highest privilege. So David thought, when he said, "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness! [Psalm 89:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.15-16)."

#137

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

**[Leviticus 23:39-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.39-43)**

"'So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'"

Christians in general are deterred from the study of the ceremonial law by the consideration that there is not sufficient light thrown upon some parts to determine their spiritual import; while in other parts we are distracted through the diversity of senses which the New Testament appears to affix to them. Certainly these are difficulties in our way; nor can we expect entirely to overcome them; but still there is much that is clear; and even that which is in some respects dubious, will be found in other respects highly edifying.

The feast of tabernacles was one of the three great feasts, at which all the males throughout the nation were to assemble at Jerusalem. Its importance therefore cannot be doubted. But, in our inquiries after the truths which it shadowed forth, we must be guided in some measure by conjecture; and consequently, cannot speak with that full confidence that we maintain where the inspired writers have led the way. Taking care however to distinguish what is doubtful from what is clear and certain—we shall proceed to consider this feast, and to open to you,

I. Its peculiar rites.

While it had some rites common to other occasions, it had some peculiar to itself:

1. The sacrifices offered.

These were very peculiar, and such as were offered on no other occasion. The feast lasted eight days; on the first of which, thirteen bullocks, with two rams, fourteen lambs, and one goat, and certain meat-offerings, were presented. On the six following days, there were the same sacrifices, except that the number of the bullocks, and of their appropriate meat-offerings, was one less every day; this went on to the eighth day, when there was only one bullock, one ram, seven lambs, and a goat, offered, [Numbers 29:12-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 29.12-39).

The precise reason of this gradual diminution is not known, unless that it was to show that the Mosaic dispensation would gradually decay, and at last vanish away, being terminated by that one great Sacrifice which would in due time be offered!

2. The services enjoined.

All were to leave their houses for seven days, and to live in booths constructed of the branches of trees, which they had previously cut down for that purpose. This would doubtless be attended with much inconvenience to them; but they were to rise superior to such consideration, and to spend the time in holy joy. Part of the command was, that they should "rejoice before the Lord their God."

After the time of Joshua, when the piety of the nation had begun to decline, the observance of this ordinance was discontinued; or if it was now and then repeated for a single year, the institution was regarded only in a partial and formal way; until Nehemiah, after the return of the people from Babylon, revived and enforced the practice of former days, [Nehemiah 8:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.13-17).

The next thing to be noticed in reference to this feast, is,

II. Its primary end.

This was two-fold:

1. Commemorative.

All the time that the people sojourned in the wilderness, even forty years, they dwelt in booths or tents—in remembrance of which this feast was instituted.

We are apt to forget the mercies which God has given to us, and especially those given to our forefathers at a remote period; but we ourselves inherit the benefits conferred on them. The descendants of those who were delivered from Egypt, owed all their liberty to God's miraculous interposition, no less than their fathers; and therefore were equally bound to keep God's goodness to them in remembrance; and by leaving their houses for a week, and living in booths, they would know precisely the situation of their ancestors, and learn to be thankful for their own more comfortable habitations.

2. Eucharistic.

This feast was after the harvest and vintage were finished; and it was intended to be a season of thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth. Hence it was called "the feast of in-gathering, [Exodus 23:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.16); [Deuteronomy 16:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.13-15);" which shows, that the time of keeping the feast was illustrative of one thing, and the manner, of another.

Not but that there was a close connection between the two; for in the wilderness they had nothing but manna; but, in the land of Canaan, they enjoyed all the fruits of the earth in the richest abundance; and, consequently, while they glorified God for miraculously supplying the daily needs of their ancestors by food from Heaven, they were called upon to bless and adore his name for the continued blessings imparted to themselves.

Thus far the intention of the feast is manifest. Our ground is not so clear in what remains; yet we utterly disclaim all idea of giving loose to our imagination on sacred subjects. We propose to you what, though we cannot prove, we think highly probable; and leave you to judge for yourselves, while we point out,

III. Its mystical design.

That this feast was a shadow, we have no doubt; and that Christ is the substance, is equally clear and certain; this point is determined by God himself in reference to the feasts and Sabbaths in general, [Colossians 2:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.16-17), and therefore much more in relation to this, which was as sacred a feast as any, perhaps the most so of any, in the whole year. We apprehend then that this feast was intended to shadow forth:

1. The incarnation of Christ.

The three great feasts were:  
the Passover, or feast of unleavened bread,  
the feast of Pentecost,  
the feast of tabernacles.

In the feast of unleavened bread, the death of Christ was typified.

In the feast of Pentecost, the out-pouring of the Spirit was typified.

In the feast of tabernacles, the incarnation of Christ was typified.

It was highly probable that this great event would be shadowed forth by some feast, as well as the other two; and there is good reason to think it was referred to in the feast before us. The very term used by the Evangelist in declaring the incarnation of our Lord, seems to mark this reference, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14). And though custom has led us to regard December as the time of his birth, the arguments to prove that he was born in the autumn are far more probable. Could this point be perfectly ascertained, it would strongly confirm the supposed reference of this feast to that event; and the conduct of the people, when they were persuaded that he was the Christ, corresponds very much with the rights prescribed at this feast, "They cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way, and cried, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest! [Matthew 21:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.8-9)." It is true, this was at another feast; but still it marks the connection in their minds between the feast of tabernacles, and the advent of the Messiah.

There was a remarkable circumstance which took place at the feast of tabernacles, which throws some additional light on this subject. The eighth day was "the great day of the feast." And though the dwelling in booths was discontinued, the people observed the season as a feast unto the Lord. They had indeed substituted a rite or ceremony on that day, bringing water from the pool of Siloam, and pouring it out as a libation (drink offering) to the Lord. The idea was perhaps adopted from that expression of the prophet, "With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation! [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.3)." On this day, in the place of public concourse, our Lord stood and cried with a loud voice, "If any man thirsts, let him come unto ME and drink! [John 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.2); [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38)." This was in fact, as if he had said, You expect at this time the advent of your Messiah, from whom you will derive all spiritual blessings; behold, I am he; and, if you will come unto me, you shall receive more than tongue can utter, or imagination conceive!

We say not that these things amount to a proof of the point in question; but we suggest them for your consideration, and leave you to form your own judgment upon them.

2. The duty of his people.

Here we can speak with more decision. No one who knows the figurative nature of the Jewish ritual can doubt, but that this feast was designed to teach us that "we are strangers here, and sojourners, as all our fathers were! [Psalm 39:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.12)." When fixed in our habitations and enjoying every comfort of life, we are apt to think that this is our home, and the language of our hearts is, "Soul, take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."

But this poor world is not our rest. We are here only in a wilderness; and we must in the spirit of our minds resemble the patriarchs of old, "who, though in the land of promise, dwelt in tabernacles, declaring that here they had no continuing city, but that they sought another country, that is, a heavenly one! [Hebrews 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.9); [Hebrews 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-14); [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16)."

This is to be the character of all the Lord's people, 1 Peter 2:11, who, "though in the world, are not of the world," and who "are looking for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God!"

APPLICATION.

It may be asked, What is all this to us?

I answer, Read what the prophet says, and you will have more satisfactory information than you are aware of, [Zechariah 14:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.16-19). Beyond all doubt he is speaking of those who live under the Gospel; and the repeated injunctions which he gives relative to our observance of this feast, are a strong confirmation, that there was in it a mysterious and most important meaning.

I call upon you then to keep this feast, to keep it with holy joy unto the Lord.

Think of the incarnation of our blessed Lord! What a stupendous mystery! God, even the most high God, leaving his blessed abodes, and sojourning here in a tabernacle of clay! Is not this worthy to be commemorated? Does it not demand our most ardent praise?

Think of the harvest of blessings which we obtain through him! Our corn and wine and oil are but shadows of that heavenly food which is prepared for us, and on which, if it be not our own fault, we are feeding from day to day. Let earthly things then not engross your affections, but lead you to seek those which are spiritual and eternal! [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2).

Whether your temporal comforts be increased or diminished, ever remember where your home is; and that when your week is finished, "you have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! 2 Corinthians 5:1."

#138

THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

**[Leviticus 24:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 24.1-4)**

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel that they bring to you clear oil from beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. "Outside the veil of testimony in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD continually; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations. "He shall keep the lamps in order on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD continually.

To engage actively in the service of God is a duty that should not be delayed; nor should any expense or trouble that may be incurred, be regarded as any obstacle to the performance of our duty.

The tabernacle being erected, and the sacred vessels prepared, an order was given that the appointed services should instantly commence; and the people were directed to bring such things as were necessary for the maintenance of divine worship.

That part of the tabernacle which was covered, consisted of two parts: the holy place, and the holy of holies. In the holy place, the daily services were performed. The the holy of holies was never entered but on one day in the year. The part devoted to the service of God was a lampstand with seven lamps, which were kept continually burning.

Doubts indeed have been entertained whether they were kept alight by day; because some passages of Scripture seem to intimate that they were not; see [Exodus 30:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.7); [2 Chronicles 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 13.11); [1 Samuel 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.3). But the order that they should "burn continually," seems plain; and the occasion for it was perpetual; and, above all, Josephus, who could not but know the practice of his day, affirms that three lamps were kept burning by day, and all of them by night.

The whole furniture of the tabernacle, no less than the tabernacle itself, was typical; some things were more illustrative of Christ and his character; and others more applicable to the Church; and some things referred to both. It is possible that the lampstand might be intended to represent Christ as "the light of the world;" but we are sure that it shadowed forth his Church; and therefore without hesitation we shall consider it as typically representing the Church:

I. In its privileges.

The Church was justly exhibited under the figure of a lampstand.

Of what materials and form the lampstand was, we are distinctly informed in [Exodus 25:31-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.31-38). That it was designed to represent the Church, is declared by Christ himself, "The seven lampstands are the seven churches, [Revelation 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.20)."

And, if we consider of what it was composed, and how it was supplied, and for what purposes it was used—we shall see a striking correspondence between the Church and that.

It was formed of pure gold; in which respect it characterized the saints, who are not polished over for the purpose of glittering in the sight of men, but are really "renewed in the spirit of their minds," and "made partakers of a divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)."

It was supplied with the purest oil; which fitly represented that "unction of the Holy One which we have received, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27)," for the enlightening of our minds, and the sanctifying of our souls.

Its use was obvious: it was to shine in darkness, that all who were engaged in the service of their God might fulfill their duties aright; and that God might be glorified in them, [Revelation 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.12-13).

Such lights are the saints to be in the midst of a dark world, that through their instrumentality, others may be directed into the way of peace, and be constrained to "glorify their heavenly Father".

The High Priest, whose duty it was to trim the lamps, prefigured Christ.

This is a point on which there can be no doubt, it being affirmed on the authority of Christ himself! [Hebrews 4:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.14-15). He is constantly employed in inspecting and trimming the lamps.

There is not a saint on whom his eyes are not fixed; and whose declensions, however secret, he does not behold. When necessary, he interposes, by his providence or grace—to correct their dullness, and to restore them to their usual splendor, [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.2).

While the Church was thus characterized in its privileges, it was also shadowed forth:

II. In its duties.

The duties of the saints are:

1. To shine.

It is justly observed by our Lord, that "no man lights a candle, to put it under a bushel or a bed; but sets it in a lampstand, that all who are in the house may see the light." It is not for themselves alone that the saints are endued with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, but for God, and for their fellow-creatures:

For God, that his power and grace may be magnified on earth.

For their fellow-creatures, who are to be benefitted by their instructions, their influence, and their example, [Matthew 5:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.14-16).

Our responsibility in this respect is not sufficiently considered. But if we are stewards even of our earthly possessions, and bound to lay them out for God, much more are we "stewards of the manifold grace of God, [1 Peter 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.10)," and bound to administer freely unto others what we ourselves have freely received, [Matthew 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.8).

2. To be receiving more grace from Christ in order to their shining with yet brighter luster.

It is from Christ that the Holy Spirit must be derived. It is "He who has the residue of the Spirit, [Malachi 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.15)." "The Father gave not the Spirit to him by measure, [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34)," but in all his immeasurable fullness; and "out of that fullness must we all receive, even grace for grace, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)." This is strikingly represented by the prophet Zechariah, who, speaking apparently of the civil and ecclesiastical governors of his Church, Joshua and Zerubbabel, represents Christ.

In reality for Christ is both the King and Priest of his Church, as the inexhaustible source of that golden oil, which is continually communicated by him to every lamp in his sanctuary, [Zechariah 4:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.2-4); [Zechariah 4:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.11-14). By prayer and faith we must keep that communication open, and entreat him, that, "as he has given us life, so he would give it to us more abundantly".

We would take occasion from this subject to suggest to you,

1. An important inquiry.

Are you Christians indeed? If this question is too vague, then I ask, Are you as lights shining in a dark place? Surely this matter is not difficult to determine. You may easily see whether you are living like the world around you, or whether you are reproving others by the brightness of your example. This idea is proposed by our Lord under the figure of a "broad and a narrow way."

The broad way is easy and much trodden. The narrow way is difficult and unfrequented.

The broad way terminates in destruction. The narrow way leads to everlasting life.

Paul expresses the same in language more accommodated to our text, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16).

Judge yourselves, brethren, in reference to this matter; and never think that you are Christians indeed, unless you have an evidence in your own souls, that, through the influences of the Holy Sprit, you are exhibiting a light which both instructs and "condemns the world" around you!

2. A solemn admonition.

If we profess ourselves to be the Lord's people, let us consider somewhat more distinctly what we profess. As lamps in God's sanctuary, we profess to be "of pure gold," truly, inwardly, substantially holy, and formed altogether according to the pattern which was shown to Moses in the mount, [Numbers 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 8.4). What that pattern was, we are at no loss to say; it is set before us with all possible clearness in the person of Jesus Christ. Let every one of us reflect on this, and search into our own hearts to see whether there is in us this resemblance? The inquiry before instituted is a comparison with ourselves with, others; the inquiry I now propose, is a comparison with ourselves with that great exemplar, the Lord Jesus Christ. We should examine, not whether we resemble him in those actions which he performed as a prophet, but whether "the same mind is in us, as was in him, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)." Our views, our principles, our habits, the great scope and end of our lives—these are the things that are to be inquired into, if we would have a solid evidence in our own souls that we are the Lord's. We must be like Him, if we would be with him forever.

He himself warns us what will be the consequence of allowing ourselves in any deviation from the path of duty, [Revelation 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.1); [Revelation 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.5); and therefore, if we would not have "our lampstand removed," let us repent of every known defect, and seek to be "pure as He is pure," and "perfect as He is perfect."

3. An encouraging reflection.

How often has our great High-Priest, when he has seen us burning dim and languishing, revived us by seasonable communications, or merciful rebukes! Truly we are living witnesses for him, that "he will not quench the smoking flax, [Matthew 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.20); nor will he extinguish the wick, the flame of which has been blown out." May we not then hope, that he will yet bear with us, and administer to us whatever, in a way of influence or correction which we may stand in need of? Surely we may look up to him with joyful confidence, and say with David, "You will light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness! [Psalm 18:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.28)."

Many are the storms to which we are exposed in this dreary wilderness, which threaten our extinction; but he is able to preserve us; and as he has made it our duty to "burn continually," so he will give us "supplies of his Spirit" for that purpose; he will "keep us by his power through faith unto everlasting salvation! [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)." "He will keep the feet of his saints; but the wicked shall be silent in darkness! [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9)."

#139

**THE SHOWBREAD** (Bread of the Presence)

**[Leviticus 24:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 24.5-9)**

"Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire."

When God appointed a dwelling-place to be erected for him in the wilderness, he ordered it to be furnished with such appendages as are common in the dwellings of men. There was in the sanctuary, as Paul observes, a lampstand, a table, and bread, called the showbread [Hebrews 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.2). But there was an infinitely higher purpose to be answered by these things, than a mere accommodation of them to the habits of men; they were typical; every one of them was typical, "they were shadows of good things to come." The mystical import of some is much clearer than that of others. Where the writers of the New Testament have explained them, we are able to speak with confidence; but where they are silent, we must proceed in our explanation of them "with fear and trembling."

The mystery of the showbread is applied by some to Christ, who called himself "the true bread," and, at the institution of his last supper, "took bread, and broke it, and said to his disciples, Take, eat, this is my body." The New Testament writers give us little, if any, insight into this subject; but they speak so fully and plainly on the subject of the lampstand, that we can easily by analogy trace the import of the showbread also.

It has been shown that the lampstand represented the Church, and that the High Priest who trimmed the lamps represented Christ. See the preceding Discourse. The same might therefore well be supposed in relation to the showbread; and the circumstance of the flour "being taken from all the children of Israel," and made into "twelve cakes," gives us sufficient reason to conclude, that those cakes did represent the twelve tribes, that is, the Church of God. Nor can we adopt a more satisfactory method of explaining the whole mystery, than that used in reference to the lampstand. Agreeably to the plan then which we pursued on the former subject, we observe, that the showbread shadowed forth the people of God,

I. In their privileges.

To elucidate this, consider what is here spoken respecting the twelve cakes:

1. Their solemn presentation before God.

They were consecrated to God in an orderly and solemn manner, and deposited on his table that they might be always before him. Being piled one upon another in two rows, incense was placed on each row, which at the appointed time was burnt "for a memorial, as an offering made by fire unto the Lord."

Here we see the Church and people of God consecrated to him according to the terms of "his everlasting covenant," to be unto him a holy and peculiar people. As such they are esteemed by him; and "his eyes are upon them day and night for good;" and, as the incense was to God a fragrance of a sweet fragrance, so their people and services shall be accepted by him. True it is that they are base and worthless in themselves; yet, being "set apart for him, [Psalm 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.3)," he will acknowledge them as his, and look upon them with delight and delight.

2. Their periodical renewal.

While one generation of men is passing away, another arises to fill their place; and among them all, God will have some, who shall be objects of his peculiar regard. The change of the loaves every Sabbath-day was intended to illustrate this; and in reference to it they were expressly called "the continual bread, [Numbers 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 4.7)." The regard shown by God to those who were first brought out of Egypt, shall be perpetuated to the end of time; never shall any be removed, but others shall be ready to follow; nor shall there ever be a period when God will not have a people truly and entirely consecrated to his service. Sometimes, as in the primitive ages, his saints maybe swept away by thousands at a time, so as to threaten their utter extinction; but others shall always be found ready to "be baptized for (that is, in the place of) the dead," as soldiers instantly come forward, to fill up the ranks which the devouring sword has thinned. That is most probably the true meaning of [1 Corinthians 15:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.29); nor shall the power of men or devils ever be able to extirpate the Christian name, "the Church is built upon a rock; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it".

3. Their ultimate destination.

The loaves at the close of the week were the property of the officiating priests; and were to be eaten by them in the holy place, as being in themselves most holy. Now we are sure that the High Priest who attended on the lamps, prefigured Christ; and therefore we assume that he was equally prefigured by those who attended on the bread.

Here then we see, that the saints, when they have abode their appointed time an earth, are the property of Christ; to which purpose it is written in the book of Deuteronomy, "The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance, [Deuteronomy 32:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9)." This is the high destiny of all who have given up themselves to God. Happy are they in the place which they are allowed to occupy in God's temple below; but happier far at their removal hence, when Christ shall claim them as "his peculiar treasure," and enjoy them forever as "his purchased possession!"

We may further contemplate the showbread as representing the Lord's people:

II. In their duties.

Well may this ordinance teach us:

1. To consecrate ourselves entirely to God.

Let us contemplate the state of those loaves; they were "taken from the children of Israel," made on purpose for God, and presented to him that they might be wholly and forever his.

And what does God say respecting us? "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise! [Isaiah 43:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.21)." Yes, we should every one of us "subscribe with our hands, and say, I am the Lord's! [Isaiah 44:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.5)." We should "give up ourselves to him by a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten, [Jeremiah 50:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.5)." We should consider ourselves as "separated from mankind" for this very purpose, [Leviticus 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 20.24), that we may be "wholly sanctified unto him, in spirit, soul, and body, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)."

This Paul declares to be "our reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." Not that we are to be inactive in the common duties of life, or to spend our days in nothing but contemplation and devotion; this would be to strain the parallel too far; but, in the spirit and habit of our minds, we are to be entirely given up to God, so that "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to his glory! [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31)."

On the Lord's Day especially, should this dedication of ourselves be repeated and confirmed. We should come up to the house of God with the same mind as the priests who brought the loaves; their purpose was known and fixed; and they went into the sanctuary determined not to leave it until they had executed their high office. O that we might go to God's house on purpose to consecrate ourselves to him afresh; and never leave our work dubious or incomplete!

2. The INCENSE teaches us to be much occupied in prayer and intercession.

The loaves were, so to speak, representatives of the tribes of Israel; and the incense ascended up as a memorial to God for them. Thus should we consider ourselves interested, not for ourselves only, but for all the Church of God. As for ourselves, we are commanded to "pray always," to "pray without ceasing," and to "offer unto God the sacrifice of praise continually, giving thanks to his name." Just so, for others are we required to "make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all men."

Moreover, this duty is inculcated on all; the prophetic declaration is, that, wherever God is known, "from the rising to the setting sun, even there shall incense be offered unto his name, and a pure offering, [Malachi 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.11);" "all who make mention of the Lord," will be thus occupied; they "will not keep silence, nor give God any rest, until he establishes his Church, and make it a praise in the earth, [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7)." How prosperous would individuals and churches be, if such a spirit prevailed more among them! O that "God would pour out upon us more of a spirit of grace and of supplication!" We would not long remain without manifest tokens of his approbation and love.

3. To wait patiently for our removal hence.

The loaves were left in the sanctuary until the time appointed for their removal. Thus we should "abide with God," performing diligently the work assigned us, until he shall be pleased to dismiss our souls in peace. Our week of life at all events is wearing fast away; but, whether its close be somewhat earlier, or later, than we expect, we should say, like Job, "All the days of my appointed time I will wait, until my change comes!" If there were no future state of existence, we might wish to have our present lives terminated or protracted, according as our sorrows or joys abound; but as death will introduce us into the more immediate presence of our God, and into a more perfect union and communion with Christ, we may well be contented either to live or die. In some sense indeed we may rather "desire to depart;" yes we may be "looking for, and hastening to, the coming of the day of Christ!" But as it respects impatience or discontent, we may well tarry the Lord's leisure, doing and suffering his holy will, until he shall take us hence, to "rest from our labors," and to "be forever with the Lord!"

#140

THE BLASPHEMER STONED

**[Leviticus 24:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 24.13-16)**

Then the LORD said to Moses: "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. Say to the Israelites: 'If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death!"

Spiritual subjects are generally most relished by a spiritual mind; and hence it is that they are brought forward for public discussion; and other subjects, which might be very instructive, are entirely overlooked.

We consider it as one great advantage attending a course of sermons on the Holy Scriptures, that every subject must find a place in our discourses, and at some time or other be brought under the view of our hearers. The history before us would at first sight appear so ill-calculated for general edification, that we would probably never fix upon it, if left to ourselves. But, occurring as it does in our present course, we shall turn your attention to it; and we trust, that, however unpromising it may seem, it will be found replete with very important instruction. There are two things in it which we seem particularly called to notice; namely,

I. The danger of being unequally yoked to an unbeliever.

To caution us against contracting an intimacy with the ungodly, we are told, "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character! [1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.33)," and that "the companion of fools shall be destroyed." But in the marriage union such a connection is peculiarly dangerous, because its influence is incessant, and operative to the last hour of our lives.

1. It is injurious to the person himself.

It is from a hope of drawing over their spouse to the same views and opinions with themselves, that multitudes enter into marital engagements which prove fatal to their happiness through life. Whatever were the views of this Israelitish woman, she seemed to have succeeded beyond all reasonable expectation in the alliance she had formed; for, instead of being detained in Egypt by her husband, she brought him out with her. But as it was an injury, rather than a benefit, to the Church, that a mixed multitude were united to it, [Exodus 12:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.38) with [Numbers 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.4), so marriage with a heathen could never render an Israelite happy. Supposing that the woman had any regard for God, how could she endure to see her husband pouring contempt upon him, and bowing down to idols of wood and stone?

It is precisely thus when a believer among ourselves becomes united to an unbeliever in marriage. However suitable in other respects the union may be, it cannot possibly be productive of happiness; for, in all those things which are most important, their views, their feelings, and their conduct must be dissimilar, or rather at variance with each other. The unconverted party can have no sympathy with the converted in the various exercises of mind peculiar to the Christian state; he cannot understand them; the hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows experienced by the believer, appear foolishness in the eyes of an unbeliever; and consequently, there can be no communion between them on those subjects which are most nearly connected with their eternal welfare.

Hence that solemn injunction to form no such alliance, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people," [2 Corinthians 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-15)." We are to marry "only in the Lord [1 Corinthians 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.39)."

2. It is injurious to their children.

Doubtless a true Christian will endeavor to give a right bias to the minds of his children. But the silent and unstudied influence of the ungodly person will operate far more forcibly than the most labored exertions of the godly. The natural bent of our affections is towards sin; and we are far more ready to justify what is wrong from the examples of others, than to follow what is right. We all know how much easier a thing it is to go with the *stream* than against it; or to spread *contagion* than to cure it.

The son of this Israelitish woman, though in the midst of Israelites, did not become a worshiper of the true God, but remained to his dying hour a profane despiser of him. And in like manner it is to be expected, that, where one of the parents is ungodly, the children will follow his example, and tread in his steps.

It is true, that the most godly parents cannot always prevail on their children to yield to their advice; but, if they have done what they could towards bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they will have the comfort of a good conscience to support them in their trials. But if a believer unites himself to an unbeliever, and his children turn out wicked, he will always have himself to blame; and the children themselves will have to reproach them in the last day for having formed a connection which afforded so bad a prospect in relation to their offspring.

The history before us naturally leads us also to contemplate,

II. The danger of ungodly habits.

It is manifest that the habits of this man were altogether bad.

We know not what was the subject of controversy between this man and the Israelite; nor in what manner he blasphemed the God of Heaven. But it is evident that he was under the influence of a contentious spirit, and habituated to indulge himself in disparaging the God of Israel. Moreover, his dispute with the Israelite was the very occasion of his blaspheming God. Conceiving that he was injuriously treated by the Israelite, he was not satisfied with reviling him, but must revile his religion also, and his God.

This is what was accustomed to be done in the days of old, when the heathen blasphemed the name of God on account of David's misconduct; and the same is done continually in the present day. Men cast the blame of every evil, whether real or supposed, which they see among Christians, on Christianity itself. They make the Gospel answerable for all that profess it; which is just as absurd, as to condemn Christ and his Apostles, together with Christianity itself, for the treachery of Judas. Had this man been of a meek and quiet spirit, forbearing and forgiving, he would never have yielded to such a fit of wrath; and, if he had cultivated the smallest regard for the Most High God, he would never have waged open war against him by his blasphemy and profaneness.

The consequences of his wicked habits proved fatal to him.

Little did he think what would be the outcome of those habits which he was so ready to indulge. The people who heard his blasphemy, informed against him; and Moses, being as yet uninstructed by God how such iniquity was to be punished, sought direction from him; and was told that "the people who heard him should lay their hands upon his head," and that "all the congregation of Israel should stone him." And from thence it was made a standing law that every similar offence should be visited with the same punishment. It was too late for the offender now to make excuses; the word was passed; the guilt was contracted; the sentence was fixed.

It is thus that our evil habits also, if not repented of, will terminate, and we shall begin to bewail our misery when it is past a remedy. Even in this world many bring distress and ignominy both on themselves and families by their unhallowed tempers and their unbridled appetites; and in the world to come, every man, however light he may make of sin now, shall find it a burden too heavy to be borne.

The advice which we would suggest from this subject, is, to check evil,

1. In ourselves.

It is said of strife, that it is "like the letting out of water," which having once made a breach in a bank, soon defies all endeavors to restrain it, and inundates the whole country.

It is thus with sin of every kind; when it is once permitted to act, none can tell where it will stop. Impiety is generally to be found in the train of ungoverned passions; and, from "walking in the way of sinners," it is no uncommon thing to "sit in the seat of the scornful." Let us be aware of this, and endeavor to oppose sin in its very first rise; ever remembering, that, "if he who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, a much sorer punishment awaits us," if we become the slaves and victims of any evil propensity!

2. In others.

The people gave information of the man's profaneness, and Moses, by God's direction, gave orders for the whole assembly to unite in executing judgment on him. This draws a profitable line of distinction for us. The magistrate did not use any compulsory measures to make the man an Israelite; but he did interfere to prevent his God and his religion from being exposed to derision. This is the proper province of a magistrate; he must not use the power of the sword to make men religious; but he may use it to keep them from being openly profane; and it is the duty of every man to lend his aid in this matter, and to cooperate for the maintenance of external order and decorum.

Let us then not only "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," and, if possible, suppress them.

#141

THE JUBILEE A TYPE OF THE GOSPEL

**[Leviticus 25:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.8-11)**

"'Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines."

In order that our Lord's descent from Judah and from David should be clear and acknowledged, it was necessary that the various tribes and families should be kept distinct. With this view many ordinances were appointed for the continuing of every man's inheritance in his own family. A difficulty on this subject having occurred, God himself decided it, and grounded a new law on that decision. See [Numbers 36:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 36.6-7). This seems to have been the primary intent of that ordinance which is mentioned in the text.

A variety of circumstances in a length of time might produce alienations of property; and if this had been allowed to continue, a confusion of the families and tribes would have at last ensued. To prevent this therefore, God commanded that on every fiftieth year every inheritance should revert to its original possessor. This season was called the Jubilee; which, while it answered many other important purposes, served in a very eminent manner to typify the Gospel.

We may observe a very strict agreement between the jubilee and the Gospel:

I. In the time and manner of their proclamation.

The jubilee was proclaimed with the sound of trumpets.

The tendency of great reverses of fortune is, in many instances at least, to produce a torpor of mind, and a stupid indifference to the things we once highly valued. Hence it was but too probable, that those who had alienated their inheritance and reduced themselves to the lowest ebb of misery, might sink into such a state of ignorance or indolence, as to let the period appointed for their restoration pass unnoticed. To prevent this, God commanded the trumpets to be sounded throughout all the land; so that the attention of all being awakened, and their spirits exhilarated, every individual might be stirred up to claim the privileges to which he was entitled.

The precise time on which this sacred year commenced, was "the day of atonement".

The day of atonement was the most solemn season in the whole year; the people were required to humble their souls for sin; and peculiar sacrifices were to be offered for the iniquities of the whole nation. It should seem at first sight that this was an unfit season for the proclamation of such joyful tidings; but it was indeed the fittest season in the whole year; for, when could masters and creditors be so properly called upon to exercise mercy, as when they themselves had been obtaining mercy at the hands of a reconciled God? Or when could debtors and slaves so reasonably be expected to receive their liberties with gratitude, and improve them with care, as when they had been bewailing the sins, by which, in all probability, they had been deprived of them?

The Gospel also is to be publicly proclaimed in every place.

One would have imagined that it were quite sufficient for God once to make known the way in which he would pardon sinners, and that from that time every sinner would of his own accord exert himself to obtain the offered mercy. But experience proves that our bereavement of Heaven is not felt as any evil; our bondage to sin is not at all lamented; and, if no means were used to awaken men's attention to their misery, and to stir them up to embrace the blessings of salvation, the greater part of mankind would rest satisfied with their state, until the opportunity for improving it was irrevocably lost! God therefore sends forth his servants to "preach the Gospel to every creature," and commands them to "lift up their voice as a trumpet."

This too has its origin in the great atonement.

If, as some contend, the year of our Lord's death was the year of Jubilee, the coincidence was indeed very singular and important. But, however this might be, it is certain that, "without shedding of blood, there could be no remission of sin;" nor, until our Lord had expiated the sins of the whole world, could the Gospel be universally proclaimed. But no sooner was his sacrifice offered, than God was reconciled to his guilty creatures; and from that time must the commission given to his Apostles be dated. A very few days had elapsed, when they sounded the Gospel trumpet in the ears of that very people who had crucified the Lord of glory; and had the happiness to find thousands at a time "brought from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Thus clearly was the connection marked between the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and the deliverance of sinners that was purchased by it.

But the agreement between the two is yet more manifest,

II. In the blessings conveyed by them.

The privileges imparted by the jubilee were many and of great value.

There was, in the first place, a universal exemption from every kind of agricultural labor. None were either to reap the produce of the last year, or to sow their land with a view to a future crop; but all were to gather from day to day what had grown spontaneously; and every person had an equal right to all the fruits of the earth.

A better mode of improving their time was provided for them; public instruction was to be given to all—men, women, and children; in order that none, however their education had been neglected, might remain ignorant of God, and his law, [Deuteronomy 31:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.10-13).

Now also debts, in whatever way they had been contracted, and to whatever amount, were to be freely remitted, [Deuteronomy 15:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 15.1-2).

But, besides these privileges which were common to other sabbatical years, there were others peculiar to the year of jubilee. If any people had, by their own voluntary act, or by the inexorable severity of some creditor, been sold—they were to receive their liberty, and to be restored to their families, as soon as ever the appointed trumpets should sound, verses 9–11. Yes, if they had formerly possessed an inheritance in the land, they were to be instantly reinstated in the possession of it, verses 10, 28; so that in a moment they reverted to their former condition, with all the advantage of their dear-bought experience.

Analogous to these are the blessings imparted by the Gospel.

Varying their order, we shall first mention the forgiveness of sins.

Though the debt we owe to God exceeds all possible calculation, it is all freely, and forever remitted, as soon as ever the Gospel trumpet is heard, and its glad tidings are welcomed to the soul! [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43). Our bondage to sin and Satan is reversed; so that nothing shall ever lead us captive, provided we assert our liberty, and claim our privilege, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14); being made free by Christ, we shall be free indeed! [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36).

And notwithstanding we have sold out heavenly inheritance, and forfeited it as worthless—yet are we called to take possession of it; we are restored to our father's house; we are brought again into the family of saints and angels; and, with our title to Heaven, have the enjoyment of it renewed, [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19). Now too are we commanded to rest from all the works of the law, and from all the works of the flesh; and, every one of us, to exist from day to day upon the bounties of divine grace! [Hebrews 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.10); [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). As we sowed them not, so neither are we to reap them as our own, but to receive them on the same footing as the poorest and lowest of the human race; all of us being alike pensioners on the divine bounty. Nor are we to lay up in store of what God gives us; but every day to gather our daily bread.

To all these blessings is added that of divine instruction; as we are taught how to improve our leisure time, so are eyes given us to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); and henceforth it is to be our daily labor to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such are the blessings bestowed by the Gospel; nor can any unworthiness in us deprive us of them, provided we thankfully accept them as the purchase of Christ's blood, and the gifts of his grace.

We will find it most edifying to contemplate the blessings peculiar to the year of Jubilee, namely, deliverance from bondage, and restoration to one's inheritance.

Inferences:  
  
1. In what way it is that sinners are to be converted to God.

The priest might have expostulated with the Jewish debtors or slaves on the folly of their past conduct; but it was the sound of the trumpet alone that could bring them to liberty. So we may represent to sinners the evil of their past ways, and denounce against them the judgments threatened in the Word of God; but it is the sweet voice of the Gospel alone that will enable them to throw off their yoke, and lead them to the enjoyment of eternal glory!

This is told us by the prophet; who, speaking of the conversion of the world in the latter day, says, "In that day the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come who were ready to perish, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem [Isaiah 27:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.13)."

O that this were duly considered by all who go forth as the Lord's ambassadors! It is not to preach a scanty morality that we are called; but to publish the glad tidings of a full and free salvation; a salvation founded in the blood of Christ, and suited to those who are weeping for their sins. Behold then, "this is the accepted time; this is the day of salvation!" Now the trumpet sounds in our ears; let us all arise, and bless our Deliverer; and improve the privileges so richly bestowed upon us. Then, when the last trumpet shall sound, and the time, which God has fixed for the redemption of his purchased possession, "shall be fully come," we shall be claimed by him as his property, his portion, his inheritance forever!

2. How solicitous is God to counteract the folly and wickedness of man!

A subordinate end of the Jubilee was, to counteract the covetousness of some, and the prodigality of others. But it is a very principal end of the Gospel to remedy the miseries which men have entailed upon themselves. Well might God have said to the whole human race, "You have sown the wind, and you shall reap the whirlwind;" but instead of that, He says, "You have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money! [Isaiah 52:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.3)." "I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner; turn, turn! why will you die?" Let not then these gracious declarations reach our ears in vain. Behold, "the year of the Lord's redeemed has come, [Isaiah 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.1);" "the perfect law of liberty" is now proclaimed; the Lord himself now preaches "deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, [Luke 4:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18-19);" he says to the prisoners, "Go forth and show yourselves." The Lord grant that none may ignore these words of life, or receive this grace of God in vain!

3. How blessed are they who embrace the glad tidings of the Gospel!

We can easily conceive the blessedness of one who is in an instant restored from poverty and cruel bondage, to the possession of liberty and affluence.

But who can estimate aright the happiness of those who are freed from the curses of the law, the fears of death, the bondage of sin, and the damnation of Hell? Who can fully appreciate the joy of a trembling and condemned sinner, who by the sound of the Gospel is enabled to call God his father, and Heaven his rightful inheritance? Well does the Psalmist, in reference to this very ordinance of the Jubilee, exclaim, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound! [Psalm 89:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.15)." Surely there is no state on earth to be compared with this. May we seek it as our supreme felicity; and may we all enjoy it as an foretaste of Heaven!

#142

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

**[Leviticus 25:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.20-22)**

You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

Many of the commands of God to his people of old appear to be mere arbitrary impositions, without any other use than that of subjecting their wills to his. But I doubt whether there be one single law that will fairly bear this construction. The reasons of many are not known to us, and perhaps were not fully understood by the Jews themselves; yet we cannot doubt but that if God had been pleased to explain them fully to us, we would have seen as much wisdom and goodness displayed in those which are at present unintelligible to us, as in others which we understand.

The command to give rest to the land every seventh year, when the extent of country was so disproportionate to its population, must appear exceeding strange to those who have not duly considered it. The generality of people would account for it perhaps from its being conducive to the good of the land, which would be too much exhausted, if it were not permitted occasionally to lie fallow. But this could not be the reason; for then a seventh part of the land would most probably have been kept fallow every year, and not the whole at once. Moreover, it would not have been allowed to produce anything which would tend to counteract the main design; whereas all the seed that had been accidentally scattered on it during the harvest, was allowed to grow up to maturity. Nor can the idea of lying fallow be applied with any propriety to the olive-yards and vineyards, which, though not trimmed and pruned that year, were allowed to bring all their fruit to maturity. We must look then to some other source for the reasons of this appointment. Those which appear the most probable and most important, it is the object of this discourse to set before you.

The ordinance itself is more fully stated at the beginning of the chapter 7. See also [Exodus 23:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.10-11); and it was given,

I. To remind them that God was the great Proprietor of all.

In the verse following the text. God says to his people, "The land is mine." And it was his; he had dispossessed the former inhabitants, and had given it to his own people, assigning to every tribe its precise district, and to every family their proper portion. This they would have been likely to forget in the space of a few years; and therefore, as the great Proprietor, he specified the terms on which he admitted them to the possession of his land, reserving to himself the tithes and first-fruits, and requiring the whole to be left uncultivated and common every seventh year. Thus the people would be reminded from time to time that they were only tenants, bound to use the land agreeably to the conditions imposed on them.

Instructive as this thought was to them, it is no less so to us. Indeed, we should never for one moment lose the remembrance of it. "The whole world is mine," says God, "and the fullness thereof, [Psalm 24:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 24.1); [Psalm 50:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.12)." Nay more, our very "bodies and spirits are his, [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20);" and consequently, all that we are, and have, should be used for him, and be entirely at his disposal. Of what incalculable benefit would it be to have our minds duly impressed with this truth! How would it lay the axe to the root of all those evils which arise within us from the diversity of our states and conditions in the world!

Pride in the attainment of earthly things,  
anxiety in the possession of them,  
and sorrow in the loss of them—  
would be greatly moderated.

Instead of being agitated with the keen sensibilities of an owner, we should feel only a subordinate interest, like that of a steward; we should be neither elated with prosperity, nor depressed with adversity—but in every change should be satisfied, if only we were sure that we had done our duty, and that no blame attached to us.

II. To keep them from earthly-mindedness.

When our corn and wine are multiplied, we are apt to be thinking how we may treasure them up, rather than how we shall employ them to the honor of God. To counteract this sordid disposition, God provided, that, when he had given his people the richest abundance, they should think only of the temperate and grateful use of it, and not of amassing wealth. By this ordinance he said to them, what he says to us also, "If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them, [Psalm 62:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 62.10)." He would have us live above this vain world; and not, when running for such a prize, be "loading our feet with thick clay, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6)." If we could have the reasons of God's dispensations fully revealed to us, I have no doubt but that we should find that he has this end in view, when he sends us one bereavement after another; he does it, I say, that we may learn to "set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth".

III. To lead them to trust in him.

Like the rich fool in the Gospel, they would have been ready to say, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry." But God is jealous of his own honor. He will not endure that we should "say to gold, You are my hope; or to the fine gold, You are my confidence." Indeed, he not only denounces against such conduct his heaviest judgments, but sets forth in most beautiful terms its practical effects, [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-6). The cares of this world are as thorns and briers, which choke the seed which God has sown in our hearts, and prevent it from bringing forth any fruit to perfection. They also weigh down the spirits, and oftentimes prove an insupportable burden to the soul. Whereas the person who has learned to confide in God, is always happy, "he knows in whom he has believed," and is assured that "he shall nothing that is good." Hence David not merely affirms that such people are happy, but appeals to God himself respecting it, "O Lord God Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you." This was the state to which God designed to bring his people of old; and in it he would have all his people live, even to the end of the world. "I would have you," says he, "without anxiety." "Do not be anxious about anything; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

IV. To make them observant of his providential care.

When they saw that the sabbatical year was at hand, how forcibly would they be struck with the provision which God had made for it! They would have "three years" to live on the produce of one single year. Commentators appear to me to mistake in supposing that the sabbatical year began, like their civil year, in autumn; for then, the sowing and reaping being brought within one year, the loss of that whole time would be felt only for two years. But if their year began, like their ecclesiastical year, in the spring, then they would of course not sow in the sixth year, nor reap in the eighth year; because they could not reap or sow in the seventh year; consequently, they could only sow in the eighth year what they were to reap in the ninth. The language of the 22nd verse seems to require this interpretation.

But when they saw their barns overflowing with the produce of the earth, and their presses bursting out with new wine, methinks they would say: This is the hand of God; we will love him; we will serve him; we will trust in him; we will show that we are not insensible of all his love and kindness.

Such opinions and conduct would tend exceedingly to exalt and honor God; and would conduce very much to the happiness of all. We are apt to think that there is great comfort annexed to the idea of wealth and plenty; but the comfort which a poor man has in receiving his pittance as from the hand of God, far outweighs all that the rich ever felt in their unsanctified abundance. The more we enjoy God in the creature, the more we enjoy the creature itself.

V. To typify the felicity of Heaven.

Canaan was an acknowledged type of Heaven; and this ordinance fully represented the blessedness there enjoyed. All the land was common during the seventh year; and every person in it, whether rich or poor, a native or a foreigner, had an equal right to everything in it. None were to assert an exclusive claim to anything; none were to reap or treasure up the fruits of the earth; but all were to participate with equal freedom the bounties of Heaven.

What a delightful picture does this give us of that blessed state in which there will be no distinction of people, no boast of exclusive rights, no lack of anything to the children of God; but all will have a fullness of joy at God's right hand, and rivers of pleasure for evermore! Even in the Church below there was a little of this, when the disciples had all things common, and none said that anything he possessed was his own; but in the Church above, this will universally prevail, and endure to all eternity.

This subject, in its different bearings, affords ample matter of instruction to,

1. The doubtful and undetermined professing Christian.

The Jews were required to sacrifice their worldly prospects for the Lord; and were threatened, that, if they did not obey this ordinance, God would expel them from the land. This threatening was executed in the Babylonish captivity, according to the number of sabbatical years which they had neglected to observe, [Leviticus 26:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.33-35), with [2 Chronicles 36:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.20-21).

Shall Christians then be backward to exercise self-denial, or to sacrifice their temporal interests for their Lord and Savior? Let them not hesitate between duty and self-interest; the calls, though apparently opposite, are indeed the same; if we sacrifice anything for the Lord, he will repay us a hundred-fold. If we will lose our lives for his sake, we shall find them; but if we will save them here, we shall lose them in the eternal world.

2. The anxious and worldly-minded professing Christian.

If the Jews, whose principal rewards were of a temporal nature, were taught not to place their affections on earthly things, then how much less should we! It is really a disgrace to Christianity, when people who profess godliness are as anxious after this world as those who have no prospects beyond. Yet how common is this character! Happy would it be for them if they would study our Lord's sermon on the mount; and learn from the very birds of the air to live without anxiety for the morrow, [Matthew 6:25-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.25-30). Not that they should neglect their earthly business, whatever it may be; but, in the habit and disposition of their minds, they should "be content with such things as they have," and realize the prayer which they profess to approve, "Give us day by day our daily bread!"

3. The fearful and unbelieving professing Christian.

On the command being given respecting the observance of the sabbatical year, some are represented as asking, "What shall we eat in the seventh year?"

Now thus it is with many Christians, who are anticipating evils, and questioning with themselves what they shall do under such or such circumstances? And fearing, that, if they proceed in the way of duty, they shall not be able to stand their ground. But the answer to such people is, "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." We have no right to anticipate evils; at least, not so to anticipate them as to distress ourselves about them. All that we need to inquire, is: What is the way of duty? True, to carnal minds we may appear to act absurdly, and to thwart our own interests; but the path of duty will always be found the path of safety. God is the same God as ever he was; and, if he calls us to exercise faith in him, he will never disappoint us. Justly did Jesus reprove his disciples for fearing, when they had him in the same vessel with them. Let us remember, that he is embarked with us, and that they who trust in him "shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

4. The humble and believing Christian.

Did you ever, when exercising faith in God, find yourself disappointed of your hope? Did he ever leave you or forsake you? If the command has appeared formidable at a distance. have you not always found that your strength was increased according to your day, and that His grace was sufficient for you? Have you not found also, that, though your obedience might be self-denying, it has always been productive of happiness? In short, are you not living witnesses of the truth and faithfulness of your Lord? Go on then, and be examples of a holy self-denying obedience. Prefer the performance of duty before worldly prospects, however lucrative they may appear; and let it be seen in you what it is to "live by faith in the Son of God, who has loved you, and given himself for you."

#143

GOD'S PROMISES TO PENITENTS

**[Leviticus 26:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.40-42)**

"But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land."

We are apt to feel a jealousy respecting the divine mercy, as though a free and full exhibition of it would cause men to make light of sin. But the inspired writers seem never apprehensive of any such effects.

In the passage before us God has set forth his promises to his people, if they should continue obedient to them; and the most tremendous threatenings, in case they should become disobedient. Yet even then, though he foreknew and foretold that they would depart from him and bring upon themselves his heavy judgments, he told them, that, if even in their lowest state they should return to him with humiliation and contrition, he would restore them to his favor, and to the land from whence they should have been expelled.

What encouragement the pious Nehemiah derived from these declarations, may be seen in the prayer he offered; in which he reminded God of them, and sought the accomplishment of them to his nation in a season of deep distress, [Nehemiah 1:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 1.5-9). May the contemplation of them be attended with similar effects to our souls, while we consider,

I. What is that repentance which God requires.

We find in the Scriptures a great variety of marks whereby true repentance may be known; but we shall confine our attention to those which are set forth in the text. It is there required,

1. That we should acknowledge our guilt.

Our fathers' sins, as well as our own, are just grounds of national humiliation; in the repentance that is purely personal, our own sins, of course, are the chief, if not the exclusive, sources of sorrow and contrition. But our sins should be viewed in their true light, not as mere violations of our duty to man, but as acts of hostility against God. Sin is "a walking contrary to God," or, in other words, a willful, persevering, habitual opposition to his holy will; nor do we ever appreciate our own character aright, until we see our whole lives to have been one constant scene of rebellion against God; Even adultery and murder, though so directly militating against the welfare of society, were considered by David as deriving their chief aggravations from this source, "Against You, You

2. That we should justify God in whatever judgments he may inflict.

Though we think ourselves at liberty to "walk contrary to God," we do not consider him as at liberty to "walk contrary to us," but murmur and repine if at any time he punishes us for our iniquities. But whatever judgments he may have inflicted on us, we must say, "You have punished us less than our iniquities deserved, [Ezra 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.13)." We should even view his denunciations of wrath in the future world as no more than the just desert of sin; and be ready to acknowledge the justness of the sentence, if we ourselves are consigned over to everlasting misery on account of our sins; I know that, when we consult only our proud reasonings on the subject, it is hard to feel entirely reconciled to the declarations of God respecting it; but a sight of sin in its various aggravations will silence us in a moment, and compel us to cry out, "Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments! [Revelation 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.7)."

3. That we should be thankful for any dispensation that has been the means of "humbling our uncircumcised hearts".

This is one of the most decisive evidences of true repentance. Nothing but genuine contrition can ever produce this. We may submit to afflictive dispensations with a considerable degree of patience and resignation, even though we have no just view of our guilt before God; but we can never be thankful for them, until we see that sin is the greatest of all evils, and that everything is a mercy which leads us to repent of sin. Until we are brought to this, we can never be truly said to "accept the punishment of our iniquity." We must accept it as a fatherly chastisement, a token of love, a blessing in disguise; we must say from our hearts, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted!"

These marks sufficiently characterize the repentance which God requires. We now proceed to mark,

II. The connection between repentance and the exercise of mercy.

It is strange that any should imagine repentance to be meritorious in the sight of God. Our blessed Lord has told us, that obedience itself can lay no claim to merit; and that "when we have done all that is commanded, we should confess ourselves to be unprofitable servants." Who does not see that an acknowledgment of a debt is a very different thing from a discharge of that debt; and that, if a condemned criminal be ever so sorry for his offences, and acknowledge ever so sincerely his desert of punishment, his sorrow cannot cancel the debt which he owes to the laws of his country; much less can it give him a claim to great rewards! It is not then on a ground of merit, that God pardons a repenting sinner. Nevertheless there is a connection between repentance and pardon; there is a fitness and suitableness in the exercise of mercy towards the penitent:

1. On God's part.

Repentance glorifies God, as much as any action of a creature can glorify him. It expresses an approbation of his law, and of the penalties annexed to it; it exalts the goodness and mercy of God, by the hope which it entertains of ultimate acceptance with him. There is not any perfection of the Deity which repentance does not honor. Hence Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him! [Joshua 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.19)."

2. On the part of the penitent himself.

If a man were pardoned without repentance, he would feel little, if any, obligation to God; and would be ready to commit the same iniquities again, from an idea that there was no great enormity in them. But when a person is truly penitent, he admires and adores the riches of that grace that is offered him in the Gospel; and, having tasted the bitterness of sin, he is desirous to flee from it, as from the face of a serpent.

Hence it is that so great a stress is laid on repentance, in the text, "If they are humbled, then will I pardon"—then I can do it consistently with my own honor; and then will they make a suitable improvement of the mercy given unto them.. It will be profitable yet further to inquire into,

III. The ground and measure of that mercy which penitents may expect.

The expressions in the text are very peculiar. Thrice is mention made of that covenant which God made with Abraham, and renewed with Isaac and Jacob. And why is this repetition used, but to show that that covenant is the ground and measure of all God's mercies towards us. As far as it related to the Jewish nation, it assured to them the enjoyment of the promised land. But it relates also to the spiritual children of Abraham; and assures to them all the blessings of grace and glory. It is that covenant whereby God engaged that "in Abraham's Seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed." Of that covenant Christ was the Mediator and Surety. He undertook to fulfill the conditions of it, that we might partake of its benefits. These conditions he did fulfill, "he made his soul an offering for sin;" and now claims the accomplishment of the promise, that "he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." This covenant God remembers on behalf of penitent transgressors; and all his engagements contained in it he will perform.

It is not because penitents deserve mercy, that he will impart it to them, but because he has promised it in that covenant; and for the very same reason will he impart unto them all the blessings of salvation. All the riches of his glory shall be given to them, because they lay hold of that covenant, and look to him to approve himself faithful to his own engagements.

As an **improvement** of this subject, we would suggest to you two things:

1. Be thankful that you are yet within the reach of mercy.

The state represented in the text is such as might be thought altogether hopeless. But God says. "If then they are humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity, He will even then remember his covenant." Surely this shows us that none should despair of mercy, but that, whatever be our state of guilt or misery, we may yet "cry unto God, even as Jonah did, from the belly of Hell, [Jonah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.2)."

But how many are there who are now beyond the reach of mercy! God does not say that, if we cry unto him in another world, he will regard us. No, we shall then cry in vain for "a drop of water to cool our tongues!" O that we might improve this day of grace, this day of salvation!

2. Have especial respect unto the Covenant of Grace.

It is to that that God looks; and to that should we look also. It is that alone which is the real ground of all our hopes. This matter is by no means sufficiently understood among us; we do not consider, as we ought, the stupendous plan of salvation revealed to us in the Gospel. If we saw more clearly the nature and necessity of the covenant which God entered into with his only dear Son for the redemption of a ruined world, we would form a far better estimate of the malignity of sin, and of our obligations to the mercy of God. Beloved brethren, remember this covenant, both for the humiliation and encouragement of your souls. Independent of that, you must expect nothing; but by pleading it before God. you shall obtain what "neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived!"

Numbers

#144

THE JEALOUSY OFFERING

**[Numbers 5:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 5.29-30)**

"This, then, is the law of jealousy when a woman goes astray and defiles herself while married to her husband, or when feelings of jealousy come over a man because he suspects his wife. The priest is to have her stand before the LORD and is to apply this entire law to her."

Many tests for marital unfaithfulness have been devised by man; but they are all superstitious, delusive, cruel, and unjust. But there has been one established by God himself, which was open to no objection. It was appointed for the satisfaction of any who might conceive themselves injured by their wives. The jealous husband might bring his wife to a tribunal, at which the heart-searching God was to be both witness and judge.

The process was this: he was to bring his wife to the priest; and with her an offering, not of fine wheat flour, but of barley meal; and that without either oil or incense; (the offering being intended to mark her humiliating and afflicted state.) He was then to take some holy water out of the laver, and to mix with it some dust from the floor of the tabernacle; and to repeat to the woman a form of imprecation; to which the woman was to say, 'Amen, so be it,' in token of her full consent to every part of it. This curse was then to be written in a book, and washed off again into the vessel that held the water; so that the water might be, as it were, impregnated with the curse. Then the offering was to be waved before the Lord, and part of it to be burnt upon the altar, in token that an appeal was made to God. Then the water was given to the woman to drink; and immediately it was seen whether she had been justly or unjustly accused.

If she had been guilty of unfaithfulness to her marriage vows, the curse she had imprecated upon herself came upon her; instantly her belly began to swell, and her thigh to rot; and her shame became visible to all.

If, on the contrary, she was innocent, the water she had drunk produced no such effect, but rather a blessing from God came upon her.

"Such was the law of jealousy," as set forth in the chapter before us. But it is not on the provisions of this law, nor on its sanctions, that we intend to dwell; it is sufficient for us to know that such and such things were done, and that such and such effects were produced. It is to the uses of this law that we would direct your attention; and they will be found replete with interest and instruction.

Its use was two-fold; political, and moral:

I. Political.

Many of the Jewish laws were adapted exclusively to that people, and were wholly inapplicable to any other nation. The Jews lived under a Theocracy. God himself was their temporal, no less than their spiritual, Governor. Doubtful causes were referred to his decision; and there were means appointed for the manifestation of his will respecting them. Of this nature was the trial of a suspected wife; it was conducted by a direct appeal to God. This singular institution was of great national utility:

1. As a guardian of domestic peace.

It must almost of necessity happen, that some husband, either through the perverseness of his own temper or the indiscretion of his wife, should feel "a spirit of jealousy" arising within him. Wherever such a thought is indulged, it corrodes, and eats out all domestic happiness; and, especially among a people so hard-hearted as the Jews, who were ever ready to put away their wives on the slightest occasions, it would lead to almost an immediate dissolution of the nuptial bonds. The miseries consequent on such hasty divorces may be more easily conceived than described. But when a man had the means of redress in his own hands, he would be less willing to indulge suspicion; or, if it arose, he would not suffer it to rankle in his bosom; he would either dismiss it from his mind, or bring it to an issue at once; that if it were justly founded, he might be released from his marital connection; or, if unfounded, be delivered from his painful apprehensions.

Thus the law in question would retard the rise of jealousy, diminish its force, and facilitate its extinction; at the same time that it would prevent unjust divorces, and reconcile the mind to any which the circumstances of the case might require.

2. As a preservative of public virtue.

It is the hope of concealment that gives an edge to temptation. A thief will not steal, if he knows that he must infallibly be detected; nor will the adulterer lay his plans of seduction, if he knows that he cannot possibly conceal his guilt. Now, the remedy being in the hands of the injured party, and the outcome of a trial certain, men would be cautious how they subjected themselves to such tremendous consequences as they had reason to expect.

Women too would be upon their guard, not merely against the actual commission of sin, but against the smallest approximation towards it. The impossibility of escape would be a fence to their virtue, a barrier which no temptation could force. From their earliest days they would feel the necessity of being reserved in their habits, and circumspect in their conduct; and of abstaining, not only from evil, but from even the appearance of evil. For though they should not be found criminal to the extent that the jealousy of their husbands had led them to imagine, few would wholly exculpate them, or think that they had not given some grounds for suspicion; and the consciousness of this would make the trial itself extremely formidable even to those who had nothing to fear on account of the ultimate decision.

Hence then it is manifest, that the existence of this law would give a beneficial check to the passions of mankind, and operate in the most favorable manner on all classes of the community.

Its use, as political, was important; but it was still more so as,

II. Moral.

Minute and trifling as many of the Jewish laws may appear, there was not one but was intended to inculcate some great lesson of morality. This which we are considering was of very extensive benefit. It had a direct tendency,

1. To convince the skeptical.

The general notion of mankind is, that God does not attend to their actions, "The Lord does not see, neither does the Almighty regard it," is the language of every heart, [Isaiah 29:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.15); [Psalm 73:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.11); [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14). But a single execution of this law would carry an irresistible conviction to every mind. It is supposed that the crime committed has been so secret, that no human being, except the two guilty people, were acquainted with it. It is supposed also that no clue for the discovery of it could possibly be found. Behold the outcome of this ordeal, and the offending woman justifying that God who had inflicted vengeance on her; could any doubt now remain, whether God sees our actions or not; or whether he will allow sin to pass unpunished?

The most determined atheist (if such a being could be found) must, like the worshipers of Baal, be convinced at such a sight, and exclaim, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God!" "Truly there is a God who judges in the earth, [Psalm 58:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 58.11). Such passages as [Psalm 139:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.11-12) and [Job 34:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.21-22) would now appear to him in their true light!"

2. To reclaim the wicked.

What must be the feelings of a man, who, after having rioted in iniquity, beholds such a scene as this? Must it not bring his own iniquities to his remembrance? Must he not tremble at the thought of appearing before this holy Lord God, and at the prospect of those judgments that shall be inflicted on him? Must he not realize in a measure, that shame which he will be exposed to in the presence of the assembled universe, and that misery which will be coeval with his existence? Yes; methinks he already begins to smite upon his bosom, and cry for mercy; and determines from henceforth to walk in newness of life.

3. To comfort the oppressed.

Where a woman of blameless character was made the victim of her husband's jealousy, with what holy confidence would she drink the appointed cup, and make her appeal to the heart-searching God! In what triumph would she depart from the tabernacle, when God himself had borne a public testimony to her innocence!

From hence then might every one, whose name the breath of calumny had blasted, assure himself that a time was coming, when God would vindicate his injured character, and cause his righteousness to shine as the noonday. David, under the accusations of Saul, consoled himself with this prospect, [Psalm 7:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.3-8); and lived to attest the fidelity of God to those who trust in him, [Psalm 18:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.16-20); and to recommend from his own experience this remedy to others, [Psalm 37:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.4-6).

True, the interposition of God may not, towards others, be so immediate, or so visible, in this world; but, in the world to come, if not before, shall that promise be fulfilled to every servant of the Lord, "Every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17); [Isaiah 66:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.5)."

We cannot conclude the subject without recommending to all,

1. To beware of appealing lightly to God.

It is grievous to hear how carelessly men swear by God, or use the term, 'God knows.' But, however light men make of such appeals, God hears them; and he will, sooner or later, manifest his indignation against all who so profane his holy name. Instantaneous displays of his vengeance are sometimes even now given, in order to check such impiety; but, if he bears with such people for a season, in due time "their sin shall surely find them out!"

2. To stand ready for the final judgment.

This law has ceased; but there is another tribunal, to which all, whether male or female, married or unmarried, shall be summoned. There shall we be brought by our heavenly "Husband," "who is a jealous God, yes, whose very name is Jealous! [Exodus 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.14);" and by his infallible decision will our eternal state be fixed.

Think what must have been the frame of a woman's mind on the eve of her trial, when she knew herself to be guilty—must she not be filled with fear and trembling? How then can any of us be mirthful and thoughtless in the prospect of such a judgment as we have to pass! We cannot but acknowledge that we are justly branded as "adulterers and adulteresses, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4)." Let us therefore confess our sins with all humility of mind, and wash in that "fountain which was opened for sin and for impurity."

#145

THE LAW OF NAZARITES

**[Numbers 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.21)**

"'This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD in accordance with his separation, in addition to whatever else he can afford. He must fulfill the vow he has made, according to the law of the Nazirite.'"

The Nazarites, in the best times of the Jewish state, were eminently pious. God himself declares concerning them, that "they were purer than snow, and whiter than milk, [Lamentations 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 4.7)." The very order of Nazarites was instituted by divine appointment, on purpose that they might be blessings to the nation, and preserve the tone of piety and morals from decay. It was a favor to that people that "God raised up of their sons for prophets;" nor was it less so, that he raised up of their "young men for Nazarites, [Amos 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 2.11)."

Some, as Samson and John the Baptist, were separated by God himself even from their mother's womb; and the express order was given, that from their very birth they should drink no wine, and that no razor should come upon their head, [Judges 13:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.4-5); [Judges 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.7); [Judges 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.14); [Luke 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.15). Others perhaps, like Samuel, might be consecrated by their parents from the womb, [1 Samuel 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.11).

But, in general, the separation of themselves to be Nazarites was altogether voluntary and for a fixed time. The custom continued even to the apostolic age. Paul himself seems to have completed the vow of Nazariteship at Cenchrea, [Acts 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.18); and when there were four men performing it at Jerusalem, he, in order to remove prejudice from the minds of those who thought him adverse to the law of Moses, united himself with them, bearing part of the charges attendant on that vow, and conforming himself in everything to the prescribed ritual, [Acts 21:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.23-24).

The law respecting them is contained in the chapter now before us; and, agreeably to the arrangement made for us in our text, we shall consider it as containing,

I. The Nazarite's vows.

The particulars of their vow are here minutely detailed:

They separated themselves for a season to an extraordinary course of attendance upon God. During that season they were not to touch any wine, or grapes either moist or dried. They were not to cut their hair, or to approach any dead body, or to mourn even for a father or a mother verse 2-8. If, by any unforeseen accident, a person should fall down dead near them, or a corpse be brought nearly into contact with them, they were to shave their head, and offer both a burnt-offering and a sin-offering (to atone for the pollution they had contracted), and were to begin again the term of their separation, the whole that had passed having been rendered null and void, verse 9-12.

The design of it, though not expressly declared in Scripture—yet may without difficulty be ascertained.

It seems that the order of Nazarites was intended to prefigure Christ, who, though not observant of the laws relating to that order, was from eternity consecrated to the service of his God, not only by the designation of his Father, but by his own voluntary engagement, and completed the course of his obedience until he could say, "It is finished!"

But we have no doubt respecting the design of God to exhibit to us in the Nazarites, a pattern for our imitation. The appointment itself has ceased with the law, "the believing Gentiles" are expressly told that they "are not required to observe any such thing, [Acts 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.25)."

But, though the form has ceased, the substance remains. We are called to consecrate ourselves unreservedly to God. This is our duty, and our privilege. "We are not our own; we are bought with a price;" and therefore bought, "that we may glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." Every one among us should subscribe with his hand, and say, "I am the Lord's! [Isaiah 44:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.5); [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8)." We need not literally abstain from wine; but we should show a holy superiority to all the pleasures of sense. We may enjoy them, because "God has given us all things richly to enjoy;" but we should not seek our happiness in them, or be at all enslaved by them; or value them any further, than we can enjoy God in them, and glorify him by them.

The same indifference should we manifest also in relation to the cares of this life. We may mourn indeed, but never indulge that "sorrow of the world which works death." Having God for our portion, the loss of all earthly things should be comparatively but little felt. We are not called to that singularity of dress which marked the Nazarites to public view; but surely we are called not to be conformed to every idle fashion, or to be running into all the absurdities which characterize the votaries of this world. A Christian should despise such vanities, and "be no more of this world, than Christ himself was of the world." From sinful pollution of every kind we should stand at the remotest distance; we should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," but "be purged from dead works to serve the living God." What caution, what holy fear should we maintain! What dread of dishonoring our Lord, and walking unworthy of our holy profession! Surely we should "abstain even from the appearance of evil," and labor to "be pure as God himself is pure!" If at any time, through weakness or inadvertence, we contract pollution, we must not think to proceed as if we had done nothing amiss. No, sin, of whatever kind, must be repented of; for, if it be continued in, it will infallibly destroy us, [Ezekiel 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24).

We must, like the Nazarite, instantly apply ourselves to the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and seek remission through his precious blood. Yes, like him too, we must renew our dedication of ourselves to God, just as if we never had been devoted to him before. This is the safest way, and by far the happiest. If we stand doubting and questioning about our former state, it may be long before we come to any comfortable conclusion; but if we leave the consideration of past experiences, or use them only as grounds of deeper humiliation, and devote ourselves to God again as we did at the beginning—we shall most honor the mercy of our God, and most speedily attain renewed tokens of his favor.

At the completion of their vows they were required to present,

II. The Nazarite's offerings.

These are particularly specified; they consisted of a male lamb for a burnt-offering, to acknowledge God's goodness to them; an ewe-lamb for a sin-offering, to obtain mercy at his hands; and a ram for a peace-offering, to show that they were in a state of favor and acceptance with God. Besides these, they were to offer a basket of unleavened bread, consisting of cakes mingled with oil, and wafers anointed with oil, with a meat-offering and a drink-offering. Of these a greater portion was given to the priest than on other occasions; for, not only the wave-offering and the heave-shoulder were his, but also the other shoulder of the ram, which was sodden or boiled, was added, with one unleavened cake and one unleavened wafer; and, after having been put into the hands of the Nazarite and waved before the Lord, were given to the priest as his portion. The Nazarite's hair also was shaved, and was burnt in the fire which boiled the peace-offerings. Thus was the termination of their vow publicly made known; and they, released from those particular obligations, were at liberty to resume the enjoyments which during their separation they had voluntarily renounced, verse 13-20.

It would not be easy to mark with precision the exact design of these multiplied observances; but from a collective view of them we may gather,

1. That of all that we do, we should give the glory to God.

This was designed by the burnt-offering, as also by the heave-offering; they were acknowledgments to God, that his goodness to them was great, and that the service which they were enabled to render him had been the fruit of his love, and the gift of his grace. Thus should all our services be viewed. If they be regarded by us as grounds of self-preference and self-delight, they will be odious to God in proportion as they are admired by us. We should never for a moment forget, that "it is by the grace of God we are what we are." "It is God who gives us both to will and to do, and that too altogether of his good pleasure." Our sufficiency even for a good thought is derived from Him alone. Instead of imagining therefore that we lay God under obligations to us for any works that we do, we must remember that the more we do for God, the more we are indebted to God.

2. That, after all that we can do, we need a saving interest in the sin-atoning blood of Christ.

This was clearly manifested by the sin-offering. The Nazarite's hair was not burnt on the altar of the burnt-offerings, to make atonement, but with the fire that boiled the peace-offerings, to make acknowledgment. However holy our lives are, even though we were sanctified to God from the very womb, and never contracted such a degree of pollution as should destroy our hope of acceptance with him—yet must we be washed in "the fountain open for sin," even the fountain of Christ's blood, which alone "cleanses from all sin." There is iniquity cleaving to our holiest things; and an atonement is as necessary for them as for our grossest sins; and that atonement can be found only in the sacrifice of Christ.

3. That when our term of separation is fulfilled, our joys shall be unrestrained for evermore.

"After that, the Nazarite may drink wine, verse 20." Just so, after the short period of mortification and self-denial assigned to us here on earth, we shall "enter into the joy of our Lord," even into "his presence, where there is fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore." The dread of pollution shall then be past; and the tokens of humiliation be put away. Then shall we "drink new wine in the kingdom of our Father;" and O! how sweet those draughts, of which, in our present state of separation, it was not permitted us to taste! More encouragement than this we need not, we cannot, have. Let us only contemplate "the blessedness of those who die in the Lord," and we shall need no other inducement to live unto the Lord.

APPLICATION.

The term, Nazarite, imports separation; and though, as has been observed before, the ordinances relative to Nazarites are no longer in force, their duties, in a spiritual view, are obligatory on us. Paul says, "Come out from among the ungodly, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." You remember too it was observed, that "God raised up young men to be Nazarites." O that the young among us would be foremost in the surrender of themselves to God! How would the world be benefitted! how would God be glorified!

With respect to women, a vow of theirs, if not allowed by their father or their husband, was made void; so that they could not separate themselves, as Nazarites, without the permission of those who had the control over them, [Numbers 30:1-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 30.1-16); but there is no such controlling power now, none to prevent a surrender of our souls to God. The answer to any opposing authority must be, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Let nothing then keep us from executing the purposes which God has inspired; but let us, both old and young, "yield up ourselves as living sacrifices unto God, assured that it is no less a reasonable service, than it is an acceptable service".

#146

GOD WILL BLESS HIS OWN ORDINANCES

**[Numbers 6:22-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.22-27)**

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."' "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

The exercise of benevolence is that which every child of God should cultivate to the uttermost; but ministers above all should consider it as the distinguishing badge of their office; they are compelled indeed sometimes to "use sharpness;" but whether they rebuke, or whether they exhort, they should be actuated by nothing but a principle of love. Under the law, it was a very important part of the priestly office to bless the people; and God prescribed a form of words to be used by Aaron and his sons in the discharge of that duty. The circumstance of its being a prescribed form of words, did not render it the less efficacious for the people's good; nor can any words better express the scope and end of the Christian ministry. If the people are brought to receive abundant communications of grace and peace, and to surrender up themselves entirely to God, a minister can desire nothing more in this world; his labors are well repaid. To promote this blessed end, we shall,

I. Explain the words before us.

God is here making known his will to Moses, and directing him what orders to give to Aaron and his sons respecting the execution of their priestly office and there are two duties which he assigns to them:

1. To bless the people in God's name.

This was repeatedly declared to be their office, [Deuteronomy 21:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.5); and the constant practice of the Apostles shows that it was to be continued under the Christian dispensation. In conformity to their example, the Christian Church has universally retained the custom of closing the service with a pastoral blessing. We are not indeed to suppose that ministers can, by any power or authority of their own, convey a blessing, [Acts 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.12); they can neither select the people who shall be blessed, nor fix the time, the manner or the degree in which any shall receive a blessing. But, as stewards of the mysteries of God, they dispense the bread of life, assuredly expecting, that their Divine Master will give a beneficial effect to the ordinances of his own appointment.

The direction in the text was confirmed with an express promise, that what they spoke on earth should be ratified in Heaven; and every faithful minister may take encouragement from it in the discharge of his own duty, and may consider God as saying to him, Bless the congregation, "and I will bless them to this effect, see [Luke 10:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.5-6) and [John 20:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.23)."

2. To claim the people as God's property.

To "put the name of God upon them" is, to challenge them as "his portion, the lot of his inheritance, [Deuteronomy 32:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9)." This every minister must do in most authoritative terms; and not only claim them as his property, but excite them with all earnestness to surrender up themselves to his service. Nor shall their exhortations be lost; for God will accompany them "with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven;" and the people, constrained by a divine impulse, shall say, "I am the Lord's! [Isaiah 44:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3-5)." Moreover, in their intercessions for the people, they are also to urge this plea with God on their behalf, [Daniel 9:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.17-19); [Jeremiah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.9). Thus are they to strengthen the connection between God and them; and to promote that fellowship with God, which is the end, as well as means, of all spiritual communications.

Having thus explained the general import of the words, we shall,

II. Notice some truths contained in them.

Amidst the many profitable observations that may be deduced from the text, there are some deserving of peculiar attention:

1. The priests under the law, while they blessed the people, typically represented the office of Christ himself.

Christ as our High-Priest performs every part of the priestly office; and it is remarkable that he was in the very act of blessing his disciples, when he was taken up from them into Heaven, [Luke 24:50-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.50-51). Nor did he then cease, but rather began, as it were, to execute that office, which he has been fulfilling from that time to the present hour.

Peter, preaching afterwards to a vast concourse of people, declared to them, that to bless them was the great end for which Jesus had ascended, and that he was ready, both as a Prince and a Savior, to give them repentance and remission of sins, [Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26); [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31).

Let us then conceive the Lord Jesus standing now in the midst of us, and, with uplifted hands, pronouncing the blessing in the text; is there one among us that would not cordially add, "Amen, Amen?" Nor let this be thought a vain and fanciful idea, since he has promised to be wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, and that too, for the very purpose which is here expressed. Compare [Matthew 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.20) with [Exodus 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.24).

2. Though ministers are used as instruments to convey blessings, God himself is the only author and giver of them.

The very words which the priests were commanded to use, directed the attention of all to God himself; nor could the frequent repetition of Jehovah's name fail to impress the most careless auditor with a conviction, that the blessing could come from God alone.

Perhaps too, the mystery of the Holy Trinity might be intimated in these expressions, since it is certain that we, under the clearer light of the Gospel, are taught to look to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the distinct, though united, authors of all spiritual good, 2 Corinthians 13:14. We ought indeed to reverence God's ministers as the authorized dispensers of his blessings, [1 Thessalonians 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.13); but we must look for the blessings themselves to God alone; and endeavor to exercise faith:  
in the Father as the fountain of them,  
in Christ as the channel in which they flow,  
and in the Holy Spirit as the agent, by whose divine energy they are imparted to the soul, [Revelation 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.4-5).

At the same time we should remember the obligation which these mercies lay us under, to devote ourselves entirely to the service of our gracious and adorable Benefactor.

3. However weak the ordinances are in themselves—yet shall they, if attended in faith, be available for our greatest good.

Nothing can be conceived more simple in itself than a priestly blessing; yet, most undoubtedly, it brought down many blessings upon the people. And can we suppose that God will put less honor upon his ordinances under the Gospel dispensation? Shall not "grace, mercy and peace, flow down from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ," in answer to the fervent intercessions of his ministers, [2 Timothy 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.2). These three words seem to contain all that is implied in the text.

Though ministers are but earthen vessels—yet shall they impart unto the people the richest treasures, [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7). Their word shall not be in vain, but shall accomplish God's good pleasure, and prosper in the thing whereunto he has sent it, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11). Let not then the blessing be so often slighted, as though it were only a signal to depart; but while it is delivered with solemnity in the name of God, let every heart be expanded to receive the benefit. Let every one consider himself in particular as the person addressed. "You" was repeated six times, though addressed to the whole congregation, that every person might feel himself as much interested as if he alone were present; and may the experience of all attest at this time, that God is ready to "grant us above all that we can ask or think!"

#147

THE JOURNEYS OF ISRAEL REGULATED BY GOD

**[Numbers 9:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 9.21-23)**

"Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening until morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."

The conducting of Israel in the wilderness by a pillar and a cloud is often mentioned in the Holy Scriptures; but in no place so fully as here. From the fifteenth verse to the end of this chapter is the same truth repeated again and again, with very little variation.

It would seem, however, that the guiding of Israel was not the only use of the pillar and the cloud. These conductors appear, indeed, to have rested on the tabernacle; but to have occupied at the same time such a space, as to give light to the whole camp of Israel by night, and to afford them a cooling shade by day; so that the people might be protected from the burning rays of the sun, which, in that climate, nothing but a miracle could enable them for a continuance to sustain. This information we have from David, who says, that God "spread a cloud for a covering; and fire, to give light in the night, [Psalm 105:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.39)."

But the regulating of their motions is that particular point to which my text adverts; and to which therefore, exclusively, I shall direct your attention. It is obvious, that the extreme uncertainty of the movements made by the cloud must keep the people in continual suspense. This was a state of discipline proper for them. And we shall find it a profitable subject of contemplation, if we consider:

I. The use of this discipline to them.

The whole system of God's dealings with them in the wilderness was intended to promote their spiritual welfare. Moses, at the close of their wanderings there, says to them, "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart—whether you would keep his commandments, or not, [Deuteronomy 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.2)."

But the circumstance mentioned in my text was of very peculiar use:

1. To show them what they **were**.

Truly they wore a rebellious and stiff-necked, people, even from the first moment that God sent to take them under his more immediate protection, [Deuteronomy 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.7); [Deuteronomy 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.24). The very moment that anything obstructed their wishes, or disappointed their expectations, they murmured against the Lord. The mercies they received were altogether overlooked by them, and produced no effect to compose their minds, or to reconcile them to anything which bore an untoward aspect. The wonders of Egypt, and the passage of the Red Sea, with the destruction of all their enemies in the mighty waters, were soon forgotten, "they were disobedient at the sea, even at the Red Sea, [Psalm 106:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.7)." To such a degree did they rage against the dispensations of Heaven, that they frequently regretted that ever they had come out of Egypt, and occasionally proposed to make a captain over them, and return there again.

Now the particular dispensation mentioned in my text had a strong tendency to elicit these unholy feelings. For sometimes the cloud moved by day; at other times it commenced its motions by night; and the whole people were compelled to follow it immediately, or to be left behind. Sometimes it continued its course for days and nights together without intermission; at other times it stopped for days, and months, and even a whole year together, without ever moving from its place. These sudden changes greatly irritated their rebellious spirit.

On one occasion, we are told, "they departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them, [Numbers 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.33)." From whence it is evident, that they found no resting-place during those three days. And what was the effect of this upon their impatient minds? They so murmured against the Lord, as to provoke him greatly to anger. Moses says, "The people complained; and displeased the Lord; and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp, [Numbers 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.1)."

On another occasion, when "they had journeyed from Mount Hor, by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom," we are told, "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the difficulty of the way. And the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness [Numbers 21:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.4-5)."

Nor were their evil passions less called forth by the long suspension of their movements. A whole year without any progress was a severe trial to their impatient minds, when a less space than that had sufficed to bring them from the brick-kilns of Egypt to the borders of the promised land. Had nothing occurred to try them, they would never have "known what spirit they were of;" but, when such frequent occasions were administered for the discovery of their evil dispositions, it was impossible but that they must see and acknowledge that they were indeed "a rebellious and stiff-necked generation."

2. To show them what they **should be**.

In this respect, the discipline here used was admirably calculated to inform their minds.

Almighty God, by a visible symbol of his presence, graciously undertook to guide them in all their way. On every occasion of need, he showed himself abundantly sufficient for the task he had undertaken. To his power there was no limit, whether to subdue their enemies, or to supply their needs. What, then, befit them, but to express the deepest gratitude for this wonderful condescension, and to commit themselves entirely to his fatherly care? Their song at the Red Sea should have continued to be their song under all circumstances, "Who is like unto you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders! [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11)."

When circumstances arose that were trying to their feelings, or which they were not altogether able to account for, one might expect that their past experience of God's wisdom and goodness would suffice to allay any rising irritation, and to induce a submission to his sovereign will. They knew what ready acquiescence they themselves expected from their own children and servants, in any appointments which they should make; and it was but reasonable that they should place the same confidence in God, as they themselves required of their fellow-creatures.

The successive orders to proceed or stop would naturally lead them to consider themselves as altogether at God's disposal, and to seek all their happiness in serving and obeying him. What should they do, but keep themselves in readiness at any time, in any way, to any extent to follow his leadings and fulfill his will?

The precise state of mind which this dispensation called for was that which comprised their entire duty, and would ultimately conduce to their truest happiness.

But it was not for their sakes only that this discipline was used, but for ours also; as will clearly appear, while we consider,

II. The instruction it conveys to us.

We should not limit these things to the generation then existing, nor to that peculiar people. The whole of that mysterious dispensation had a reference to the dispensation under which we live; and the particular circumstance mentioned in our text is expressly spoken of in that view, "The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defense, [Isaiah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.5)." It may well be considered as teaching us:

1. What we may expect from God.

There was no mercy given to the Jews, which we ourselves may not expect at God's hands. In fact, all that he did for them, he will do for us.

Did he direct them in all their way? He will go before us also, and direct our way. This he declares, in many express promises, "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths, [Proverbs 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.6)." We may say of God's people now, as certainly as of his people of old, "The steps of a godly man are ordered of the Lord, [Psalm 37:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.23);" and, "The Lord shall guide you continually, [Isaiah 58:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.11)."

But we must be careful not to form wrong notions respecting the guidance which we are authorized to expect. The Jews lived under a dispensation, the blessings whereof were chiefly carnal; but we live under a dispensation which is altogether spiritual, "We walk by faith, and not by sight, [2 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.7)." It is not by anything obvious to the senses that God will guide us; but by his word and Spirit. His Word is the one rule by which we are to walk. There is not anything we are bound to do, but we may find it there; nor anything contained in that blessed volume, but what, according to our ability, we are bound to do. Everything must be referred "to the Law and to the testimony;" and agreeably to that must we more in all things.

We are not to expect the Holy Spirit to direct us by any impulses unconnected with the Word. To be looking for visions, or impressions of any kind independent of the word, is to delude our own souls. The way by which the Holy Spirit will guide us is this: He will sanctify the dispositions and desires of our souls, and thus enable us to "discern good from evil, and light from darkness." He will give us "a single eye; and then our whole body will be full of light, [Matthew 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22)." Then we shall be prepared to understand the word; and be enabled and inclined to follow it; and in this way he will fulfill his promise, that we "shall hear a voice behind us, saying: This is the way; walk in it! [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)."

This is exactly what he has taught us to expect, "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9);" the judgment shall be rectified, in the first instance, by the influence of the Holy Spirit; and then shall the way of duty be made clear before our face; the word becoming, not only "a light to our feet in general, but a lantern to our every step! [Psalm 119:105](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.105)."

2. What we should render to him.

If we could but realize the state of mind which this mode of conducting Israel required, we would see at once what are those graces which we should cultivate in our journey towards the heavenly land.

We should exercise:  
dependence without anxiety,  
submission without murmuring,  
obedience without reluctance.

We should depend on him without anxiety. We should leave God altogether to "choose our inheritance for us, [Psalm 47:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 47.4)," and to "appoint the bounds of our habitation, [Acts 17:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.26)." We should consider ourselves as entirely under his care and guidance, as a child is under the direction of his father; and, being assured of his fatherly regards towards us, we should "cast our care altogether upon him! [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7)."

We should submit to him without murmuring. We cannot see the reasons of all his dispensations; nor is it needful that we should. We should feel convinced of this, that, however inexplicable they may be to us, he is too wise to err, and too good to inflict pain without some adequate cause. We should "know in whom we have believed;" and satisfy ourselves with this composing thought, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand! [John 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.7)."

We should obey him without reluctance. We must not inquire whether his commands are pleasing to flesh and blood, or not. We must be anxious only to know what his will is; and then, though it be to march at midnight, or to continue our journey for many wearisome days and nights together, or to be kept by his providence in a state of inactivity for years—we should rise to the occasion, and endeavor to approve ourselves to him as faithful and obedient children.

In a word, to be continually with him, enjoying his presence, fulfilling his will, and pressing forward to his glory—this is the Christian's duty; this is the very end of his redemption, and the way to his inheritance.

ADDRESS.

Consider yourselves as now in the state of Israel advancing through the wilderness; and expect that, "as God's children, you shall be led by his Holy Spirit, [Romans 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.14)." Yet be careful not to expect more than God has promised. Do not suppose that you shall be so led as to be kept from all error. It is not God's design to render any man infallible, or so to guide him that he shall have no ground for fear and self-distrust. We must, under all circumstances, feel a jealousy, lest Satan should take advantage of us, or our own deceitful hearts should beguile us. The Israelites, though under the cloud, fell short of the promised land, 1 Corinthians 10:1; [1 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.5), because "their hearts were not right with God, neither were they steadfast in his covenant [Psalm 78:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.37)." But, if you will "follow the Lord fully," you may look up to him with holy confidence, that now "he will guide you by his counsel, and hereafter he will receive you to glory! [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24)."

#148

MOSES' INVITATION TO HOBAB

**[Numbers 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.29)**

"Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel."

I. The invitation.

Where was Moses going? To the land of Canaan. There was not a child in all the camp of Israel, who did not know whence he had been brought, and where he was bending his course

This is really the state of God's Israel now. They are all sensible that they have been brought out of bondage to sin and Satan; and there is not one among them who does not consider himself as a pilgrim here, and is not daily pressing forward to the heavenly Canaan as his rest, his portion, his inheritance.

Are you not solemnly pledging yourselves to renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh, etc. etc. etc. This then is the very thing which the journeying of the Israelites in the wilderness shadowed forth, and which all God's Israel at this very time are doing.

We say then to you, yes, to every one of you in particular, "Come with us." Though you be young, like Hobab, come with us; yes, though your father Jethro has gone back, "come you with us"

II. The arguments.

Hobab, it should seem, was the son of Jethro, who is here called Raguel, and in another place Reuel, [Exodus 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 2.18). He was the brother of Zipporah, whom Moses had married in the land of Midian. Both Jethro, and his son Hobab, had accompanied Moses for a season; but Jethro had left him some time since, [Exodus 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 18.27); and Hobab also now proposed to leave him, and "to go back to his own country and kindred." But Moses besought him not to go, but to proceed with Israel to the promised land; assuring him, that, though a Midianite, he should participate in all the blessings which God designed for Israel. On finding that this consideration was not sufficient to influence his mind, Moses urged the services which Hobab might render to Israel in their journey through the wilderness; for though God had undertaken to guide Israel through the wilderness, and to provide for and protect them in the way—yet there were many local circumstances which Hobab was acquainted with, by the communication of which, from time to time, he might render very essential services to Moses and to all Israel.

Whether Moses prevailed with Hobab to alter his determination, does not certainly appear. But it seems rather that he did succeed, because we find the descendants of Hobab actually settled in Canaan, and dwelling in the midst of the tribe of Judah, not indeed as blended with them, but as a distinct people, [Judges 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.16); [Judges 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.11); [Judges 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.17).

This however is of no importance to us. It is the invitation only that we are concerned about; and we hope that, when the arguments with which it is enforced are duly considered, the success with us shall not be doubtful, whatever it might be with him. There is a land of promise towards which the true Israel are yet journeying, under the conduct of our great Lawgiver, the Lord Jesus Christ; and in their name is the invitation addressed to all of us , "Come with us; and we will do you good."

But, that we may have clearer views of this matter, let us distinctly consider,

III. The invitation.

That the journey of Israel in the wilderness was altogether typical of our journey heaven-ward, is well known. When therefore, in the name of all Israel, we say to every individual among us, "Come with us," we must be understood to say:

1. Set your faces in good earnest towards the promised land.

There is "a land of which God has said, I will give it to you." And it is a good land, "a land flowing with milk and honey;" a land "where you shall eat bread without scarceness;" and enjoy "a rest" from all enemies, and from all labors, for evermore, [Hebrews 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.9); [1 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4).

Towards that land all the Israel of God are journeying; they consider this world as a wilderness, in which they are pilgrims and sojourners; and the object of every step which they take in it is to advance nearer to their desired home. Let every one of us join himself to them.

Let us estimate aright the inheritance prepared for us.

Let us lose no further time in commencing our journey towards it.

Let us engage in the pursuit of it with all the ardor that the object requires.

And let us "fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into it, any of us should even seem to come short of it, [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1)."

2. Let nothing be allowed to hinder you in your progress there.

Hobab was solicited to postpone all regard for his family and country, for the attainment of the promised land. And such is our duty also. Our blessed Lord has said, "He who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." "If any man comes to me, and hates not his father and mother, yes, and his own life also (in comparison with me), he cannot be my disciple." "He who will save his life, shall lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake, shall find it, [Matthew 10:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.37-39); [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)."

There will be difficulties and obstructions which we must meet with; but we must meet them manfully; and, whatever be the cross that lies in our way, we must take it up, yes, and glory in it, and rejoice that we are counted worthy to bear it for His sake! For what is the favor of man, in comparison with the favor of God; or the preservation of earthly interests, in comparison with a heavenly inheritance? "What would it profit us if we gained the whole world, if at the same time we lost our own souls? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Nor let this sacrifice appear great; it is no other than was made by Abraham, [Genesis 12:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.1-4), and Moses, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26), and the Apostles of our Lord, [Mark 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.28), and all the primitive Christians, [Acts 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32); nay, it is made daily even for the sake of a connection with an earthly object, [Ephesians 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.31); much more therefore may it be made for a union with Christ; who offers himself to us only on these express terms, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own people and your father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in your beauty; for he is your Lord, worship him, [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)."

3. Proceed steadily until you are in possession of it.

Hobab had abode with Moses some considerable time; but at last he grew weary of the way, and determined to return. It must not be thus with us. We must not run well for a season only, but unto the end, if we would obtain the prize. We must "never be weary of well-doing," or "look back after having put our hand to the plough;" but "by patient continuance in well-doing must seek for glory and honor and immortality." "If any one of us turns back," says God, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "It were even better for us never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us." It is "he alone who endures unto the end, that shall ever finally be saved."

4. Do not object that those who give this invitation are a mere company.

Whose fault is it, if they are a mere company? Is it theirs who are going heaven-ward; or those who will not advance a step towards it? Are those who "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way that leads unto life," to be blamed, because the great mass of mankind prefer "the broad road that leads to destruction?"

But if they must be called a mere company, let me tell you what company it is; it consists of such as Moses summoned to his aid, "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me, [Exodus 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.26)." Yes, they are those who are "on the Lord's side;" and if that be a fault, let them bear it. But who is at the head of that company? When we know that it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, [John 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.23); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16), and that "the whole world besides lies under the dominion of the wicked one, [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14); [John 15:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-20); [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19)," we need not be ashamed.

If this objection has any force, it had the same force against the Israelites who had come out of Egypt; (for they were but a mere company, in comparison with those whom they had left behind,) yes, against the Apostles and the primitive Christians it lay with still greater force; for they were, especially at first, as nothing in comparison with their opponents. If those who invite us to join them be but "a little flock," still they are the flock to whom exclusively "the kingdom of Heaven shall be given, [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32);" and therefore we would urge you all to join them without delay.

To give yet further weight to the invitation, I will call your attention to,

IV. The arguments with which it is enforced.

Two considerations Moses proposed to Hobab; first, the benefit that would accrue to himself; and next, the benefit which he would confer on Israel. Similar considerations also may fitly be proposed to us. Consider then, if you accept the invitation:

1. What benefit will accrue to **yourselves**.

Truly, "God has spoken good respecting Israel." He calls them his children, his first-born, his peculiar treasure above all the people upon the face of the earth. And whatever can conduce to their present and eternal happiness, he promises them in the richest abundance. Both in their way, and in their end, they shall be truly blessed.

What a catalogue of blessings is assigned to them in the space of a few verses, [Exodus 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 6.6-8). yet they relate to this world only, and are but faint shadows of the blessings which God will pour out upon their souls. As for the glory prepared for them in a better world, what tongue can utter it? What heart can conceive it? The very throne of God is not too exalted for them to sit on; nor the kingdom of God too rich for them to possess.

Now then to all who comply with the invitation given them, we do not hesitate to say, as Moses did, "It shall be, if you go with us, yes, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto you, verse 32." You shall partake of every blessing which God's most favored people enjoy.

Does he go before them in the pillar and the cloud?

Does he feed them with manna, and cause the waters from the rock to follow them in all their way?

Does he protect them from every enemy?

Does he carry them as on eagles' wings?

Does he forgive their sins, and "heal their backslidings, and love them freely?"

Is "he as the dew to them," causing them to "grow as the lily, and to spread forth their roots as Lebanon?"

Does "he love them to the end," and "never leave them until he has fulfilled to them all that he has promised?"

All this shall be yours, if you will come with us. "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." You may exhaust all the powers of language in asking, and it shall all be done; you may even stretch your imagination to the utmost bounds that human intellect can reach, and all that also shall be done, and more than all, yes, "exceeding abundantly above all that you can either ask or think."

And shall not this induce you to accept the invitation? Go to all others that solicit your company, and see what they can do for you. Can they ensure to you even the least of all the blessings of grace or glory? No; they are all broken cisterns, that can hold no water, and can present to you nothing but the dregs of sensual enjoyment. Whereas with us is "the fountain of living water," of which whoever drinks shall live forever.

2. What benefit you will confer on **others**.

Every one that gives himself up wholly to the Lord, strengthens the hands and encourages the hearts of God's chosen people. Death is from time to time thinning the ranks of the Lord's armies; and if they were not recruited by voluntary enlistment, they would speedily disappear. But all who accept the invitation become soldiers of Christ, and engage to fight manfully the Lord's battles. All such people also are "witnesses for God" among an atheistic and rebellious people, whom they practically "condemn," as "Noah condemned the world" by constructing the ark in the midst of them, [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7). As lights too in a dark world, they are of great service; for they "hold forth the word of life" to those who would not otherwise behold it; and are "epistles of Christ, known and read" by thousands, who, but for such instructors, would remain forever ignorant of his will.

If any one be disposed to ask: What good can so weak an individual as I do? I answer, "If under any circumstances whatever any individual could be justified in offering such an objection, it would have been Hobab.

First, because Israel were altogether under the divine guidance, protection, and support; and therefore could not be supposed to need anything.

Next, because he was a Midianite, and therefore incapable, as might be thought, of adding anything to Moses and the Israelites. But to him Moses said, "You may be to us in the stead of eyes, verse 31."

The truth is, that no one can foresee of what use he may be to the Church of God. Had Peter, when employed in fishing, been told what services he should render to the Jewish nation, or Paul what wonders he should effect in behalf of the Gentile world, how little would they have conceived that such weak instruments should ever accomplish so great a work! The same may be said of others in later times; and so far is the weakness of the instrument from affording any just ground for discouragement, that God has expressly "committed the Gospel treasure to earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellence of the power may the more clearly appear to be of God;" and it still is, as it has ever been, his delight to "ordain strength in the mouth of babes and sucklings."

Think then, you who have tasted anything of redeeming love, is it possible that you may be useful in promoting the designs, and in advancing the glory of your Lord and Savior—and will you not do it? Shall any earthly interests or attachments prevail with you to put your light under a bushel, when, by allowing it to shine forth, you might aid others in their way to Heaven? O! requite not thus your heavenly Benefactor, but join yourselves to his people without delay, and live henceforth altogether for Him who lived and died for you.

ADDRESS.

1. To those who have never yet contemplated the invitation given them.

Our blessed Lord, both in the Old and New Testament, says, "Look unto me," "come unto me," "follow me." But yet, as strange as it may appear, we for the most part consider these invitations no more than a mere empty sound; or, if we regard them at all, we satisfy ourselves with vain excuses for refusing them. But, if we wonder at Hobab for proposing to go back, after all that he had seen and heard—then what shall be said of us, if we resist all the gracious invitations of the Gospel, after all that we have seen and heard in the New Testament? He was a Midianite by birth and by profession too, whereas we name the name of Christ, and profess ourselves to be his followers. Let us remember, that the invitation, rejected once, may be lost forever; and that the Master of the feast, when he hears your vain excuses, may send his invitations to others, and decree that you "shall never taste of his supper."

2. To those who having once accepted it, and are disposed to turn back.

Many such we read of in the Scriptures; and many such we behold among ourselves. But, if any who are here present are halting, we would ask them, "To whom will you go?" Where, but in Christ Jesus, will you find the words of eternal life! [John 6:67-68](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.67-68). You have not forgotten Lot's wife, or the judgments that overtook her for only looking back to the city whence she had escaped; nor can you reasonably doubt but that they who turn back, "turn back unto perdition! [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39)."

I charge you then: Be steadfast; and harbor not so much as a thought of "returning with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that was washed to the wallowing in the mire." "If, after you have once escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you are again entangled therein and overcome, your last end will be worse with you than your beginning, [2 Peter 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20)." Do not, like Orpah, kiss, and part; but, like Ruth, be steadfast in cleaving to the Lord, [Ruth 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.14); [Ruth 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.17). Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life!"

3. To those who, having given themselves up to Christ, are cleaving to him with full purpose of heart.

You have doubtless met with some trials in your way, and been called to make some sacrifices; for where was there ever a true follower of Christ who had not his cross to bear? Then I will ask you, Have you ever had cause to regret any sacrifice you made for him? He has said, that "if any man leaves father and mother, and house and lands, for His sake and the Gospel's, he shall receive a hundred-fold more in this life; and in the world to come, eternal life! [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30)." Is not this true? Have you not found it to be so by actual experience? Go on, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Only, with Caleb, "follow the Lord fully," and you shall with him assuredly obtain a blessed portion in the promised land. "Faithful is He who has called you; who also will do it!"

#149

MOSES' PRAYER AT THE REMOVAL AND RESTING OF THE ARK

**[Numbers 10:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.35-36)**

Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you." Whenever it came to rest, he said, "Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel."

Patriotism, according to the general acceptance of the term, consists in such a partial regard for our native land, as would advance the interests of one's own country at the expense of all others, and trample upon the most sacred rights of justice for the attainment of its ends. In this view, it is no better than a specious cloak for cruelty and oppression; but, when freed from selfishness and injustice, patriotism is a good principle, and nearly allied to religion itself.

Such was the patriotism of Moses; he wished well to his own country, and sought to promote its best interests. That he sought to occupy the territory of others, is true; but his right to their land was founded on the grant of Jehovah himself, the great Proprietor of Heaven and earth; and his desire to possess it originated, not in a thirst for dominion, but in a persuasion that the possession of it was combined with spiritual blessings, and would tend as much to the advancement of God's honor as of Israel's good. He wished ill to none, any further than as they were enemies of Almighty God; it was their opposition to him which he prayed to be rendered ineffectual. All his desire was, that Israel might be happy in their God, and in the ultimate possession of those privileges which God, in his sovereign mercy, had destined them to enjoy. This was the one object for which he prayed, whenever the ark removed, and whenever it became stationary. And from this prayer of his we may learn, what we also should do,

I. In times of **trial**.

It is not to be expected that we should pass through this wilderness without meeting with manifold trials along our way. The Church of old had much to contend with; and so must every individual that advances towards the heavenly Canaan. But our help is in God; and to Him we must look,

1. In earnest prayer.

Prayer is the appointed means of obtaining support from above; and it shall prevail when urged with fervent importunity. The uplifted hands of Moses prevailed against Amalek more than Joshua's sword; nor can we doubt but that, in all their journeys, the Israelites owed much of their safety to his continual intercession. Without prayer the whole Christian armor would leave him open to the assaults of his enemies; but, with it, he is altogether invincible!

2. In humble trust.

However numerous or powerful our enemies may be, we must remember, that "He who dwells on high is mightier." "If God is for us, none can with any effect be against us." With His help "a worm shall thresh the mountains!" It is manifest that Moses never doubted for a moment the all-sufficiency of Jehovah; nor should we; but, like David in the most perilous circumstances, we should banish all unbelieving fears with this thought, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in Heaven!"

3. In confident expectation.

Moses did not pray as to an unknown God, but as to a God whom by experience he knew to be "abundant in goodness and truth." Thus we should have our expectations raised; we should ask in faith, persuaded and assured that "God will do more for us than we can either ask or think!" If we were "not straitened in ourselves," we should not find ourselves straitened in our God.

Similar to this should be our conduct,

II. In seasons of **rest**.

There were even in the apostolic age some seasons when "the Churches had rest." Just so, there are times of comparative rest which the saints experience in every age. But these are pregnant with danger to the soul no less than times of trial. At those seasons we are apt to relax our vigilance, and to be "settled on our lees." It befits us therefore, then more especially, to seek the presence of our God:

1. We must seek God's presence as **our only safeguard**.

Moses never deemed himself secure but under the divine protection. Hence he was as anxious to have God present with his people in their resting-places, as in their removals. We too, though apparently in peace, must remember, that "the roaring lion which seeks to devour us" never rests; he is ever going about, and ready to "take advantage of us" to our ruin. In God, and in him alone, is our safety.

If He guides us, we shall not err.

If He upholds us, we shall not fall.

If He is a wall of fire round about us, we may bid defiance to all the assaults of earth and Hell.

2. We must seek God's presence as **our supreme happiness**.

At no time should we allow ourselves to rest in created enjoyments; they are then only conducive to real happiness, when we can enjoy God in them. All, without him, is but "as the crackling of thorns under a pot." To have his presence in the ordinances, and in prayer, and in our own hearts—this is life, this is peace, this is "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!" This therefore we should covet beyond all created good; and every moment that we are bereft of this, we should consider as lost to all the great ends and purposes of life.

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are ignorant of God.

Do not despise the idea of communion with God; there is a time coming, when you yourselves will wish for it. A dying man is a pitiable object indeed, without the divine presence. But if we seek it not now, what reason have we to expect it in a dying hour?

2. To those who indulge unbelieving fears respecting him.

How greatly do you dishonor the God of Israel! See how he attended his people of old, going before them in their journeys, and abiding with them in their resting-places; and is he not the same God still? O blush and be ashamed, that ever you have limited his power and grace. Only live near to him in the exercise of faith and prayer, and you cannot but be happy in time and in eternity.

3. To those who enjoy his presence.

Be, like Moses, true patriots. Consider "the many thousands of Israel," and let them ever have a remembrance in your prayers. Seek for them, as well as for yourselves—God's blessing and protection. To be intercessors for the Church is an employment worthy the attention of the highest potentates; at the same time "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," however low he is in the scale of society, "avails much." And they who bring down blessings on the Church by prayer, shall be sure to have no small portion of them resting on their own souls!

#150

INORDINATE DESIRE PUNISHED

**[Numbers 11:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.10-13)**

"Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!'"

Truly humiliating are the views which the Scripture gives us of human instability. Who would have thought that the zeal which all the princes of Israel manifested in furnishing the tabernacle, Numbers 7, should so soon vanish? The first journey which they have to perform, fills them all with discontent; it being continued three days without intermission, all complain of the length of the way. Some are signally punished by the Lord, being struck dead by fire; but the survivors, neither awed by the judgments inflicted on others, nor won by the mercy shown to themselves, soon murmur again for lack of variety in their food. At this, Moses is deeply grieved, and God is greatly offended. That the different circumstances may come easily under our review, we shall notice in succession,

I. The sin of Israel.

They were discontented with the food which God had given them.

They wanted flesh to eat, that they might gratify their palates; and were so vexed for lack of it as to "weep in all their tents." To excuse these inordinate desires, they complained that they were emaciated by subsisting only on such insipid food as God had provided for them, verse 6. They adversely compared their state in Egypt with their present state; omitting all which they had suffered there, and magnifying the comforts which they had there enjoyed. Thus they misrepresented both their past and present condition, that they might the better conceal their ingratitude, and justify their complaints.

This was nothing less than a contempt of God himself, verse 20. "You have despised the Lord," etc.

What had not God done for them? What more could he have done? He had brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and had overwhelmed their enemies in the Red Sea; he had been their Guide and Protector in all their way; he had given them bread from Heaven, and water out of the rock; he had revealed unto them his will, and taken them into a peculiar relation to himself above all the people upon the face of the earth. And yet, all that he had done was accounted as nothing, because they wanted flesh to eat. Is it possible to conceive a greater contempt of God than this?

Such a sin is discontent, in whoever it is found.

There are many things in this world which a discontented mind will pant after or murmur over. But the indulging of such a disposition is rebellion against the Sovereign Disposer of all events; yes, it is an utter contempt of him. What! is it not sufficient to have:  
God for our Father,  
Christ for our Savior,  
the Spirit for our Comforter,  
and Heaven for our everlasting inheritance,  
but must we murmur and complain because all temporal circumstances are not exactly to our mind?

What does any temporal need or loss signify, when we have such unsearchable riches secured to us? In comparison with such spiritual blessings, the greatest of earthly comforts is no more than the dust upon the balance.

But this, alas! we are too apt to forget! We are ready, like the Israelites, to overlook all the mercies we enjoy, through an excessive regret of something lost, or an inordinate desire of something unpossessed.

When we reflect on the exceeding baseness of this conduct, we shall not wonder at,

II. The grief of Moses.

We cannot altogether approve of the manner in which Moses expressed his sorrow.

He not only complained to God, but in reality complained of God himself. God had appointed him to lead that people to the land of Canaan. This should have been considered by him as a singular honor; but he complained of it as a burden. Not that he would ever have complained of it, if the people had walked worthy of their high calling; but when they were dissatisfied and rebellious, it seemed to him as if all his labor had been in vain. Had he been their natural father, he would have thought it reasonable enough that he should take the oversight of them; but when he had no other relation to them than that which was common to all, he deemed it a hardship to have so great a charge committed to him; and he begged that God would release him from it by taking away his life. Alas! what is human nature when it comes to be severely tried!

But from this we learn some very important lessons.

We learn what the ministerial office is.

God says to a minister, "Take this people," and, "as a nursing father carried his nursing child" through the wilderness, where there were no other means for its conveyance, so do you "carry them in your bosom," bearing with all their frowardness, attending to all their needs, administering to all their necessities, and seeking your happiness in their welfare." O! what a charge is this! and what grace do they need who have to sustain and execute it! O that all of us resembled Paul, [1 Thessalonians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.7-8).

We learn also what a minister's heaviest affliction is.

If his people are obedient to their God, great as his difficulties are, he is willing to bear them; his people are "his joy and crown of rejoicing;" "he lives, when they stand fast in the Lord;" "he has no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth." But when they decline from the ways of God, when they are dissatisfied with his ministrations, and begin to despise the bread of life because it is plain and unmixed with anything suited to a carnal appetite—then he is grieved, and wounded in his inmost soul; then life itself becomes a burden to him, and he is ready to wish for death to put an end to his sorrows.

We remember how Paul was grieved by the worldliness and sensuality of some, and by the heretical conduct of others; he could not speak of them without tears, [Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19); and he was always like a woman in travail, by reason of his anxiety for their welfare, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19). "The care of all the churches" was a heavier burden to him than all his own perils and dangers, whether by sea or land. "None were weak, but he was weak also;" nor were any offended and turned aside, but "he burned" with an ardent desire to restore them. O that every minister were thus wrapped up in the good of the people committed to his care! "His afflictions might abound; but his consolations should abound" also.

That which so deeply afflicted Moses, excited, in a very high degree,

III. The displeasure of God.

It is instructive to observe in what manner God manifested his displeasure.

He granted their wishes, and sent them such abundance of quail, that for many miles round their camp they lay above a yard thick upon the ground. The people with great avidity began to gather them up. For two whole days and a night did they occupy themselves in this work; so he who gathered least among them, gathered ten homers, or eighty bushels. Now they began to revel upon the spoil; but while the flesh was in their mouths, even before it was chewed, God smote them with a very great plague, whereof many thousands of them died, verses 32-33 with [Psalm 78:17-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.17-31); How strongly did God mark their sin in their punishment!

But we are peculiarly interested in the end for which he thus displayed his indignation.

He expressly tells us, that it was for our sakes, and to make them examples unto us, [1 Corinthians 10:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.6); [1 Corinthians 10:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.10-11). He designed to teach us "not to lust after evil things, as they lusted." O that we could learn that lesson, and take warning by them!

We are ready to think it a light matter to be murmuring and dissatisfied with what we have, and to be longing for what we have not; but God has shown us that he does not account it light; he deems it a contempt of him and of the rich mercies he has given unto us; and as such, he will sooner or later visit it with fiery indignation.

Allow you then, brethren, a word of exhortation.

1. Guard against the contagion of bad example.

It was "the mixed multitude" who first began to murmur, verse 4. They were Egyptians, who accompanied the Israelites; and from them the dissatisfaction spread through all the tents of Israel. Thus did Judas infect all the disciples, Compare [Matthew 26:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.7-9) with [John 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.4-6). Thus shall we ever find it in the Church, "a little leaven is sufficient to leaven the whole lump." If there is any one of a carnal, worldly, querulous and contentious spirit, be sure to let him have no influence over your mind. Reject his counsels as poison; and follow none any further than they follow Christ.

2. Cultivate a contented spirit.

"Be contented with such things as you have." It is better to have little with a devout spirit, than abundance, and "leanness of soul." God showed that it was not from any lack of power that he did not feed them every day with flesh; but because he knew that it would be productive of no good to their souls. Think not that it is from any lack of love or power that he allows you to be tried in a variety of ways. He could easily carry you on without any trials, and give you all that the most carnal heart could desire. But trials are the fruits of his love; he desires to instruct you in every part of your duty; that you may "know both how to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." "Learn then in everything to be content," and to say from your hearts in all things, "Not my will, but may your will be done."

3. Expect from God all that is truly good for you.

Moses himself staggered at the promise, when God said, that all the people should feed on flesh for a whole month, verse 21, 22; but God said to him, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? You shall see now whether my word shall come to pass unto you or not, verse 23." His promises to us also are "exceeding great and precious," both in relation to our bodies and our souls; Let us never presume to "limit the Holy One of Israel," as though anything which he has promised, were either too great, or too good, for him to give. The trials which he sends us, are often sent on purpose that we may see the exceeding riches of his grace in our deliverance. For temporal things, let us depend entirely on his good providence; and for spiritual things, on his all-sufficient grace. In Christ Jesus there is a fullness of all that we can need; and "out of his fullness we may all receive" from day to day.

#151

GOD'S WORD SURE

**[Numbers 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.23)**

The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

In reading the history of the Israelites, we cannot fail of being struck with the wonderful display of God's patience and forbearance towards them. No displays of love and mercy on his part would satisfy them. They were always murmuring, and wishing that they had never come out of Egypt at all. It was a small matter in their eyes that they were supplied with manna from the clouds from day to day; they must have flesh to eat; and so intense was their desire after that gratification, that they actually wept before God, whole families of them, throughout the camp, saying, "Give us meat, that we may eat! verse 10, 13, 18." Nor was Moses himself blameless in this matter; for though he did not in the least participate with them in their inordinate desire for meat, he questioned God's power to give them meat; and it was this unbelief of his which brought forth from Jehovah the reproof which we have just read, and which will be the subject of our present discourse.

In this reproof we see:

I. The evil of unbelief.

Unbelief is the most **common** of all evils.

Unbelief pervades the whole human race. It is found in the godly, no less than in the ungodly.

Even Abraham, the father of the faithful, was by no means free from it. Repeatedly did he make his wife deny her relation to him as a wife, and to call herself his sister, lest people, captivated with her beauty, should kill him for the sake of obtaining an undisturbed possession of her; thus betraying his fears, that God was either not able to protect him, or not sufficiently interested in his welfare to watch over him.

And Moses, on the occasion before us, was evidently under the power of unbelief. Some, indeed, would understand his reply to God as a mere question, and a desire to be informed whether the flesh which he would give should be that of beasts or fish; but then the answer would have corresponded with it, and would merely have informed him that it was not the flesh of beasts or of fishes that he would supply in such abundance, but the flesh of birds.

But Moses' question was evidently founded on the magnitude of the supply which God had promised. He had declared, that the whole people of Israel, not less than two million in number, should be supplied with it, "not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but even a whole month, until it should come out at their nostrils, and be loathsome unto them, verse 19, 20." To that, Moses in a way of unbelief, asks, How, when the fighting men alone amounted to six hundred thousand men, should they all be so fed as "to suffice them," (twice is that idea suggested,) and that "for the space of a whole month?"

God's answer to him clearly shows, that it was unbelief that was here reproved, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" You have seen how easily I brought frogs and locusts upon the land of Egypt; and am I less able to supply meat of any kind that I may see good? "You shall see now (presently) whether my word shall come to pass, or not."

When we see people so eminent for the grace of faith as Abraham and Moses—yet giving way to unbelief, we need scarcely adduce any further proof of the universal prevalence of this evil. It exists, indeed, in very different degrees in men, being in some only occasional, while in others it is the entire habit of their minds; but there is not a man under the whole heavens who has not reason to mourn over the workings of this corruption, when he is brought into circumstances to call it forth. From other evils many people may be accounted nearly free; but this works equally in men of every class, and every age.

Unbelief is also the most **deceitful** of all evils.

No one will avow a doubt of God's power to effect whatever he shall please; his pretext will be, that he cannot conceive how God should condescend to show such extraordinary favor to one so insignificant and worthless as himself. But God himself never puts this construction upon it; he always regards it as a denial of his perfections, and resents it in that view.

We have a remarkable instance of this in Ahaz. God told him, by the prophet, to "ask a sign of him, either in the depth or in the height above." But Ahaz, wishing to hide his unbelief, pretended that this was too great an honor for him, and that therefore he could not presume to ask any such thing, "Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord."

But was this excuse admitted on God's part? No; He viewed the evil as it really was, and not as it was glossed over by this self-deluded monarch; and therefore, with just indignation, he replied, by his prophet, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? [Isaiah 7:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.10-13)."

So, whatever we may imagine, a lack of entire confidence in God, whatever be the circumstances under which we are placed, will appear in its true colors before God, and be condemned by him as unbelief.

It is, moreover, the most **offensive** of all evils.

There is no grace so highly honored of God, as faith; nor any evil so reprobated by him, as unbelief. Other evils are acts of rebellion against his authority; but unbelief rises against every one of his perfections. It doubts his wisdom, his power, his goodness, his love, his mercy; yes, it questions even his veracity; and reduces the infinite Jehovah to a level with his own creatures; insomuch that Balaam, when checking the vain hopes of the king of Moab, could find no language more appropriate than this, "God is not a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and shall he not do it? Has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)."

What an indignity he considers it, is plain from his very answer to Moses, "Is the hand of the Lord waxed short? You shall see whether my word shall come to pass or not." This is no slight rebuke; it is similar to that which he gave to Sarah, when she doubted whether she should ever bear to Abraham the promised child, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I bear a child, when I am so old? Is anything too hard for the Lord Genesis, 18:12-13."

How Zachariah was reproved for his unbelief in the temple, you well know, [Luke 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.20).

And among all the provocations which the Israelites committed in the wilderness, this was the one which God laid most to heart, "How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yes, they turned back, and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel; they remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy, [Psalm 78:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.40-42)."

Finally, unbelief is the most **fatal** of all evils.

Other evils, if we come to God in the exercise of faith, may be forgiven; but this evil, while it is yet dominant in the soul, precludes a possibility of forgiveness; because it keeps us from God, to whom we ought to come; and puts away from us that mercy which he offers to bestow. The whole adult population of Israel perished in the wilderness. What was it that prevented their entrance into Canaan? We are told, "They could not enter in because of unbelief, [Hebrews 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.18)."

And what is it which, under the Gospel also, is the great damning sin? it is this, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; he who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; and he who believes not, shall be damned, [Mark 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15-16)."

While the answer of God to Moses reproves this evil, it points out to us,

II. The proper **antidote** to unbelief.

To prevent unbelief from ever gaining an ascendant over us, we should,

1. Reflect on God's power as already exercised.

Had Moses only called to mind the wonders which God had already wrought for his people, he would not have "staggered at the promise" that was now given. Nor shall we doubt the certainty of any promise whatever, if we bear in remembrance what God has already done. It is for this end that God himself refers us to all his wonders of creation, providence, and redemption.

Of Creation, he speaks thus, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? his understanding is infinite! [Isaiah 40:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-28)."

Just so, in reference to his Providence, "Why, when I came, was there no man; when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand so shortened that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke, I dry up the sea; I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish smells, because there is no water, and dies for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering, [Isaiah 50:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.2-3)."

So also respecting Redemption, Paul expressly tells us that God's particular design, in converting and saving him, was, to show to all future generations his power to save, and to cut off all occasion for despondency from the whole world, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first (in me, the chief of sinners) God might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting! [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.16)."

It is in this view that the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is of such infinite benefit to the soul; for when we see what God has already done, it is almost impossible to doubt his power to effect whatever in his mercy he has promised to us.

2. Reflect on his veracity, as unalterably pledged.

When did God ever violate his engagements? His word has been pledged for many things; and has been questioned by mankind; but when did he abstain from fulfilling it? He said to our first parents in Paradise, "In the day that you eat of the forbidden tree, you shall die." No, says the tempter, "You shall not surely die." But whose word proved true? Satan's or the Lord's?

Again, to the antediluvians, God said that he would destroy by water every living creature, except what was be contained in the ark. During the building of the ark, the scoffers were lavish enough of contempt. But did God's Word fail, either in relation to those who were to be saved, or to those who were doomed to perish?

The destruction of Sodom, the captivities of Israel and Judah, the sending of the Messiah, the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world, furnished plenty of matter for doubt, before they were accomplished; but they all came to pass in their season, according to the Word of God.

For the captives who were restored to Judea from Babylon, it was said, "that if they would continue there, and be obedient to the king of Babylon, they would be preserved in peace and safety; but that if, through fear of the king of Babylon, they should flee to Egypt for safety, they should all perish, [Jeremiah 44:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.12-14)." And, when they would not be persuaded to remain there, but would go to sojourn in Egypt, the Lord sent this word to them, "All the remnant of Judah that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose word shall stand, theirs or mine! [Jeremiah 44:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.26-28)."

But, that we may depart as little as possible from our text, let us see the outcome of the prediction before us. God sent a wind; and brought such a number of quails, that they fell round about the tents of Israel, and filled the whole country for the space of one hundred and twenty miles in circuit, above a yard deep; so that the whole people occupied about six-and-thirty hours in collecting them; every one, even of those who gathered the least, collecting as much as eighty bushels for his own use, verse 31, 32.

Now it was seen "whether God could fulfill his word or not." It was seen, too, whether they had reason to repent of their inordinate desires or not; for "while the flesh was yet in their mouths, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and smote them with a very great plague, verse 33 with [Psalm 78:26-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.26-31)."

The truth is, that "it is easier for Heaven and earth to pass away, than for one jot or tittle of God's Word to fail! [Luke 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.17)." "He cannot lie," [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2); he cannot deny himself, [2 Timothy 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.13)." He could as soon cease to exist, as he could falsify his word in any one particular. And, if we could only bear this in remembrance, we should never give way to unbelief, or doubt the accomplishment of anything which the Lord God has spoken.

ADDRESS.

1. Those who doubt the fulfillment of God's **promises**.

Who among us is not conscious of great defects in this particular? Who, in trying circumstances, has not found it difficult to cast all his care on God, as caring for him; and has not rather been ready to say with David, "I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul!" Who, while he has professed to call God his Father, has been able habitually to walk before him with the same confidence that a child places in his earthly father?

Yet this is our duty; and it is a shame to us that we find the performance of it so difficult. But let us remember what a God we have to do with; how "merciful and gracious; and how abundant in goodness and truth;" and let us "never stagger at any of his promises through unbelief; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." And if, according to the views of sense, there is no hope, "let us against hope believe in hope;" and rest assured, that "whatever God has promised, he is both able and willing to perform!"

Those who question the execution of his **threatenings**.

Men will dissuade us from regarding, as we ought, the sacred oracles; and will venture to place their own word in opposition to God's. Your own heart, too, will be apt to suggest, "I shall have peace, even though I walk after the imagination of my own evil heart! [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20)." But what God said to Moses, he says to us, "You shall know whether my word shall come to pass unto you or not, [Ezekiel 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 24.14)."

Go on; listen to your carnal advisers; let them tell you that there is no need to give yourselves up to God; and that you may be the servants both of God and Mammon at the same time.

Go on; and take their word in preference to God's; and wait to see whose word shall stand—theirs or his. But remember, that if, unhappily for you, God's Word shall take place, and that threatening be executed—there will be no room left for repentance; your state will be fixed, and that forever. Choose you, then, whom you will believe, and whom you will serve; and, if you be truly wise, shut your ears against the assurances of an ungodly world, and say, in reference to them all, "Let God be true, and every man a liar! [Romans 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.4)."

#152

JOSHUA'S ENVY REPROVED

**[Numbers 11:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.27-29)**

"A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Experience proves that eminent situations are attended with manifold anxieties; and that rulers, though envied by their subjects, often feel a weight of care which is burdensome in the extreme. Moses was supported in his office by God himself, who confirmed his authority by many signal and miraculous interpositions; yet even he complained, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me, verse 14."

To relieve him from the burden, God promised that he would pour out his Spirit upon seventy elders, whom Moses should select, and would qualify them for taking a share in the government. Two of the people nominated, (being deterred, it would seem, by a sense of their own insufficiency for the office,) stayed in the camp, instead of going up with the others to the tabernacle at the time appointed. God however did not on this account withhold his Spirit from them, but gave the Spirit to them in the same manner as to the others; in consequence of which they began to prophesy in the camp.

This innovation excited the jealousy of Joshua; who, fearing lest it should weaken the authority of Moses, instantly informed him of it, and desired him to forbid any further exercise of their gifts; but Moses saw through the hidden motives by which Joshua was actuated, and checked the evil which had risen in his heart.

Let us consider,

I. The **principle** which Joshua he indulged.

Doubtless, thought that he was acting under a good impression, and that his zeal was of the purest kind; but Moses traces his conduct to a principle of envy, which needed to be mortified and suppressed.

1. Envy is a **common** principle.

Few are conscious of it in themselves; but all see the operation of it in their neighbors. There is not any evil in the heart of man more universally prevalent than envy! "It is not in vain that the Scripture says, The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy, [James 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.5)." We may see in Cain, in Joseph's brethren, in Saul, and in all the rulers of the Jewish Church, that this disposition is natural to man, [1 John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.12); [Acts 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.9); [1 Samuel 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.9); [Matthew 27:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.18). Infants at the bosom have been seen to feel envy's malignant influence, when another has been permitted to participate what they have deemed their exclusive right. There is no age, no situation, exempt from envy! Even those who possess the most, as well as those who are wholly destitute, are open to its assaults.

2. Envy is an **active** principle.

Whatever is an object of desire, is also an object of envy; for envy is nothing but a regret that another should possess that which we ourselves would wish to enjoy. Usually indeed the things which people most envy, are such as are proper to their own age or condition in life; and such as they think themselves in some measure entitled to.

Those in whom beauty or strength is highly valued, look not with delight on one who is reckoned to surpass them; nor do those who desire fame on account of mental qualifications, love to acknowledge the intellectual superiority of others. All are happy to hear their rivals depreciated, and themselves preferred. Nor is it respecting natural endowments only that this principle exerts itself; it shows itself no less in reference to acquired distinctions, of whatever kind. Riches and honors are among the objects which most powerfully excite this corrupt feeling; and it is difficult for any one to behold the more rapid advancement of his rival, and not to feel in himself some workings of this malignant disposition.

But this principle operates even where personal considerations appear very feeble and remote. The exaltation of a party, for instance, will call envy forth in those who belong to an opposite party. There scarcely ever is a popular election, but the partisans of rival candidates are open to its assaults, as much as the principals themselves.

Parties in the Church are no less agitated by this corroding passion, insomuch that they will endeavor to outstrip each other in things to which they have no real inclination, in order by any means to gain an ascendency for their own side. In the days of the Apostles, "some preached Christ out of envy and strife;" and there is but too much reason to fear, that many also in this day have no better motive for their benevolent and religious exertions, than the strengthening and increasing of a party in the Church.

3. Envy is a **deep-rooted** principle.

One would suppose that true religion should presently and entirely extirpate this principle; but it is not so easily rooted out. We find it working in people who profess to have a zeal for God, [1 Corinthians 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.1-4); yes, in people also of whose piety we cannot doubt. The disciples of John were alarmed for the honor of their master, when they heard that Jesus had more disciples than he, [John 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.26); and the Apostles themselves forbade a person to persist in the work of casting out devils, because he did not attach himself to them, [Mark 9:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.38). This was the very spirit by which Joshua was actuated; he was afraid lest the honor and influence of Moses should be weakened by others rising into popularity around him. Of course, envy is not willfully indulged by any who truly fear God; but it is so rooted in the heart, that all have need to be on their guard against it.

The hatefulness of such a principle may be seen by,

II. The **reproof** which Joshua met with.

Moses appears truly as a man of God. Behold, in his answer to Joshua,

1. Moses' **fidelity**.

Moses had a peculiar regard for Joshua; but that did not cause him to overlook his faults, much less to countenance him in what was wrong. Young men in general are apt to be led away by their feelings, and not to be sufficiently aware of their own corruptions. This was the case with Joshua; and Moses, like a father, watched over him with care, and reproved him with tenderness. Moses pointed out to him the principle by which he was actuated, and that higher principle by which he ought rather to be governed.

It would be well if all religious people were equally on their guard, to check, rather than encourage, the growth of evil. If a person is of our party, and more especially if he is our friend, we are ready to receive his reports, without very strict inquiry, and to accede to his proposals, without sufficient care. Hence one person in a society sometimes diffuses throughout the whole a spirit of strife and contention, when, if the erroneousness of his views had been pointed out at first, the peace of the whole body might have been preserved. Great attention therefore do we recommend to all in this particular. More especially would we remind professing Christians of their duty, "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt, [Leviticus 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.17)." We should not be contented with a vague suggestion. We should dread the incursion of an evil principle in the Church, as much as we do the introduction of fire in a place filled with combustibles. We should ever remember, that "a little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump!"

2. Moses' **zeal**.

The glory of God was that which was uppermost in the mind of Moses; and if that might but be advanced, he was quite indifferent whether his own honor were eclipsed or not. He well knew, that these two men "could have nothing except it were given them from above. This was John's answer; [Mark 9:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.39); and that if God had conferred on them the gift of prophecy, he would overrule the exercise of it for his own glory. Instead therefore of wishing to repress it in them, he would have been glad if every person in the camp had possessed it.

What a noble spirit was this! How worthy of universal imitation! It was precisely thus that Paul rejoiced, when "Christ was preached in contention." He knew the motives of the preachers to be bad; but he knew that God would render their ministrations subservient to the increase of the Redeemer's kingdom; and therefore, however their conduct might affect his influence, he did, and would, rejoice, [Philippians 1:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.15-18).

Thus, beloved, should we be glad to see the Redeemer's interests advanced, whoever be the instruments, and whatever be the means. This consideration should be paramount to every other; and we should say, with John, "Let me, and my party, decrease, so that Christ and his kingdom may but increase! [John 3:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.30)."

3. Moses' **love**.

Moses had no desire to engross or monopolize the gifts of God. As Paul said to his bitterest persecutors, "I would to God that all who hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds, [Acts 26:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.29)," so did Moses wish all the people of Israel to have the Spirit of the Lord imparted to them, as he himself had. The more they were benefitted, the more would his happiness be increased. This is that very disposition which Paul himself exercised, [1 Corinthians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.9), and which he inculcates on us, when he says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others, [Philippians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4)." In fact, this is that principle, which, more than any other, counteracts the baneful influence of envy, "Charity does not envy! [1 Corinthians 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.4)." Let universal love reign in our hearts, and, instead of envying any of our brethren, we shall be willing rather to "lay down our lives for them, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16)."

To **improve** this subject, we would recommend to you two things:

1. Examine well your own principles.

Do not hastily conclude that your principles are right, even though you do not know that they are wrong; but search and try your ways, and maintain a godly jealousy over your own hearts. The Apostles themselves, on more occasions than one, "knew not what spirit they were of."

Who among us does not see the blindness of others in relation to their principles? Pride, and ostentation, and vanity, and envy, and malice, and a thousand other evils—are visible enough to others, when the people influenced by them give themselves credit for very different motives. Doubtless, at times, this is the case with all of us. If indeed envy becomes in any respect a governing principle in our hearts, our religion is altogether vain, [James 3:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.14-16). Let us therefore watch our own spirits, and be thankful to any friend, who, like Moses, will "point out to us a more excellent way, [1 Corinthians 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.31)."

2. Take diligent heed to the Word of God.

The Word of God, if duly attended to, would correct every bad principle in us. It is a two-edged sword, that lays open the inmost recesses of the heart, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12). To that Peter directs us, as the means of subduing envy, and every other evil propensity, [1 Peter 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.1-3). By the Word the Apostles themselves were sanctified; and by that also must we be made clean, [John 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.3); [John 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.17). Meditate then on the Word day and night; and let it be your earnest prayer, that it may dwell richly in you in all wisdom; and that, being cast into the mold of the Gospel, you may be "changed into the divine image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."

#153

AARON AND MIRIAM REPROVED

**[Numbers 12:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 12.8-10)**

"Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam--leprous, like snow."

When men are angry, we may often, and with reason, doubt, whether there is any just occasion for their displeasure; but when we see Almighty God expressing indignation, we may always ask with confidence, "Is there not a cause?"

It is no slight degree of anger which God manifests in the passage before us. And what could be the reason? We are told that "Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married, verse 1." But this seems only to have been, if not a fictitious, at least a secondary, reason. (It must be strange indeed if they now began to be displeased with a thing which they knew to have been done many years ago, and which had never, in that instance, been disapproved by God.) The true reason, I apprehend, was that they were offended at his not having consulted them about the seventy people whom he had selected to bear a part of his burden with him; and it is possible enough that they might ascribe this to his wife's influence. They thought, that, as God had spoken by them as well as by Moses himself, compare verse 2 with [Micah 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.4), Moses should have treated them with more respect. (This is precisely the way in which many, yes and good people too, are prone to act. If overlooked in any instance wherein they think they had a right to be consulted, they forget all the distinguishing honors which they already enjoy, and become querulous on account of the supposed slight which is cast upon them.) Of this complaint Moses took no notice; but meekly passed it over in silence. Herein he shows how unreasonable murmurers and complainers should be treated. Would to God we were more like him in this particular! If querulous objections be met by passionate answers, contentions soon arise The common history of quarrels is, that they begin like those of the ambitious disciples, and proceed like those of the jealous tribes, [Matthew 20:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.21); [Matthew 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.24); [2 Samuel 19:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 19.43); whereas silence, or "a soft answer, would turn away wrath."

But the less anxious we are to vindicate our own character, the more readily and effectually will God interpose for us. "He heard," though Moses was as one that heard not; and he immediately summoned the offenders before him, in their presence vindicated the character of his servant Moses, and smote Miriam with a leprosy; and though, at the request of Moses, he restored her to health—yet he ordered her to be put out of the camp for seven days; and thus exposed to shame the people, who, through the pride of their hearts, had arrogated to themselves an honor which belonged not to them.

On account of the importance of these subordinate circumstances, we have dwelt upon them somewhat longer than usual. But it is not our intention to enlarge any more on them; we wish rather to turn your attention to the great and leading points contained in the words of our text. In them, God expostulates with Aaron and Miriam for presuming to speak against Moses. Now Moses sustained a variety of characters; in reference to which the words before us may be differently understood.

As he was a civil magistrate, they show God's anger against those who resist the magistracy.

As he was a teacher of God's Word, they show how God is offended with a neglect of his faithful ministers.

And, as he was a representative of our great Lawgiver and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, they show what indignation God will exercise against those who either openly reject, or secretly despise, his only dear Son.

First then we shall consider them as expressing God's displeasure against those,

I. Who oppose the civil magistrate.

Magistrates are appointed of God to bear a portion of his authority; and they are invested with it, that they may be a terror to evil-doers, and a protection to the good. To these we are to be subject, not reluctantly through fear of their displeasure, but willingly, and for conscience sake; and "if we will resist them, we shall receive punishment, [Romans 13:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-5)." Both temporal and eternal judgments must be expected by us if we rebel against the constituted authorities. Nor is it of open and avowed rebellion only that we speak, but of murmuring and complaining against them without just and great occasion. This was the fault of Aaron and Miriam, "they were not afraid to speak against" the person whom God had ordained to be his leader. Persons of this class are invariably represented by God himself as enemies to him. "Presumptuous are they, says he, and self-willed, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, [2 Peter 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.10)." They take liberties with earthly potentates, which the first archangel dared not to take with Satan himself, Jude verse 8, 9. It would be well if religious people were sufficiently on their guard respecting this.

We have seen, during the French Revolution, great multitudes even of them drawn after Satan; and the supporters of civil government traduced by every opprobrious epithet; and though the generality of these deluded people have seen their error—yet the necessity for cautioning you on this head has not ceased. That the rights of people are very different in different countries, is certain; and that rulers may so conduct themselves, as totally to destroy the compact between them and their subjects, is also certain. But it is no less certain, that religious people, above all, should be "the quiet in the land," and should ever conform to that solemn injunction, "You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people, [Acts 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.5)."

II. Who disregard the ministers of the Gospel.

Those who minister in holy things are ambassadors from God, and speak to the people "in Christ's stead, [2 Corinthians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.20)." Their word, as far as it accords with the inspired volume, is "to be received, not as the word of men, but as the Word of God himself, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13);" and whatever, in the name and by the authority of God, they bid you to observe—that you are bound to observe and do, [Matthew 23:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.2-3). It is true, that ministers are "not lords over God's heritage, [1 Peter 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.3)," neither have they any "dominion over your faith, [2 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.24)." Yet it is also true, that in things pertaining to God they are invested with a divine authority; they "are over you in the Lord, [1 Thessalonians 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.12);" they "have the rule over you, and you are to obey them, and submit yourselves, [Hebrews 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.17);" and if, while "they labor in the word and doctrine, they rule well, they are to be counted worthy of double honor, [1 Timothy 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.17)."

What shall we say then to those who despise the ministers of God, and that too in proportion to their fidelity? This we must say, that "in despising us, they despise both Christ, and the Father who sent him, [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.16);" and their opposition to such ministers is felt by God as opposition to himself, [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8); such opposition too as will meet with a dreadful recompense in the day of judgment, [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6). What Moses had said and done, was by the direction and authority of God; and it was at the peril of the greatest people of the land to contradict and oppose him.

III. Who neglect the Lord Jesus Christ.

Moses, as the head of the Church and people of God, certainly prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ. The very eulogies here passed on Moses by God himself, are such as of necessity lead our minds to Christ.

Was Moses a prophet far superior to all others? verse 6, 7. Just so, Christ is that Prophet of whom Moses was only a shadow, and whom all are commanded to hear at the peril of their souls, [Acts 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.22-23).

Was Moses faithful in all God's house as a servant? verse 7. Christ is that Son who presides over his own house, [Hebrews 3:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.2-6).

Was Moses the meekest of all men upon the face of the earth? verse 3. Christ is he whose unparalleled meekness is our great encouragement to learn of him, [Matthew 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.29).

In reference to Christ therefore, the expostulation in our text has tenfold weight. O, who must not be afraid to speak against him, or to entertain so much as a thought contrary to his honor?

Here then we have not to address the unbelievers; for they may well be classed under the former head—those who openly reject Christ, cannot even in profession obey his ministers.

But many who are partial to faithful ministers, are yet far from being conformed to the mind of Christ. Many who are in high repute in the Church of Christ, have yet their unsubdued lusts, which rise in allowed hostility against their Lord and Savior. The murmurs of Aaron and Miriam were not public; but "The Lord heard them." And so these vile affections may not be known by others; but God sees them; and he will, if we continue to harbor them, be "a swift witness against us".

With what solemn authority did he summon Aaron and Miriam before him, verse 4, 5. But with a more solemn voice will he call us forth to judgment. With what indignation did he, after reproving their iniquity, "depart verse 9;" and will he not depart from such professors here; yes, and bid them to depart from him forever! Did he expose their sin to all? Did he inflict a most disgraceful punishment? Did he order Miriam to be excluded from the camp of Israel, verse 10, 14. Who does not here see the shame and misery of those, who, under a cloak of religion, have harbored any secret lusts? Were Aaron and Miriam, the most distinguished characters in the whole kingdom, dealt with thus? Who then among us has not reason to fear and tremble? "Be wise now therefore, O kings, be instructed, you judges of the earth. O kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way! [Psalm 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.10-12)."

Behold, the sin of these two professors delayed the progress of all the hosts of Israel for seven days, [Numbers 22:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 22.15). Armed hosts, or intervening seas, could not retard them; but sin, that evil and accursed thing, did what all the powers of earth and Hell could not have done.

O professor, think how many may be retarded in their progress towards Heaven by one sin of yours; yes perhaps may be turned out of the way, and ruined forever! Remember what our Lord has said, "Woe unto the world because of offences! But woe, most of all, unto him, by whom the offence comes." It is on this account that God enjoined all his people to "bear in mind what he had done to Miriam by the way, after that they were come forth out of Egypt, [Deuteronomy 24:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 24.9)." May the Lord grant that none of us may ever lose sight of it! May we remember what an evil and bitter thing it is to lose in any degree the fear and love of God! [Jeremiah 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.19).

ADDRESS.

To those who have sinned in any of the foregoing particulars, we would particularly recommend, that, like Aaron, they confess their sin humbly, and without delay, verse 11. Yes, entreat that very Savior whose authority you have despised, to intercede for you. Seek a saving interest in him; implore forgiveness for his sake; so will God "pardon your offences, though he may take vengeance of your inventions, verse 13, 14." "Turn with sincere sorrow from your transgressions; so that your iniquity shall not be your ruin." Leprous as you are, you shall yet be healed; and, deserving as you are to be expelled from the camp of Israel, you shall yet be received into it, and, through the tender mercy of your God, shall proceed in comfort to the promised land.

#154

APOSTASY DEPRECATED

**[Numbers 14:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.4-5)**

"And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there."

That the journeying of the Israelites in the wilderness is typical of our journey towards the heavenly Canaan is so generally known among you, that I need not insist upon it.

The Israelites had now arrived at the borders of Canaan; and they sent spies, one from every tribe, to search out the land. They all agreed respecting the fertility of the country; but ten of the spies represented the attempt to conquer it as altogether hopeless. This report discouraged the whole congregation; who bitterly bewailed their disappointment, cast severe reflections on Jehovah himself as having deceived and betrayed them, and proposed to make a captain over them and to return to Egypt.

Let us consider the circumstances here recorded; and,

I. The proposal made by the people.

The report given by the spies was very unfavorable; the cities were represented as impregnable, being "walled up to Heaven;" and the people of such a gigantic stature, that the Israelites were no more than as grasshoppers before them. The climate, too, was represented as so unhealthy, that "the land ate up the inhabitants thereof, [Numbers 13:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.31-33)." Hence the people were led to "despise the land" as unworthy of their pursuit, [Psalm 106:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.24), and to despair of attaining it against such formidable enemies; yes, they impiously wished that they had died in Egypt, when the Egyptian first-born were slain; or in the wilderness, when God sent a plague among the people for worshiping the golden calf.

Under the influence of their unbelieving fears, they proposed to make a captain over them, and to return to Egypt, from whence they had come out. They judged this to be so wise a measure, that no one could doubt of its expediency, "Is it not better for us to return into Egypt? verse 3."

And are we not likely to hear of similar proposals at this time? You profess now to have dedicated yourselves to Almighty God, and to be bent on the attainment of the heavenly Canaan. But are you prepared to encounter the discouragements which you will meet with in the way? You have promised, before God, to renounce:  
the devil and all his works,  
the pomps and vanities of this wicked world,  
and all the sinful lusts of the flesh.

But are you girt for the warfare, and ready to go forth in the strength of Christ, against these mighty foes?

What reports, alas! will you hear! The mortality among the Canaanites, which the spies represented as arising from the climate, was no other than that occasioned by the hornets, which God, according to his promise, had sent, to weaken the people of the land, and thereby to facilitate the entrance of Israel into it. Compare [Exodus 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.28); [Deuteronomy 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.20); [Joshua 24:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.12); yet was that made an additional ground for desisting from the enterprise.

In like manner, the very exercises of mind, whereby God weakens the corruptions of his people's hearts, and ensures to them a final victory over all their enemies—are urged, by ignorant and unbelieving men, as reasons for declining all attempts to secure the heavenly inheritance; and you will hear repentance itself decried as melancholy, and denounced as little better than a prelude to insanity. In addition to such obstacles from without, (for I confine myself to those which arise from report only, without noticing any from actual opposition,) will not your own hearts suggest, that to overcome such potent enemies, as the world, the flesh, and the devil, will be impossible, especially for people so circumstanced, as you?

The result of such misrepresentations and misconceptions is but too likely to appear among you at no distant period. You will not in a formal manner actually appoint a captain over you, because every one can act for himself, without any combination with others; but that many of you will be like-minded, in relation to this matter, is greatly to be feared; and that you will even justify the measure as wise, saying, "Is it not better that we go back again to the world?"

But let us turn our attention to,

II. The effect of that proposal on God's faithful servants.

"Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of Israel;" filled, no doubt, with grief and shame at so foolish and impious a proposal. What prospect could they have of succeeding in such an enterprise? Could they suppose that God would go before them; and cause the manna and the water to attend them in their retrograde motions, as he had done when moving according to his will? If not, without any enemy whatever, or any special judgment inflicted on them, they must all die of hunger and thirst in a few days. Or, supposing them to get back to Egypt, what would be their reception there? Would not the rigors of their bondage be increased by their vindictive oppressors to the utmost extent of human endurance? Granting that all their fears respecting the Canaanites were well founded, what could they suffer worse by manfully contending with them, than they would infallibly bring upon themselves by attempting to return to Egypt?

But the impiety of the proposal was, if possible, still greater than the folly of it.

What a contempt of the promised inheritance did it argue, when they did not deem it to be worth a manly contest!

What a distrust of God, too, who had already shown himself so mighty to save, and had engaged that not one of their enemies should be able to stand before them!

What base ingratitude, also, did this express, when they could so soon forget all the wonders that God had wrought for them, and all the benefits he had conferred upon them!

We do not wonder that Moses and Aaron, who were able to form a just estimate of their conduct, were so deeply affected with it.

And shall not we also fall on our faces with grief and shame, my dear friends, if we see you forgetting the vows that are upon you, and turning back again, and abandoning those glorious prospects which have just opened upon you? For, what can you gain by going back to the world? Suppose that you gain all that the world can give. What is it? What satisfaction can it all afford? How long will you retain it? Or, supposing you could retain it ever so long, would it repay you for the loss of Heaven?

To what a state, too, will your defection reduce you! Of all the men who came out of Egypt, not so much as one was allowed to enter the promised land, except Caleb and Joshua, who continued faithful in the midst of this general apostasy. A fearful type and pledge of the doom that awaits you! [Numbers 26:64-65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 26.64-65) with Jude verse 5 and [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11). Hear what God says on this subject, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "If any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him, [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38)." Ah! know of a certainty, that all who draw back, "draw back unto eternal perdition, [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39);" and "if, after you have escaped the corruptions of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you are again entangled therein and overcome, your latter end will be worse than your beginning; for it would have been better that you had never known the way of righteousness at all, than, after you have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you, [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)."

You have all doubtless heard of Lot's wife, who, though brought out of Sodom, was turned into a pillar of salt, because she looked back towards the city, when she should have thought of nothing but of pressing onward to the destined place of refuge. Ah! "Remember Lot's wife! [Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.32)," as our blessed Lord has warned you. For "if you only look back, after having put your hand to the plough, you are not fit for the kingdom of God! [Luke 9:61-62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.61-62)." How can your ministers, who have watched over you, contemplate such an outcome of their labors, and not weep and mourn before God on your behalf? [Jeremiah 13:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.16-17). I beg you, beloved, let not this be the recompense of all the pains we have bestowed on you; let us not have the grief of seeing that the very privileges you have enjoyed have only fitted you, like Capernaum of old, for a deeper and heavier condemnation; but let us have joy over you, in beholding your spiritual advancement; and let us have the sweet and blessed hope of having you for "our joy and crown of rejoicing to all eternity!"

Be not afraid of any enemies; for God is with you, "if he is with you, who can be against you?" Read the exhortation of Caleb and Joshua to their unbelieving brethren, and apply it to your own souls verse 7-9; and, instead of listening to the ruinous suggestions of unbelief, [Hebrews 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.18), "be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Let me, in conclusion, address myself to the elder part of this audience. You must not forget, that the subject equally concerns you. For you also must "endure unto the end, if ever you would be saved;" and it is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing, that you can attain to glory and honor and immortality."

But that which I would particularly impress on your minds at this time, is the vast importance of your watching over the young people who have now consecrated themselves unto the Lord. Set them a good example yourselves; and do all you can to induce them to follow it. Take the part that Caleb and Joshua took on this occasion; strengthen their hands; encourage their hearts; tell them what a gracious and powerful and faithful God they have to help them in every time of need. Speak to them of "the land that flows with milk and honey." Invite them to taste of "the grapes of Eshcol," which you have taken thence. Watch over the very "lambs of the flock, and carry them in your bosom." So shall all of us, ministers and people, rejoice together, and "have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!"

#155

THE PEOPLE MURMURING AT THE REPORT OF THE SPIES

**[Numbers 14:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.6-9)**

"Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

When actions originate in an evil principle, however deceitful they are, the motives from whence they proceed cannot long be hidden; a thousand things in the course of tune will arise to elicit truth, and to discover the principles which we hoped to conceal.

The proposal of sending spies to search out the land, appears, from the first verse of the preceding chapter, to have been first made by God; but in fact it arose from the Israelites themselves; the whole body of the people took a lively interest in it, and came, by their representatives at least, to request that Moses would accede to it. Moses, taking it as a symptom of their readiness to go and possess the land, was highly delighted with it, [Deuteronomy 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 1.22-23); and consulted God respecting it. God, knowing the thoughts of their hearts, and seeing that their faith in him needed to have it confirmed by further testimony, consented; just as the Baptist did to his disciples, when they wanted to ascertain whether Jesus were the Christ, [Matthew 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.2-3); he bore with their weakness, and permitted them to seek conviction in their own way. But when the spies "brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched," the people instantly betrayed their unbelieving fears, and drew from Caleb and Joshua the remonstrance which we have just read.

That we may have a full view of the subject, we shall consider,

I. The **remonstrance** itself.

Let us examine,

1. The **occasion** of the remonstrance.

The spies who were sent, were twelve in number, one from every tribe. Of these, no less than ten agreed in representing the land as unconquerable. The inhabitants, they said, were giants, in comparison with whom they themselves were but "as grasshoppers; and they dwelt in "walled cities" that were impregnable. They represented too the climate as so unhealthy, that "the land ate up its inhabitants, [Numbers 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.28); [Numbers 13:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.31-33)." (God had, according to his promise, sent either hornets, or some kind of plague, to destroy the people before them, [Exodus 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.28); and this they turned into a ground of discouragement!) The goodness of the land indeed they could not deny; because they had brought such a sample of its fruits, as was a clear poof of its luxuriant fertility, [Numbers 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.23). On hearing the report, the congregation gave way to utter despondency; they "wept the whole night;" they wished they had "died either in Egypt, or in the wilderness;" they complained that God had brought them there on purpose to destroy them; they declared it would be better for them at once to return to Egypt; (this is not mentioned by Moses; but it is asserted by Nehemiah; [Nehemiah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.17),) and they actually appointed a captain over them, to lead them there.

What "madness is there in the heart of man! [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3)." Who would conceive it possible, that that whole nation should so soon forget all their past deliverances, and form so strange a resolution as that of returning to Egypt? This was an expedient more impracticable in its nature than the conquest of Canaan, and more dreadful in its consequences than death itself upon the field of battle. Could they expect God to follow them with miraculous supplies of bread and water; or their state in Egypt to be better than before? Yet such is the effect of discontent:  
it magnifies every difficulty;  
it undervalues every enjoyment;  
and it rushes upon evils greater than those which it attempts to shun.

2. The **manner** of the remonstrance.

The boldness of Joshua and Caleb, in opposing all their colleagues together with the whole congregation of Israel, was truly commendable. That it was at no little risk they ventured to remonstrate, is evident from the effect; for no sooner had they spoken, than all the people threatened to stone them; and would undoubtedly have carried their threat into immediate execution, if God himself had not interposed, by a signal manifestation of his glory, to restrain them, verse 10. But they would have accounted themselves happy to suffer martyrdom in such a cause.

This is the very courage which we also should possess. We should be witnesses for God in a degenerate world. We should never be deterred from testifying against sin, either by the number or authority of our opponents. If even we stood alone, as Elijah did, it would befit us to maintain the truth with steadfastness, and to venture life itself in the service of our Lord.

Supposing these remonstrants not to be intimidated, we might expect them to be filled with indignation at the wickedness of the people, and to give vent to their feelings in terms of severity and reproach. But behold, they are penetrated with grief; and "rend their clothes" for anguish of heart; and in their whole address they exhibit a beautiful specimen of "the meekness of wisdom."

O that there were in all of us such a heart! that we could weep over sinners, instead of being angry with them; and that we could "in meekness instruct them that oppose themselves," bearing with their frowardness, and pitying their perverseness! This union of fortitude and compassion is the very thing which we should labor to acquire, and which alone can fit us for reproving with effect.

3. The **matter** of the remonstrance.

Nothing could be more judicious than this address. The people had lost sight of God; and their faithful leaders set God before them. They acknowledge the existence of the difficulties; but they deny the inference deduced from it. True, say they:

the people are mighty; but our God is mightier;

their fortifications are strong; but not so strong that they can withstand God;

the inhabitants fight only with an arm of flesh; we with the arm of the living God! What then have we to fear?

They, however numerous or powerful, are only as "bread for us," and shall be devoured by us as easily as the food we eat. We have nothing to do but to trust in God; and we are as sure of victory, as if all our enemies were already slain. Let us go up then; not to conquer the land, but "to possess it;" the food is prepared for us; and we have nothing to do but to go up and eat it. Compare [Numbers 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.30) with the text.

How encouraging was this! how calculated to carry conviction to their hearts! not one word to irritate, but everything to convince and comfort them! This is the true pattern for reproof; as it should never savor of our own spirit, so it should never touch on painful topics but with care and tenderness; every syllable should breathe love.

It is a proverb in France, that 'Flies are not caught with vinegar:' and we shall do well to remember, that it is the sweet alone which renders the sour palatable. Faithful indeed we must be, and so faithful as oftentimes to give offence; but we must take care that the offence arise, not from any needless severity on our part, but from the force of truth itself.

Having noticed the remonstrance, it will be proper to consider,

II. The **use** we should make of it.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapters 3 and 4) the Apostle traces the correspondence between the events we are considering and the duties of Christians in all ages. He shows that Canaan represented the rest which remains for us; and he cautions us against falling short of it through unbelief, as that people did. Hence it is evident that the address delivered to them by Joshua and Caleb may with great propriety be made to us; at least, we may take occasion from it:

1. To excite your **desires**.

Justly did these remonstrants, who themselves "had searched the land," declare it to be good, "an exceeding good land." Are there not those among us, who by faith have searched the heavenly land, and already tasted its delicious fruits? Is not the sealing influence of the Spirit said to be "the pledge of our inheritance, [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14)." And may we not from the first-fruits of the Spirit which we have already received, [Romans 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.23), judge in a measure what the harvest shall be? May we not at least take upon us to affirm that Heaven is a good, an exceeding good land? Yes, truly, "it flows with milk and honey;" yet while it affords abundance to all, it never gluts.

How can that land be otherwise than good, which was:  
prepared by God the Father from the foundation of the world,  
purchased for us on the cross by the blood of his dear Son,  
and secured to us by the gift of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to fit us for it, and to preserve us to it, [2 Timothy 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.18). How can that be otherwise than good, which is emphatically called "Emmanuel's land, [Isaiah 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.8)," as being the place where our adorable Savior displays the full radiance of his glory, and communicates to every one, according to the measure of his capacity, all the fullness of his richest blessings? In whatever view we contemplate it, we cannot but see, that it is worthy of our utmost exertions, and will amply repay all that we can do, or suffer, in the attainment of it.

2. To animate your **hopes**.

Unbelief will say to us exactly what the people said to each other on this occasion, "Were it not better for us to return to Egypt? Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt." "When we were in the world, we enjoyed its pleasures, which now we have exchanged for pain and trouble. When we turned our backs upon the world, we imagined that we should experience nothing but ease and happiness under the protection of our God; but, behold, here are constant difficulties and trials to be encountered, and such too as we can never surmount. It would have been better therefore to return to our former state, and to leave events to God, who is too merciful to exclude any of his creatures from his heavenly kingdom."

But, beloved, why should any of you be discouraged by your trials and conflicts? Have you not God on your side, who is able to make you "more than conquerors over all your enemies?" "If God be for you, who can be against you, [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31); [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)." Multiply the number and power of your enemies a thousand-fold, and you need not fear them. Only, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10);" and know, that, though you are but as a worm, you shall, through, his almighty aid, be enabled to "thresh the mountains! [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-15)."

3. To direct your **exertions**.

One caution did Joshua and Caleb give to Israel; which also we would recommend to your attention; it is, to guard against an unbelieving and disobedient spirit, "Only do not rebel against the Lord." You have nothing to fear but sin. Nothing, but sin, can by any means hurt you. As for men and devils, so far from prevailing against you, they are only "bread for you," and shall, by the very efforts which they use to destroy you, be made subservient to your spiritual welfare. But sin is a deadly evil; that will provoke your God to depart from you. Sin may cause him to "swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest, [Hebrews 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.11)." O put away from you that deadly evil! Especially put away unbelief; it is "by an evil heart of unbelief that you will be tempted to depart from the living God, [Hebrews 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.12)." Pray therefore to God to "increase your faith, [Luke 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.5)."

Guard also against a murmuring spirit. If the Lord brings you into difficulties, it is only for the magnifying of his own grace in your deliverance. It is not your place to be indulging solicitude about events. God "would have you without worry, [1 Corinthians 7:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.32); [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6). [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7);" he bids you "do not worry about anything;" but to "cast all your care on him." Duty is yours; outcomes are his. "Only therefore let your conduct be as it befits the Gospel of Christ, [Philippians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.27)." and your success is sure; for your God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

#156

GOD'S ANSWER TO THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES

**[Numbers 14:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.18-24)**

"'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.' In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times-- not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it."

Little does the world think how much they are indebted to the saints. They are:  
the cluster, for the sake of which the vineyard of the Lord is spared, [Isaiah 65:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.8);  
the elect, for whose sake the days of vengeance have been often shortened, [Matthew 24:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.22);  
the little remnant, without which the whole world would long since have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah, [Isaiah 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.9).

In the passage before us we have this very matter exhibited in a striking point of view. The whole people of Israel were in a state of rebellion against God; and God was meditating their utter extermination. But Moses lifts up his heart in prayer for them; and, by his importunate intercession, averts the judgments which were ready to burst upon them.

Let us consider,

I. The **prayer** which Moses offered.

This did not relate to the eternal salvation of the people, except incidentally and by remote consequence; it had respect only to the threatening which God had denounced against the people. Having reason to fear that God would "smite them all with a pestilence, and disinherit them" utterly, verse 11, 12, Moses entreated God to spare them, and urged such arguments as he judged most suitable to the occasion. These pleas of his deserve an attentive consideration.

1. He pressed upon God a regard for his own honor.

"What will the Egyptians and the Canaanites say? Will they not ascribe the destruction of this people to a lack of power in you to accomplish your projected plans, verse 13-16. O let them not have such cause for triumph! Let them not have so specious an occasion to blaspheme your name!"

This was an argument of great weight. He had used it successfully on a former occasion, [Exodus 32:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.12); and God himself had acknowledged its force, [Deuteronomy 32:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.26-27). See also [Ezekiel 20:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.9); [Ezekiel 20:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.14); [Ezekiel 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.22); [Ezekiel 20:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.44). This therefore is a plea which we should use; we should use it with God, as an inducement to him to keep us, [Psalm 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.8); [Jeremiah 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.21); and we should use it with ourselves, as an incentive to vigilance and circumspection, [1 Timothy 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.1). We should be exceeding tender for God's honor; and, when tempted to the commission of any sin, we should think, How will the Philistines rejoice, and the uncircumcised triumph? [2 Samuel 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 1.20). How will they "blaspheme that sacred name by which I am called, [James 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.7)." O that I may "never thus give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully, [1 Timothy 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.14)."

2. He pressed upon God a conformity to his own perfections.

Did you not, O my God, when proclaiming your name to me, represent yourself as "long-suffering, and of great mercy, and as forgiving iniquity and transgression, though you would not clear the guilty, verses 17, 18 which refers to [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7)." Let it now be seen that this is indeed your character. I do not ask that you should "leave them altogether unpunished; but only that you should not make a full end of them. That clause, "by no means clearing the guilty," may, both in [Exodus 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.7) and in this place, be rendered "clearing, I will not clear," that is not make desolate. The word "guilty" is not in the original. In that sense it will be exactly parallel with [Jeremiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.11). But the sense affixed to it in the translation is probably the right one, though the other is better suited to the purpose for which it is here adduced, as you have threatened."

Here, methinks, is a plea, which, almost above all others, it befits us to urge in all our supplications at the throne of grace. The character of God, as a God of infinite mercy—is that which encourages our addresses to him. When every other ground of hope fails, this is still firm. If only we do not "limit the Holy One of Israel," we can never be at a loss for "arguments with which to fill our mouths" at the throne of grace. O let us study well the representations which God has given of himself, and especially that to which Moses referred; then, even in our lowest state of guilt or misery, we shall never despair of obtaining mercy at his hands.

3.He pressed upon God a consistency with his own conduct.

"You have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now; and will you abandon them at last? O let it not be so; pardon, I beseech you—yet again and again their iniquity, according unto the greatness of your unbounded mercy, verse 19."

This plea, if used with men, would have had no weight; it would have operated rather to prevent the repetition of mercies which had been so abused. But, with God, it avails much; and in our minds too, it is a most encouraging consideration. We may look back and see how God has borne with all our frowardness from our youth up to the present moment; and may take occasion from his past forbearance to supplicate the continuance of it, "Remember, O Lord, your tender mercies, and your loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old, [Psalm 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.6)." Yes; we should "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation, [2 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.15)," and the goodness he has already exercised towards us as a motive and encouragement to repentance, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4).

Such was the prayer of Moses, a prayer peculiarly excellent, because it was a holy pleading with God. Let us now proceed to consider,

II. The **answer** which Moses obtained.

"I have forgiven them," says God, "according to your word. You have entreated me to spare them; and I will spare them; but, I swear by my own life, that the whole of my conduct on this occasion shall be such, as shall procure me honor to the remotest ends of the earth, and to the latest period of time. Every one of my perfections shall be now displayed; now will I exhibit before my people such rays of my glory, as shall illumine the benighted heathen, and fill the whole earth with wonder."

Now then, my brethren, let us contemplate this subject with holy awe; let us beg of God to take away the veil from our hearts, that we may see wherein this glory of his consists. Let us behold,

1. God's **condescension** in hearing prayer.

Here was a whole nation involved in actual rebellion against God; and one single individual betakes himself to prayer. What, it may be said, can a single individual do? Read the answer of God, and see. He replies, not, "I will pardon," but, "I have pardoned;" "the very moment you lifted up your voice, my hands were tied, and I could no longer persist in my resolution to destroy them. Compare [Daniel 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.20-21); [Daniel 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.23). I have pardoned according to your word, and to the full extent of your petitions."

O, who after this will ever doubt the efficacy of prayer? If God answered so speedily the prayer of one on behalf of a rebellious nation, what will he not do for those who supplicate mercy for themselves? Will he ever cast out their prayer? No! Let the whole universe know, that he is "a God that hears prayer," and that not even the vilest of the human race shall "ever seek his face in vain."

2. God's **mercy** in forbearing vengeance.

Consider the mercies which that nation had experienced, and the extent of that wickedness which they now committed; consider that they cast the most bitter reflections on God himself, and actually appointed a captain to lead them back to Egypt, [Nehemiah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.17); and were proceeding to murder those who exhorted them to obedience. Could it be supposed that such people should be spared, spared too after God had said he would instantly cut them off? Whom then will he not spare? Who, while on praying-ground, can be considered as beyond the reach of mercy?

Let us not despair of any; nor let any despair of themselves; He is the same God as ever, "slow to anger, and of great kindness, and ready to turn from the evil" which he has thought to inflict upon us, the very moment that he can do it in consistency with his own perfections.

3. God's **justice** in punishing sin.

Though he forbore to destroy the nation at large, he executed immediate vengeance on those who were the leaders and instigators of the rebellion, verse 36, 37. Nor were the people themselves left unpunished. They had expressed a wish that they had died in the wilderness; now God gave them their wish; and declared that not one of those who had rebelled against him should ever see the promised land. Forty days had been spent in searching the land of Canaan; and forty years were they condemned to bear their iniquities, until their carcasses would be consumed in the wilderness.

What a solemn lesson does this give to the ungodly world! Who must not tremble for fear of his judgments? Who does not see that it is vain to hope for impunity on account of the number of those who tread the paths of wickedness? The question is often confidently put by sinners: Do you think that God will condemn so many? We answer, If you would know what God will do, look at what he has done; inquire, how many of those who came out of Egypt ever were admitted into the land of Canaan; and when you have learned that, you will know how God will proceed in the day of judgment, See [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11); [Hebrews 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.17-19); [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1); Jude verse 5. Let all the world hear this, and tremble; for "truly there is a God that judges in the earth!"

4. God's **goodness** in rewarding virtue.

Two of the spies were faithful to their God, and behold how God interposed for them! The congregation was just going to stone them, and God instantly displayed his glory in such a manner as to horrify the hearts of their enemies. To them also he bore testimony, that they had "followed him fully;" and he promised them, that though every other man throughout all the tribes should die in the wilderness, they should go into the promised land, and enjoy the inheritance reserved for them, verse 24, 30.

Do any of the human race wish to ascertain whether their works shall be rewarded? Let them look to this history; let them here see how God will protect his people; and how assuredly those who serve him in time, shall dwell with him in eternity. Surely none who hear these records will ever be afraid of being singular, or of bearing persecution for righteousness' sake. No! From henceforth every soul should be emboldened to "confess Christ before men," and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."

5. God's **faithfulness** in fulfilling his word.

Here was a strong temptation to rescind his promises; and indeed, because of the appearance of so doing, God says, "You shall know my breach of promise verse 34." But the promise was not made to that people, that they at all events should inherit the land of Canaan; it was made to Abraham, that his seed should inherit it; and, both on this and a former occasion, when God threatened to destroy the present generation, he offered to raise up a nation from the loins of Moses, and to give the promised land to them, verse 12 with [Exodus 32:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.10).

God fulfilled his word in every point; and Joshua appealed to the whole nation of Israel for the truth of this, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14); just as did Solomon many hundred years after him [1 Kings 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.56). None therefore need to be afraid of trusting in God; for "he is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent, [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)." Let the whole world be assured, that they may safely rely on him; that "not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail;" that "faithful is He who has promised;" and that "what he has promised he is able also to perform." Be it known therefore, I say, "that those who trust in him shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end! [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

6. God's **power** to accomplish his own sovereign will and pleasure.

The people had expressed their fears that their little ones would fall a prey to the warlike inhabitants of Canaan. Now, says God, "those very children, who you said would be a prey, even them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised, verse 31." As weak as you judge them to be, I will give them the victory; and not an enemy shall be able to stand before them.

Hear this, you drooping, doubting Christians! Let the whole world hear it; yes, let it never be forgotten, that "God ordains strength in babes and sucklings;" that "his strength is perfected in their weakness;" and that through him the weakest of us shall be "more than conquerors." Who is weaker than Paul in his own apprehension? "I have not," says he, "a sufficiency even to think a good thought;" yet who is stronger in reality? "I can do all things," says he, "through Christ who strengthens me, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)." Let the weak then say, "I am strong, [Job 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 3.10);" "let the feeble be as David, and the house of David be as the angel of the Lord, [Zechariah 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.8)."

APPLICATION.

Behold now this glory of the Lord! see how it shines throughout this mysterious dispensation! See:  
his condescension in hearing prayer,  
his mercy in forbearing vengeance,  
his justice in punishing sin,  
his goodness in rewarding virtue,  
his faithfulness in fulfilling his word, and  
his power to execute his sovereign will and pleasure!

Let the whole earth contemplate it; let all transmit the knowledge of it to those around them; and assist in spreading it to the remotest heathen; let all expect the time when this view of God shall be universal through the world—and all shall give him the glory of his immutable perfections.

And, while we view the glory of God in his past works, let us remember what will be the final outcome of all his dispensations. His glory will hereafter shine in still brighter splendor. When his answers to the prayers of all his people shall be known, how marvelous will his condescension and grace appear! When the sins of the whole world shall be made manifest, how shall we be filled with wonder at his long-suffering and forbearance! How tremendous will his justice and severity be found, when millions of impenitent sinners are cast headlong into the bottomless abyss!

And when his obedient people shall be exalted to thrones of glory, how will his goodness and mercy be admired and adored! Then also will his truth and faithfulness be seen in the exact completion of every promise he has ever given; and his power and might be gratefully acknowledged by all whom he has redeemed, sanctified, and saved!

This then is certain, that in every human being he will be glorified. But the question is, How will he be glorified in me? will it be in my salvation, or condemnation? In answering this question aright we are all deeply interested; nor will it be difficult to answer it, provided we inquire what our real character is. Do we resemble the unbelieving and rebellious Israelites, or those believing spies who "followed the Lord fully?" Vast was the difference between them, and consequently the discrimination will be easy. The Lord grant that we may "so judge ourselves now, that we may not be judged of the Lord" in that solemn day!

#157

FOLLOWING THE LORD FULLY

**[Numbers 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.24)**

"But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it."

The fewness of those who shall finally be saved is strongly declared in the Holy Scriptures; yet those who venture to suggest such an idea, are deemed uncharitable in the extreme. But it is not owing to a lack of mercy in God that any perish; it is utterly their own fault. God delights to bless his faithful and obedient people; but the unbelieving and disobedient he will eternally condemn. The numbers that are found in either of these classes make no difference with respect to him; if there were only one or two ungodly, they alone should perish, and all others should be saved; but if a whole nation be ungodly, and only one or two of them be observant of the divine commands, those individuals alone shall find acceptance with him, and all the rest shall meet with their deserved doom.

None but Noah and his family escaped the deluge; none but Lot and his daughters were delivered from the judgments which came upon Sodom and Gomorrah; thus, in the passage before us, we are told that Caleb alone, together with Joshua, was permitted to enter into the promised land, because they alone had followed the Lord fully.

To elucidate this record, and to bring it home to our own hearts, we shall show,

I. When we may be said to follow the Lord fully.

The whole nation of Israel might be considered as followers of the Lord, because they had given up themselves to him as his redeemed people, and depended on him for guidance and protection. In the same manner the whole body of Christians may be called followers of Christ, because they profess to have been redeemed by him from the far sorer bondage of sin and death, and because they look to him, in profession at least:  
to guide them by his Spirit,  
to keep them by his grace, and  
to bring them in safety to the heavenly Canaan.

But as the great body of the Jewish nation deceived themselves to their ruin, so, it is to be feared, the greater part of the Christian world will ultimately be disappointed of their hopes. To follow the Lord will be to but little purpose, unless we follow him fully. Now this implies:

1. That we follow him with **unreserved cheerfulness**.

The Israelites at large were pleased with God's service no longer than while their inclinations were gratified to the full. As soon as ever they were called to exercise any self-denial, or to suffer a little for his sake—they began to murmur, and were sorry that they had taken his yoke upon them. Especially when they heard the report of the spies respecting the power of their enemies, they proposed to cast off God's yoke altogether, and to return to their former masters in Egypt.

But Caleb "had another spirit with him;" he considered himself as altogether at God's disposal, and cheerfully obeyed him, as well in circumstances of difficulty and danger, as in the ways that were more pleasing to flesh and blood.

Now this disposition characterizes every faithful follower of Christ. It is not for us to choose our own way, but to follow the directions of our Divine Master. No commandment of his must be esteemed grievous; nothing must be called "a hard saying;" but we must cheerfully conform ourselves to every part of his revealed will, and account his service to be perfect freedom.

2. That we follow him with **undaunted resolution**.

Caleb had seen with his own eyes what difficulties he should have to encounter in subduing the land of Canaan; yet was he not in the least dismayed. Yes, his whole nation were so offended with his fidelity to God, that they gave orders that he should be stoned to death. But nothing could intimidate him; he knew the will of God, and he was determined to execute it at all events.

Thus the Christian whose heart is right with God, is not deterred by any difficulties from proceeding in the path of duty. He knows that the world will be against him; and he often finds his greatest enemies to be those of his own household; yet he determines to go forward, and to obey God rather than man. Like the Hebrew youths, if he beholds a furnace prepared for his destruction, he will still hold fast his integrity, and submit to death itself rather than violate his duty to his God.

3. That we follow him with **unshaken trust**.

The report of the spies was doubtless very discouraging. The people whom they had seen were of most gigantic stature; the cities in which they dwelt, were walled up to Heaven; and it is probable that there was a dreadful pestilence at that time ravaging "the land, and swallowing up the inhabitants thereof." But Caleb had the promise of Jehovah to rest upon; and therefore he knew that he could not fail of success; yes, he was assured that, however numerous or mighty his enemies were, they should be "bread for the Lord's people," and be as easily crushed and devoured by them as a piece of bread.

In this also the faithful follower of Christ will resemble Caleb; he knows that Omnipotence is engaged in his behalf; and he rests securely on the Word of God. If his corruptions were yet stronger than they are, and the world, with the confederate hosts of Hell, were tenfold more powerful, he would not fear, "he knows in whom he has believed," and is persuaded that "He who has promised is able also to perform."

The character of those who follow the Lord fully, being thus delineated, we shall proceed to notice,

II. The blessedness of those who follow the Lord fully.

Here also the history of Caleb will serve as our guide. The text informs us, that he received,

1. The approbation of his God.

God confessed him before all Israel as "his servant." What an honor was this, to be thus distinguished by Jehovah himself! And shall not every faithful servant of Jehovah be thus distinguished? Shall he not have an inward witness of the Spirit testifying of his adoption into God's family, and enabling him with confidence to cry, Abba, Father! Will not God "shed abroad his love in the hearts" of his people, and "seal them with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the pledge of their eternal inheritance?" And though no authentic declaration shall be made to others respecting his state—yet shall his very enemies be constrained to reverence him in their hearts, even though, like Herod, they should persecute him unto death.

2. The completion of all his wishes.

Doubtless Caleb earnestly desired an inheritance in the land of Canaan; and the very mountain on which his feet had trodden was assigned to him as his portion by God's express appointment. But he surely looked beyond an earthly inheritance; nor can we doubt but that he is distinguished in the Canaan above, as much as he was in the earthly Canaan.

And what does the faithful Christian desire? What is the great object of his ambition, but to inherit that good land which the Lord his God has promised him? And shall he come short of it? Will not God preserve him unto his heavenly kingdom? Yes; neither men nor devils shall deprive him of his inheritance; that very land which by faith he has so often viewed and trodden, shall be given to him; and "all the seed of Caleb" and of Abraham shall have it for their everlasting portion.

Behold, Christian, where Caleb now is, you shall shortly be; whatever difficulties may obstruct your way, or whatever length of time may intervene, the period shall arrive, when He whom you serve shall say unto you, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

Address,

1. Those who have never set themselves to follow the Lord at all.

Think not that the Christian name will avail you, while you are destitute of the Christian spirit. Nor imagine that you will be screened from divine vengeance by the number of those who are in your condition; for there were but two out of all who had grown to man's estate, that were allowed to enter into the promised land; all the rest were excluded from it, that they might be an example unto us, and might show us what we are to expect, if we give not up ourselves to the service of Christ.

Let me then entreat you all to become followers of Christ, "not in word only, but in deed and in truth."

Look to him, that you may experience the full benefits of his redemption.

Trust in his sin-atoning blood to cleanse you from your sins.

Rely on his Spirit to guide you in his ways.

Depend on his grace to subdue all your enemies before you.

But if you still persist in your rebellion against him, know for a certainty that you shall never see that good land which you profess to expect as your eternal inheritance.

2. Those who follow the Lord **partially**.

A profession of religion may in a variety of ways conduce to the good of society, but it will never save the soul. We must follow the Lord *fully*, if we would find favor with him in the eternal world. It is no small matter to be Christians indeed. What Caleb was under the Law, we must be under the Gospel. The reason of Caleb's acceptance is marked repeatedly, in the strongest terms, [Joshua 14:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 14.8-9); [Joshua 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 14.14). The reason too of the rejection of the others is marked in similar language, and with equal plainness, [Numbers 32:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.10-11). And the example of those who perished is set before us by Jude, on purpose that the professors of godliness may be admonished by it Jude verse 5. O let the admonition sink deep into our hearts! Let us all be stirred up to diligence, that we may be found "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

3. Those who, like Caleb, are following the Lord **fully**.

Fear not singularity in so good a cause. If you are singular in following the Lord fully, the fault is not yours, but theirs who presume to violate the divine commands. Go on then, though the whole universe should be against you. If God acknowledges you as his servant, you need not regard the censures or the threats of men. You are embarked in a good cause; you serve a good Master; you run for a good prize. The land of promise is before you. Press forward for the attainment of it, "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life!"

#158

PRESUMPTION OF THE REBELLIOUS ISRAELITES

**[Numbers 14:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.44)**

"Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp."

There are principles in the human heart of which few people are aware. One in particular is, a disposition to withstand the authority of God, whatever his commands may be. We see something of this in children towards their parents; the very circumstance of a thing being enjoined makes them averse to it; and a prohibition immediately creates in them a desire after the thing prohibited.

Paul represents this to have been his experience in his unconverted state, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in him all manner of covetous desire," and made him rise against the commandment, as water does against the dam that obstructs its progress.

Such a disposition is not uncommon. There is scarcely any man, who, if he will examine carefully his own conduct, may not find, that he more readily does or forbears anything in compliance with his own will, than when that thing is the subject of a prohibition or command. This perverse temper was very conspicuous in the Israelites when on the borders of Canaan. Being commanded, importuned, and encouraged to go up and possess the promised land, they could not be prevailed upon to go; but, when they were commanded to return into the wilderness, immediately they changed their minds, and would go against the Canaanites, even in direct opposition to the will of God. This is called in our text, "presumption;" "in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country."

Let us, for the elucidation of this subject, inquire,

I. Wherein their presumption consisted.

To believe the promises of God, and to expect the accomplishment of them to our own souls, is considered by many as an evidence of presumption. But presumption is rather the fruit of unbelief. That of which the Israelites were guilty consisted in two things:

1. They went up without the divine presence.

God had told them that he would not go up with them; but they, who had just before despaired of success, even though God himself should fight on their side, now thought they could succeed by the unassisted efforts of their own arm. The folly of such a conceit we easily discern; but are little aware how universally it obtains in reference to spiritual combats. God offers to be with us, and by his almighty power to give us the victory. We persuade ourselves that we have a sufficiency of strength within ourselves, and that we can succeed without any supernatural assistance. Hence we neglect to implore help from God, we refuse to trust in him, and we go forth against our enemies in our own strength.

What is this but the very conduct of those rebellious Israelites? The only difference is, that they acted thus in reference to temporal enemies, and an earthly inheritance; whereas we do it, while we have all the powers of darkness to contend with, and no less a prize than Heaven itself at stake!

2. They went up in opposition to the divine command.

God had expressly said to them, "Do not go up;" and yet they would persist in their resolution. They would not go when they were commanded; but now will go, when they are forbidden. Doubtless they would attempt to vindicate their conduct, by alleging, that the rectifying of their former errors was the best proof of their repentance; and they would persuade themselves that God could never be angry with them for doing that, which he had just punished them for refusing to do. But vain were all such reasonings as these. Their duty was to obey, and not to put their reasonings in opposition to the divine commands.

Yet in this we imitate them continually. We find, as we imagine, good reasons why this or that command is not to be obeyed; and then we follow our own will, in direct opposition to God's. But what presumption is this! We do not like the way which God has prescribed for us to walk in, and we will go to Heaven in our own way. This conduct we may attempt to justify; but God has stamped upon it its true character, as daring and impious presumption!

To form a just estimate of their conduct, let us consider:

II. What the outcome was.

They hoped, no doubt, that they should gain the victory; but their efforts terminated:

1. In painful disappointment.

They found their enemies, as Moses had foretold, prepared for the encounter; and no sooner did they make the attack, than their courage failed them, and they fled; yes their enemies chased them "like enraged bees," and destroyed them even unto Hormah. This is precisely what they had reason to expect; and what must be expected by all who will presumptuously advance in their own strength.

In fact, this is the very thing of which all who depend on their own arm complain. They will not go forward in dependence on the Lord, and in obedience to his commands; but will trust in their own imagined sufficiency to work out their salvation; the consequence is, that, after all their endeavors to mortify sin, and to lead a heavenly life, they cannot do the things which are required of them. Hence the general complaint, that they who preach the Gospel require of men more than they can perform. But in whom is the fault? Not in those who enforce plainly the commands of God, but in those who, rejecting the offers of God's all-sufficient grace, attempt to gain the victory by an arm of flesh.

2. In fruitless sorrow.

The fugitive hosts "returned and wept before the Lord; but the Lord would not hearken to their voice, nor give ear unto them, [Deuteronomy 1:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 1.45)." Now they regretted their former disobedience, and prayed that the sentence denounced against them might be reversed. If God would but try them once more, they would do whatever he should command. But their doom was sealed; yes, in this very defeat, it had already been begun to be executed. Many were slain; and God had decreed that every one of them, except Caleb and Joshua, should die in the wilderness. Like Esau therefore, "they found no place of repentance, though they sought it carefully with tears, [Hebrews 12:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.17)."

What an affecting representation is this of the final outcome of disobedience to the world at large! When once their doom is sealed, how bitterly will they regret their past folly and wickedness! O, if they could but have another opportunity afforded them, how gladly would they embrace it! How resolutely would they obey the voice of God! They would no more presumptuously prefer their own will and way to his, but would obey him cheerfully and without reserve. But in vain are all such desires; their sentence is irrevocably passed; and all possibility of attaining the heavenly inheritance is gone forever. Nothing now remains for them but to "weep and wail and gnash their teeth" for anguish, and to die that death, that second death, which they were not careful to avoid.

The subject will give me a fit occasion to address:

1. Those who are afraid of presumption.

There are many who dread presumption, and who, through a fear of it, are deterred from applying to themselves the rich consolations of the Gospel; they think it would be presumptuous in such weak and sinful creatures as they to expect all the great things which God has promised to his people. But, be it known unto you that it is no presumption to believe in God, or trust in God, even though you were the weakest and the vilest of the human race! If indeed you were to profess a confidence in him, while you were living in willful and allowed sin, that would be presumption. But, if you truly desire to devote yourselves to God, and to be saved by him in his appointed way, the deeper sense you have of your own unworthiness, the more assuredly shall you receive from him all the blessings of a complete salvation.

2. Those who indulge presumption.

Of those who determinately go on in their own way, we have already spoken; and therefore we shall pass them over with only entreating them to remember what they have already heard to be the outcome of such conduct. But there are even among those who profess religion, many who are guilty of very great presumption.

What is it but presumption, to run into needless temptations, in hopes that God will keep us?

O that the worldly-minded would consider this, when they are grasping after preferment or gain!

O that they would consider it, who mix so readily with carnal company, and conform so easily to the maxims and habits of this vain world!

O that the impure and sensual would consider it, when they give such liberty to their eyes and tongue!

Beloved brethren, we must not tempt God; but, retaining a sense of our extreme weakness and sinfulness, we must watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. Let this then be our daily prayer:

"Keep your servant, O Lord, from presumptuous sins, lest they get dominion over me!"

"Preserve me blameless unto your heavenly kingdom!"

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

#159

THE DANGER OF PRESUMPTUOUS SIN

**[Numbers 15:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.30-31)**

"But anyone who sins defiantly (or presumptiously), whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the LORD's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him."

Every command of God is to be obeyed; and it is no excuse to say we were ignorant of the command. We know that there is a God to whom we are accountable; we know that he has given us a revelation of his will; and it is our duty to acquaint ourselves with all that he requires at our hands.

Even in reference to human laws, it is no excuse to say that we were ignorant of them. We are supposed to be acquainted with them; and if we violate them in any respect, the penalty is from that moment incurred. A merciful judge may consider our ignorance as a reason for mitigating, or even for remitting, the penalty; but the law knows nothing of this; its enactments are valid; its sanctions attach on everyone that transgresses them; and everyone feels interested in upholding its authority.

Thus it was under the Mosaic Law; even where the ordinances were so numerous, that they could scarcely be remembered by any, except those who were altogether devoted to the study of them. Yet, if any person transgressed through ignorance, he must, as soon as he was informed of his error, bring the appointed offering, in order to obtain forgiveness of his fault, verse 27, 28; and, if he refused to bring his offering, he must be cut off, as a presumptuous transgressor.

For sins of presumption, of whatever kind they might be, there was no atonement whatever prescribed. It did not befit God to spare one who could deliberately set himself against his authority; and therefore it was expressly commanded that the presumptuous sinner, whoever he might be, should be cut off. To illustrate this subject, I shall show:

I. The danger of presumptuous sin under the **Law**.

Presumptuous sin is not to be understood of every sin that is committed willfully; but of those sins which, as the marginal translation expresses it, are committed defiantly and "with a high hand;" such, for instance, as that of Pharaoh, when he set himself directly against God, saying, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go!" It is such also as David characterizes under the following terms, "The tongue that speaks proud things; namely, of those who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own; who is Lord over us? [Psalm 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.3-4)."

The person committing this sin was doomed to death. No sacrifice was appointed for him; whatever injunction it was that he thus determinately opposed, whether it belonged to the ceremonial or moral law, he must suffer death for his offence. It is probable that the sentence executed, by God's own command, against the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath-day was intended to illustrate this. His offence might appear but slight; namely, gathering sticks on the Sabbath-day; but, as it was done in a known and avowed contempt of the divine will, he must be stoned to death! verse 32-36.

Now, how can it be accounted for, that so severe a judgment should be executed for doing anything presumptuously? It was considered as reproaching God, and pouring contempt on God himself:

1. As unreasonable in his commands.

A man who sets himself avowedly against any command, does, in fact, complain of that command as unreasonable and unjust. A man, through infirmity, may fall short in his obedience, while he acknowledges that the law which he violates is holy and just and good; but if he sets himself against the command itself, it must, of necessity, be from an idea that it imposes an unnecessary restraint, or, at all events, that it may well be dispensed with for his convenience.

2. As weak in his threatenings.

No one who could form the least idea what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God" would despise his threatenings. But there is a vague notion in the minds of men, that God will never execute them. Thus David describes these poor deluded men, "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies, [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-5)." Would it be right for God to bear such an indignity as this?

3. As altogether unworthy of any serious regard.

Were the mind duly impressed with any of the perfections of the Deity, we could not possibly treat him with such contempt. His power and majesty would awe us into fear; his love and mercy would engage our admiration; and though we might still be far from that entire submission to his will which he requires, it would not be possible for us to set ourselves in array against him, and to "run upon the thick bosses of his buckler, [Job 15:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.25-26)."

Conceive, then, of a creature thus rising against his Creator, and you will readily see why presumptuous sin should be thus severely punished.

But let us proceed to mark:

II. The still greater danger of presumptuous sin under the **Gospel**.

True it is, that under the Gospel we have a sacrifice for presumptuous sins as well as others; but if the Gospel is the object of our contemptuous disregard, we cannot possibly be saved, but must perish under a most accumulated condemnation.

1. Because a contempt of the Gospel is in itself more heinous than a contempt of the Law.

The Law contained innumerable ordinances, the reason of which, few, if any, could comprehend; and Paul, in comparison with the Gospel, calls them "weak and beggarly elements." But the Gospel is the most perfect display of God's wisdom and goodness that ever he revealed to mortal man. It exhibits the works and offices of the Lord Jesus Christ, together with the gracious influences of the Spirit; and, if they be despised by us, there can be no hope for us. For thus says the Lord, "Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29)."

2. Because a contempt of the Gospel is, in fact, a rejection of the only means whereby sin can be forgiven.

Where shall a man flee, who rejects the Savior? "What other sacrifice for sin" will he ever find, or what other "way to the Father?" Well does the Apostle say, "If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries! [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27)."

Eli's reproof to his sons puts this matter in the clearest light, "If one man sins against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, in despising his sacrifices—then who shall entreat for him [1 Samuel 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.25)."

APPLICATION.

1. Be thankful, then, that you live under the Gospel.

To you "all manner of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven." However presumptuous your past iniquities may have been, they may all be "blotted out as a morning cloud," and "cast into the very depths of the sea." This could not be so confidently spoken under the Law of Moses; but to you I declare it with confidence, that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" and that "all who will believe in him shall be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the Law of Moses! [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)."

2. Be earnest in prayer with God, that, whatever means he may find it expedient to use, he would keep you from presumptuous sin.

This was David's course, "Keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; so shall I be upright, and innocent from the great offence, [Psalm 19:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.13)." Be assured you need to use this prayer, and will need it to your dying hour. David's attainments were great; yet he felt the need of crying continually, "Hold me up, that my footsteps slip not." So must you pray continually; and you may then hope that God will "keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy! Jude verse 24, 25."

#160

THE SABBATH-BREAKER STONED

**[Numbers 15:32-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.32-36)**

[Editor's note: We find Simeon's Covenant Theology expressed in this whole section to be unbiblical.]

"While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp." So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses."

In large communities, instances of flagrant transgression will occur; nor can any mercies or judgments from God prevent them. Nothing but divine grace can keep individuals in the path of duty. The presumption of those, who, in opposition to the divine command, had gone up to the hill-top to engage the Canaanites, had been severely punished; and though God had since given instructions respecting the particular offerings which should at a future period be presented for sins of ignorance, he had expressly declared, that presumptuous sins should be punished with death; and that no offering whatever should be accepted for them, verses 30, 31. Yet, behold, scarcely had this declaration been given, before a man was found profaning the Sabbath-day; for which offence he was made a signal monument of divine vengeance.

His crime and punishment, which are specified in the text, lead us to notice the guilt and danger of profaning the Sabbath. Let us consider,

I. The **guilt** of profaning the Sabbath.

According to the estimate of mankind in general, the profanation of the Sabbath is but a slight offence; but, in fact, it is a very heinous sin.

1. Profaning the Sabbath is an **unreasonable** sin.

Consider who it is that requires the observation of the Sabbath. It is that God who made us, and endowed us with all our faculties, and upholds us every moment, maintaining our souls in life, and providing everything for our support and comfort. And is this the Being to whom we grudge that small portion of time which he requires? But further, this gracious God has so loved us as to give his only-begotten Son to die for us; and shall we think it hard to consecrate one day in the week to him?

Consider next, what portion of our time it is that he requires. If it had pleased him, he might have given us one day for our bodily concerns, and reserved six for himself; and whatever difficulties such an arrangement had occasioned, it would have been our duty cheerfully to obey his will. But the reverse of this is the proportion that he requires, "Six days," says he, "shall you labor; and the seventh day shall you keep holy." What base ingratitude then is it to grudge him such a portion of our time as this!

But consider further, for whose sake it is that he requires it. He wants it not for himself; he is not benefitted by it; he enjoined the observance of the Sabbath purely for our sakes; he knew that without some appointment for periodical returns of sacred rest, we would soon become so immersed in worldly cares, as utterly to forget our eternal interests; and therefore he fixed such a portion of our time as to his unerring wisdom appeared best, in order that we might be compelled to seek our own truest happiness. This is what he himself tells us, "The Sabbath was made for man, [Mark 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.27)." Shall we then, for whose benefit that day was set apart, refuse to consecrate it to the Lord, according to his appointment?

Let but these considerations be weighed, and it will appear a most unreasonable thing to trespass upon that time for temporal pursuits, which God has so mercifully set apart for the concerns of our souls.

2. Profaning the Sabbath is a **presumptuous** sin.

It is particularly in this view that the context leads us to consider it. God had enjoined the observance of the Sabbath in an audible voice from Mount Sinai, [Exodus 20:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.8-11); and had afterwards repeatedly commanded that every person who should profane that day by any kind of earthly employment, even the baking of his food, or the lighting of a fire, should be cut off from among his people, [Exodus 31:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 31.14-15); [Exodus 35:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 35.2-3). See also [Exodus 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.23); [Exodus 16:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.29).

Now it was in direct opposition to all these commands that the man of whom we are speaking presumed to gather sticks. He might be ready to excuse himself perhaps by saying, that this was but a small breach of the Sabbath, and the sticks were necessary for his comfort; but these were no excuses; his conduct was a decided act of rebellion against God; and it is manifest that both Moses and God himself regarded it in that light; it was therefore a presumptuous sin, and consequently, as the Scripture expresses it, "a reproaching of God himself" as a hard master that was unfit to be obeyed, verse 30, 31.

Such is every violation of the Sabbath among us. It is clear that we are not ignorant of his commands respecting that holy day; and what we do, we do in direct opposition to his will; we "reproach him" for exacting of us what he had no right to demand, and we are under no obligation to grant. Let the profaners of the Sabbath regard their conduct in this view, and they will need nothing further to convince them of their guilt.

Having noticed the guilt of profaning the Sabbath, let us consider,

II. The **danger** of profaning the Sabbath.

Wherein can this be painted more strongly than in the text? The very sight of this sinful act created instant and universal alarm; and, as Moses did not know in what way it was to be punished, he sought instructions from God himself. Behold now the answer of Almighty God—of him, whose wisdom is unerring, whose justice is most pure, whose mercy is infinite; his answer is, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones that he die;" and let this be done "outside the camp," that he may be marked as an accursed sinner, that is separated from me, and shall have no part with my people.

Had the offender been cautioned respecting the consequences of such an act, it is probable that he would have laughed at the idea, or, as the Scripture expresses it, would have "puffed at it." So it is with men at this day; they will not be convinced that there is any danger in what they are pleased to call light sins; but there is a day coming when they will find to their cost, that no sin is light, and least of all is presumptuous sin to be so accounted.

If anything more were needful to evince the danger of violating the Sabbath, we might mention, that this sin is particularly specified, as a very principal occasion of bringing down all those judgments with which the Jews were visited at the time of their captivity in Babylon. Nehemiah, after the return of the Jews from Babylon, found that the Sabbath was still shamefully profaned among them. To remedy this evil, he exerted all his authority, and expostulated with them in the most energetic manner, "I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing--desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath." [Nehemiah 13:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 13.17-18)."

Surely then, if such was the outcome to the individual that led the way, and such the consequence to the whole nation, when it had followed the example, it will be madness in us to make light of this offence. We may, it is true, escape the judgments of God in this world; (though it is surprising how often they overtake the profaners of the Sabbath;) but we shall certainly not escape them in the world to come.

Let me then propose this subject to you as an occasion,

1. For deep humiliation.

We are apt to think highly of our nation in comparison with the Jewish people; but, if we compare ourselves with them at the period when the events mentioned in our text occurred, we shall see no great reason to boast. Among the Jews there was found but one person in the whole nation that dared to profane the Sabbath; among us there is scarcely one in a hundred that does not profane it. Among them it was profaned only by gathering a few sticks; among us, in every way that can be conceived; it is a day of business or of pleasure to all ranks and orders of men. Shops open, etc. etc. Among them, this solitary instance created universal indignation; the spectators instantly communicated the matter to the magistrates, and the magistrates instantly set themselves to stop the evil.

But among us, with the exception of a few who sigh and mourn in secret, scarcely any regard the evil as of any consequence; the very name of an informer is deemed odious, so that no one chooses to incur the obloquy attached to it; and, if any were zealous and courageous enough to inform, there are but few magistrates who would not shrink back from the task of exercising the power with which they are armed. Such is the state of this nation; such the state of almost every town and village in it. Who then does not see that this national evil calls for national humiliation?

But let us bring home the matter personally to ourselves. How many Sabbaths have we enjoyed, and yet how few have we kept in the way that God has required! A person that has attained to seventy years of age, has had no less than ten years of Sabbaths. What a time is this for securing the interests of the soul! And what a load of guilt has been contracted in all that time, merely from the one single offence of profaning the Sabbath-day! Brethren, we need indeed to lie low before God in dust and ashes. We have need to be thankful too, that God's wrath has not broken forth against us, and cut us off in the midst of our transgressions. Let us know how to estimate the forbearance we have experienced; and let "the goodness of our God lead us to repentance."

2. For holy vigilance.

The ceremonial part of the Sabbath is done away; so that there certainly is a greater latitude allowed to us than was given to the Jews. We acknowledge also that works of necessity and of mercy supersede even those duties which are yet in force on that day. Our Lord himself has taught us to interpret in this view those memorable words of the prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." But the moral part is as strongly in force as ever. To have the mind exercised on spiritual subjects, and occupied in advancing the interests of our souls, is our bounden duty. It was the work of the Sabbath even in Paradise; and therefore must continue to be our duty still. If the Sabbath existed two thousand years before the ceremonial law was given, it can never be vacated by the abrogation of that law.

Would we know distinctly the duties of the Sabbath, the prophet Isaiah has, negatively at least, informed us, "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken, [Isaiah 58:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.13-14)."

We are to lay aside all the cares and pleasures of the world, and to seek all our happiness in God, and in his immediate service. Even common conversation should as much as possible be put aside, that the mind may be wholly occupied in the service of our God.

Now this requires much care and vigilance. The more decent among us are ready to think, that, if they attend the house of God once or twice, they have done all that is required of them; from a regard to the prejudices of mankind they abstain from some particular amusements; but they are not at all solicitous to make a due improvement of their time. But this by no means comes up to the injunctions of the prophet; nor will it ever be regarded by God as a just observation of the Sabbath.

The instructing of our families, the teaching of poor children, the visiting of the sick, and many other exercises of benevolence, may find place on this day. But in a peculiar manner we are called to secret meditation and prayer; we should study the Holy Scriptures, and examine our own hearts, and endeavor to keep ourselves in readiness to give up our account to God. Let the consideration of the guilt which we contract by spending our Sabbaths in another way, put us upon this; and let every Sabbath that shall be continued to us be so improved, that it may advance our spiritual state, and help forward our preparation for our eternal rest.

#161

THE USE AND INTENT OF TASSELS ON THEIR GARMENTS

**[Numbers 15:37-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.37-41)**

"The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God.'"

A very principal distinction between the Christian and Jewish laws is this; that our laws are given in broad, general, comprehensive principles; whereas theirs descended to the most minute particulars, even such as we should have been ready to conceive unworthy the notice of the Divine Lawgiver. There was scarcely any occupation in life, respecting which there was not some precise limit fixed, some positive precept enjoined, such as:

If they ploughed, they must not plough with an ox and a donkey.

If they sowed their ground, they must not sow various kinds of seeds.

If they reaped, they must not reap the corners of their field.

If they carried their grain, they must not go back for a sheaf that they had left behind.

If they threshed it, they must not muzzle the ox that trod it out.

If they killed their meat, they must pour the blood upon the ground.

If they dressed it, they must not seethe a goat in its mother's milk.

If they ate it, they must not eat the fat.

If they planted a tree, they must not eat of the fruit for four years.

If they built a house, they must make railings on its roof.

So, if they made a garment, they must put upon it a tassel with a ribbon of blue. This last ordinance, it may be thought, like all the other ceremonies, being abrogated, is quite uninteresting to us. But, if we consider it attentively, we shall find it by no means uninstructive. It shows us,

I. The end which we ought to aim at.

That, for which the use of the tassel was appointed to the Jews, is equally necessary for us; namely, to preserve continually upon our minds a sense of:

1. Our duty to God.

We are told to "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long." For this purpose we should have the commandments of God ever, as it were, before our eyes. It is useful to have habitually some short portion of the Word of God, someone precept or promise, for our meditation through the day, especially at those intervals when the mind has nothing particular to engage its attention. The expediency of such a habit appears from the text itself; for, if we have nothing good at hand for our meditations, "the eye and the heart" will furnish evil enough. In our unconverted state we uniformly, as God himself expresses it, "go a-whoring after these;" our affections are estranged from God, and our thoughts from time to time fix on some vanity which our eyes have seen, or on some evil which our own wicked heart has suggested. How desirable were it, instead of having our minds thus occupied, to have them filled with heavenly contemplations; to be searching out our duty; to be examining our own hearts in relation to it; and to be inquiring continually wherein we can make our profiting to appear!

2. Our obligations to him.

How strong and energetic are the expressions in our text respecting this! "I am your God; I have redeemed you in order that I might be so to the utmost possible extent; and I consider all that I am, and all that I have, as yours."

If these mercies, as far as they were given to the Jews, deserved to be had in continual remembrance, how much greater cause have we to remember them; we, who have been redeemed, not from Egypt, but from Hell itself; and not by power only, but by price, even by the precious blood of God's only-begotten Son; and who have such a saving interest in God, that he not merely dwells among us, but in us, being one with us, as he is one with Christ himself, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); [John 17:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21-23) and [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17). Methinks, instead of finding it difficult to turn our minds to this subject, it may well appear strange that we can for a moment fix them upon anything else. Were we day and night to "meditate on the loving-kindness of our God, our souls would be filled as with marrow and fatness, and our mouth would praise him with joyful lips! [Psalm 63:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3-6)."

The ordinance before us goes further still, and prescribes,

II. The **means** by which we are to obtain it.

It is true that no distinctions in dress are prescribed to New Covenant Christians; the Mosaic ordinance regarding tassels on our garments in this respect is annulled. But, as a means to an end, the appointment of the tassels may teach us:

1. To make a spiritual improvement of sensible objects.

This was the direct intent of the tassels on their garments; they were as monitors, to remind the people of their duty and obligations.

And why may not we receive similar admonitions from everything around us? Has not our blessed Lord set us the example? For instance, What part of farming is there which he has not made a source of spiritual instruction? The ploughing, the sowing, the weeding, the growth, the reaping, the carrying, the winnowing, the destruction of the chaff, and the treasuring up of the wheat, are all improved by him in this view. There are some things also which he has expressly ordained to be used for this end.

What is the water in baptism, but to remind us of "the answer of a good conscience towards God, [1 Peter 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.21)." What are the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, but to be signs to us of his body given, and his blood shed, for the sins of the whole world? We acknowledge that those things only which he has appointed to be signs, are of necessity to be used as such; but we are at liberty to use everything in that view; and so far from its being superstitious to do so, it is highly reasonable and proper to do it; it then only becomes superstitious, when it is rested in as an end, or used as a mean for an end which it has no proper tendency to effect.

[Editor's note: We find Simeon's Anglican theology expressed in the the following material to be unbiblical.]

Some have been offended with the use of the cross in baptism; and if it were intended as any kind of charm, they might well be offended with it; but it is, as the Liturgy expresses it, "a token that hereafter the child shall not be ashamed to confess faith in Christ crucified;" and, if it serves to impress the minds of the sponsors in that light, it is well; if it does not, the fault is not in it, but in them.

The same may we say in reference to the names, the titles, and the habits that are in use among us. Our Christian name, as it is called, should never be mentioned without bringing to our remembrance him, "whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve." The titles which are given to men, either on account of their rank in society, or of their consecration to the sacred office of the ministry, may well be improved for that end for which they were originally given; not merely to show to others what respect was due to the individuals, but to show to the individuals themselves what might justly be expected of them, and what their rank and office required; the one should maintain his honor unsullied; the other should be so heavenly in his deportment as to constrain all to revere him. In this view, the use of the surplice was doubtless well intended; and happy would it be if all who wear it were reminded, as often as they put it on, how pure and spotless they ought to be, both in their hearts and lives. The very sight of a lofty church should remind us, that we are temples of the living God; while the spire pointing upwards, may well direct us to lift up our hearts to God.

Let us not be misunderstood. We contend not for any of these things as necessary; but we learn from our text that they may be rendered subservient to a blessed end, and that it is our privilege to make everything around us a step towards Heaven.

2. To get the law itself written in our hearts.

While the tassels had in themselves a practical use, they were also emblematic of benefits which were to be more fully bestowed under the Christian dispensation. As a sign they are abolished; but the thing signified remains in undiminished force. What the thing signified was, we are at no loss to determine; it was, that the law, of which a visible memorial was to be worn by the Jews, was to be inscribed in living characters on our hearts. To this effect Moses speaks repeatedly, when giving directions respecting those other memorials of the law, which were to be worn on the forehead, and on the neck, and arms, "These words which I command you this day shall be in your heart; and you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes, [Deuteronomy 6:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 6.6-9)."

And again, "You shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, [Deuteronomy 11:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18-20). See also [Proverbs 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.3)." Hence the real design of God even as it respected them, and much more as it respects us, is evident. Moreover, God has promised this very thing to us, as the distinguishing blessing of the New Covenant, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts, [Jeremiah 31:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.33) with [Hebrews 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10)."

Now this is the true way to attain that constant sense of our duty and obligations to God, which have been before mentioned. For, if his law is written on our hearts, then we shall find the same disposition to meditate upon it, as a covetous man does to meditate upon his gains, and an ambitious man on his distinctions. It is true, the heart has more to struggle with in the one case than the other; but, in proportion as divine grace prevails, holy exercises will be easy and delightful.

3. To exhibit that law in our lives.

The tassel was a distinction which showed to everyone of what religion they were. Thus there is a singularity which we also are to maintain; we are to be "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." If others will not walk with us in the narrow path of holiness, it is not our fault that we are singular, but theirs; we are no more blameable for differing from them, than Noah, Lot, Daniel, or Elijah, were for differing from the people among whom they lived.

As to singularity in dress, it is rather to be avoided than desired. Our distinctions must be found only in the conformity of our lives to the Word of God. While the world are clad in mirthful attire, let us "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and be "clothed with humility;" yes, let us "put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." This is the way to honor God; and the more we strive to adorn our holy profession, the more peace and happiness we shall enjoy in it.

In a word, holiness is our tassel; let us wear it; let us not be ashamed of it, but rather endeavor to "make our light to shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in Heaven." Of course, I must not be understood to recommend anything like ostentation; that is hateful both to God and man; but a bold, open, manly confession of Christ crucified is the indispensable duty of all who are called by his name; and "if we deny him, he will assuredly deny us." I say then again, let us wear the tassel, and not indulge a wish to hide it. But let us be careful that "the ribbon be of blue;" it must not be of any fading color; our piety must be uniform in all places, and unchanging under all circumstances. We must be the same in the world as in the house of God. We must be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and then we are assured, that "our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

#162

KORAH'S REBELLION

**[Numbers 16:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.37-38)**

"The censers are holy—the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their souls. Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the LORD and have become holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites."

It is painful, in perusing the history of the Israelites, to see how constantly they were murmuring and rebelling against God. Persons who are ignorant of their own hearts are ready to conceive of them as less perverse and obstinate than the rest of mankind; but they who know what human nature is, behold in their rebellions a true picture of mankind at large.

In the chapter before us we have an exact representation of a popular tumult; we see the motives and principles by which factious demagogues are actuated, and the lamentable evils which they produce. The censers of which our text speaks were formed into plates for a covering of the altar, that they might be a sign to all future generations; and, though we have not now the altar before us, they are no less a sign to us, than they were to the Israelites of old.

Let us consider:

I. The history before us.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, raised a rebellion against Moses and Aaron.

Let us mark how they proceeded. They complained that Moses and Aaron had usurped an undue authority over them; and that Moses in particular had ensnared them, and brought them into the wilderness for that very purpose, verses 13, 14. For the purpose of making an invidious comparison between their former situation in Egypt and their present state, verses 13, 14, they represented Egypt as "a land flowing with milk and honey." As to any personal interest, they disclaimed any regard to that; and professed to be actuated by a generous concern for the public welfare, verse 3. In a word, they were true patriots; they were enemies to usurpation and tyranny, and friends to the liberties of the people. Liberty and equality was their motto, verse 3.

Such were their professions—and by these they imposed upon the people, and rendered them dissatisfied with the government of God through Moses.

But what were their real principles? They envied the power and dignity with which their governors were invested, and were ambitious to obtain a like pre-eminence for themselves. As for any desire to ameliorate the state of the people at large, they had it not; a patriotic concern for others was a mere pretext, a popular cry raised for the purpose of gaining partisans.

Korah was at the head of the Levites; and Dathan and Abiram were "men of renown among the princes of the congregation;" but they were not satisfied; they could endure no dignity superior to their own; and this was the true cause of all their discontent and clamor, verse 7; and if by means of this insurrection they could have obtained the distinction which they aimed at, not a word more would have been uttered on the subject of national grievances; nor would one hundredth part of the care have been taken to prevent them. It is impossible to read the history and not to see that this was the true state of the case.

What an insight does this give us into that which is usually dignified with the name of patriotism! If ever there was a mild and just governor, it was Moses. If ever there was a pious, affectionate, and diligent minister, it was Aaron. If ever there was a well-administered government both in church and state, it was at that time. If ever people had cause to be satisfied and happy, it was then. There was not a single ground of sorrow among all the people, except that which had arisen solely from their own perverseness, their detention in the wilderness.

Yet a few factious demagogues prevail to spread dissatisfaction through the whole camp; and their oppressed state of bondage in Egypt is declared to be preferable to the grievances which they then experienced.

But, in fact, their rebellion was against God himself.

This is plainly declared to them by Moses verse 11. What matter was there of complaint against Aaron? He did only what God had commanded him; and was he to be blamed for that? Moses forbears to make the same apology for himself; but his observation was equally applicable to himself, who had done nothing but by the express command of God. The conspirators then were in reality fighting against God himself, by whose direction every measure of the government had been taken.

Moreover there was a typical design in these divine appointments, which this conspiracy was calculated to defeat. Thus, while envy and ambition characterized the conduct of the conspirators towards man, they betrayed also the grossest impiety and presumption towards God.

The best estimate of their conduct may be found in the punishment inflicted for it.

This was truly dreadful. Moses had obtained mercy from God for the congregation at large; but the leaders of the rebellion must be punished. Accordingly, while Dathan and Abiram, together with their wives, and families, and adherents, stood in the door of their tents, setting God himself, as it were, at defiance—Moses declared by what an extraordinary judgment they should perish; and no sooner had he spoken, than the judgment was inflicted, "the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them all up, with all that appertained unto them."

As for the two hundred and fifty people who presumed to make their appeal to God respecting their title to the priesthood, "a fire came forth from the Lord, and consumed them all." Terrible was this if viewed only as a temporal judgment; but if considered in reference to the eternal world, it was awful indeed! That it might be kept in remembrance for the instruction of future ages, "the censers, in which they had offered incense, were ordered to be made into broad plates for a covering of the altar."

It will be proper then that we distinctly consider,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it.

To us, no less than to the Jews, does this event most clearly speak. It shows us:

1. That sin is an act of hostility against our own souls.

These rebels might be said to sin against their governors and against God; but they were "sinners also against their own souls;" and, had the object of their desire been the destruction of their own souls, they could not have prosecuted their end by any surer means.

Little is this thought of by those who live in sin; but, whatever be the sin which they commit, the effect is still the same, [Proverbs 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.36). If a man will only keep from sin, he may defy all the assaults either of men or devils. Men may destroy his body, but they cannot touch his soul. Satan himself cannot hurt his soul, without his own consent. Sin is the only medium by which the soul can receive any injury. But sin inflicts upon the soul a deadly wound:  
that destroys its innocence and peace;  
that brings down upon it the wrath of an incensed God;  
that subjects it to everlasting misery!

See how the earth swallowed up some, and how the fire consumed others—and there you will learn the fate of all who die in their sins! Hell will open wide its mouth to swallow them up, and unquenchable fire will consume them as its proper and appointed fuel! O that men were wise, and would consider this; and turn, every one of them, from the evil of their ways!

2. That opposition to constituted authorities is highly displeasing to God.

We are far from denying that there is such a thing as real patriotism; nor do we mean to say that tyranny and oppression may not rise to such a height, as to justify the overthrow of an existing government.

But this we say, that a real Christian will not be hasty to complain of grievances, even where they do exist; much less will he bear the smallest resemblance to these factious people, whose case we have been considering. The Christian is one of "those who are quiet in the land." He regards government as God's ordinance; and the people who are invested with authority as God's representatives. He considers that, in obeying them, he obeys God; and in unnecessarily and vexatiously opposing them, he opposes God; and he knows that "God is the avenger of all such," yes, that such people "shall receive to themselves judgment! [Romans 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-2);" the government itself may justly inflict punishment upon them; and God himself will punish such conduct in the eternal world!

Persons of this stamp often pretend to religion; and so they did in the days of the Apostles; but those who "despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities," have a "woe" denounced against them; their spirit is justly marked as a compound of envy, covetousness, and ambition; and having resembled Cain and Balaam in their spirit, they shall resemble Korah in their fate; they shall be eternal monuments of God's heavy displeasure Jude verses 8, 11.

Happy would it be if people who are of a factious and turbulent disposition would look occasionally on these "censers," and reap the instruction which they are intended to convey!

3. That a rejection of Christ must of necessity prove fatal to the soul.

Moses as the governor, and Aaron as the high-priest, of Israel, were types and representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ, [Acts 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.37-39); [Hebrews 8:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.1-2); [Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-12); and in rebelling against them, the people virtually rebelled against Christ also. Thus, among ourselves, how many are there who say, "We will not have this man to reign over us! [Luke 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.14)."

Some complain of Christ's authority, as imposing an insupportable yoke upon them; and others complain of Christ's priesthood, as prohibiting any access to God except through him as the only Mediator. But what the outcome of such rebellion will be, we are faithfully warned, and that too with some reference, it should seem, to the judgments exercised on Korah and his company, [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27).

At all events, if the opposers of Moses and Aaron were so fearfully destroyed—then we may be sure that a far heavier judgment awaits the despisers and opposers of Christ! [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29) with [Luke 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.27).

Let those who do not thankfully come to God by Christ, and unreservedly obey his holy will, be instructed by these events. In particular, we entreat them to act like Israel in the case before us, "All Israel that were gathered round the tents of Dathan and Abiram, fled at the cry of them; for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also! verse 34."

Could we but hear the cry of those that are in Hell, we would no longer sit supine and confident. O let us realize this thought before it be too late, and "flee in earnest from the wrath to come!"

#163

AARON'S INTERCESSION

**[Numbers 16:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.48)**

"Moses stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped."

As corrupt as human nature is, there are some sins which we scarcely think it possible for a rational being to be guilty of; and, if it were suggested to us that we ourselves were in danger of committing them, we should be ready to reply, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Such is the sin which all the congregation of Israel committed on the very day after the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram!

These three people had excited a rebellion against Moses and Aaron; Korah and his company aspiring to the priesthood; and Dathan and Abiram, with their friends, desiring the office of supreme governor. For this their impiety they had been severely punished; Korah and his company being destroyed by fire that issued from the tabernacle; and all the relatives of Dathan and Abiram being swallowed up by an earthquake. These signal judgments, one would have thought, should have effectually silenced every murmur throughout the camp; but, instead of being humbled, the people were the more enraged; and murmured more than ever against Moses and Aaron, complaining, that the people who had been destroyed were "the people of the Lord," and that Moses and Aaron had been their murderers, "You have killed the people of the Lord!"

God now renewed his threatening to destroy them; but Moses and Aaron "fell upon their faces," as they had done frequently before, compare verse 45 with [Numbers 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.5); [Numbers 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.4); [Numbers 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.22), and importuned God to spare them. God however would not spare them, but sent a plague among them for their destruction. But no sooner did Moses perceive that "the plague was begun," than he sent Aaron with an offering of incense to arrest its progress. Aaron went immediately into the midst of the people, and succeeded according to his wishes, "he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stopped."

This subject is to be considered in a two-fold view:

I. As a historical fact.

In this view it is worthy of particular attention. We cannot but admire:

1. The interposition of Aaron.

If ever opposition was unreasonable, it was then; if ever a people had offended beyond all forgiveness, it was at that time. Well might Moses and Aaron have said, 'We have interceded for you often enough; we have repeatedly saved every one of you from destruction; and now, because God has seen fit to punish some of the ringleaders in rebellion—we are charged with having killed them. If mercies will not reclaim you, it is high time that judgments should be tried.'

But not a thought of this kind entered into their hearts. They were filled with nothing but compassion and love. They fell on their faces to intercede for these rebellious people, as much as if they had received no provocation at their hands. The expedient suggested by Moses was instantly carried into effect; and Aaron, at his advanced age, ran with haste into the midst of the congregation, to make an atonement for them. He did not know but that the incensed people would wreak their vengeance upon him, as they had frequently threatened to do; and put him to death, as the author of their present sufferings. Nor could he be certain, but that, if he ran into the midst of the plague, it might sweep him away together with the rest. But he thought not of himself, nor listened for a moment to any personal considerations. He was intent only on saving the lives of his fellow-creatures.

What a glorious example did he afford to all future ministers! What a blessing would it be to the Church, if all her ministers were like him; if all could say, "I count not my life dear to me, so that I may but fulfill my ministry, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24);" "most gladly will I spend and be spent for my people, though, the more abundantly I love them, the less I am loved, [2 Corinthians 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.15);" "I could wish even to be accursed after the example of Christ, if I might but by any means save only some, [Romans 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.3); [1 Corinthians 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.22);" yes, most cheerfully would "I suffer all things for their sakes, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory! [2 Timothy 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.10)."

Were there:  
more tender compassion among us,  
more ardent love,  
more self-denying zeal,  
more active exertion to "pluck our people as brands out of the fire,"  
and more willingness to perish in the attempt  
—then we might "save many souls alive," and have them to be "our joy and crown of rejoicing" to all eternity. O that "God would speak the word, and that great might be the company of such preachers, [Psalm 68:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.11)."

2. The effect of Aaron's interposition.

How wonderful! No sooner does the cloud of incense arise from Aaron's hands, than the plague is stayed! On the day before, two hundred and fifty censers full of incense had been offered at the tabernacle, and had brought instantaneous destruction on the offerers; now the incense from one single censer averts destruction from all the congregation of Israel. The plague was spreading its ravages with such rapidity, that already, notwithstanding Aaron's haste, fourteen thousand and seven hundred people had died of it; but the moment he reached the spot, the arm of justice was arrested, and the sword fell from the hand of the destroying angel.

It proceeded irresistibly until it came to Aaron; but could not advance one hair's breadth beyond him. On the one side of him all were dead; on the other, all remained alive. What a testimony was this to Aaron's divine appointment! What a refutation was here of the accusations brought against him! And, above all, what an encouragement was here given to all future generations to abound in prayer and intercession!

O! what might be effected for the souls of men, if all ministers were men of prayer, and all who profess themselves the servants of the Lord would interpose between the living and the dead! O that "a spirit of prayer might be poured out upon us" all! If only we took our fire from off the altar of burnt-offering, the smoke of our incense would come up with acceptance before God. "We might ask what we would, and it should be done unto us, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7)."

As a history this passage is instructive; but it is no less so,

II. As an emblematic record.

Those who read the Scriptures merely as a history, read them like mere children. The Old Testament, as well as the New, contains the deepest mysteries; and, to understand it aright, we must consider it not only "in the letter, but in the spirit."

Now the passage before us has undoubtedly an emblematic import; it was intended to shadow forth:

1. The means by which God's wrath is to be averted.

Aaron himself was a type of Christ; and the atonement which he now made for the people was typical of that great atonement which Christ himself was in due time to make for the sins of the whole world. There was indeed no animal slain; for there was now no time for sacrifice; but the fire taken from off the altar of burnt-offering, whereon the sacrifices were consumed, was considered on this occasion in the same light as "an atonement;" and the incense burnt on this occasion typified the intercession of our great High-Priest.

By these two, the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, the whole world is to be saved. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness. What can be clearer than the prediction of the prophet Isaiah, "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors, [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12)." What more express than the declaration of the beloved Apostle, "If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1-2)." The one intent of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to establish and illustrate this glorious truth.

Let us then look beyond Aaron and the rebellious Israelites, to Christ and a rebellious world! Let us see with what eager desire for our welfare he left the bosom of his Father, and came into the midst of us, not at the risk of his life, but on purpose to "make his soul an offering for sin, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." Let us hear too with what compassion he interceded for his very murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Let us look through the shadow to the substance. Then shall we have a right understanding of the history when we view it as "a shadow of good things to come."

2. The efficacy of Aaron's atonement for the end proposed.

Death was arrested, and could proceed no further. And to what is it owing that our rebellious world has not long since been consigned over to destruction? "Not unto us, O Lord Jesus Christ, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise!" By your sin-atoning sacrifice you have made reconciliation between God and us; and by your prevailing intercession you have procured for us the mercies we so greatly need. Can we doubt whether this statement be true? Paul expressly tells us that Christ is "our Peace;" and, in that view of him, exultingly exclaims, "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather who has risen again, who also makes intercession for us! [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34)." He tells us further, that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for us! [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)."

Here then again let us view the history in its proper light; and let us learn, Where to look, and, In whom to hope, whenever our sins have raised the divine displeasure against us. Let us learn too the force of that apostolic argument, so weak in logic, but so sound in theology, "If the censer in Aaron's hand prevailed for the preservation of one rebellious people from temporal death—then how much more shall the atonement and intercession of Christ prevail for the everlasting salvation of our souls, yes, for the souls of the whole world. See [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14)."

From the whole of this subject let us learn the duties:

1. Of **faith**.

In the case before us, the benefit was conferred on account of Aaron's faith, just as our Lord afterwards healed the paralytic on account of the faith of those who brought him. But in the great concerns of our souls, nothing can be obtained but through the exercise of our own faith. Notwithstanding our great High-Priest has performed the whole of his office, no benefit will accrue to us unless we believe in him.

In this respect we are to resemble the Israelites when bitten by the fiery serpents; we must look unto the bronze serpent in order to be healed; or, in other words, we must regard the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate and sin-atoning sacrifice. We must renounce every other hope, and "flee for refuge to him as to the hope set before us."

On the one hand, we must not construe the forbearance of God as an approbation of our sinful ways, as though we had no ground for fear; nor, on the other hand, should the greatness of our guilt or the multitude of our provocations make us despair, as though there were no ground for hope. But, viewing Christ as the appointed Mediator between God and us, we should "go to God through him," trusting to his promise, that "he will never cast us out."

2. Of **love**.

We see not men struck dead around us under any visible marks of the divine displeasure; but we know that "God is angry with the wicked every day," and is summoning multitudes to his tribunal under the weight and guilt of all their sins!

How can we behold these things with such indifference? Why do we loiter? Why do we not run, as it were, into the midst of the congregation, in order, if possible, to awaken them from their stupor, and to save their precious souls? Why do we not betake ourselves to prayer? We have figuratively, at least, our censers near at hand, if only we would take fire from the altar of burnt-offering, and burn incense on them.

Let it not be said, "This is the work of ministers;" doubtless it is so; but not of them exclusively. They should lead the way, it is true, and be examples to the flock. But others should imitate their example, and "be followers of them, as they are of Christ;" or rather, should follow Christ, whether others will follow him or not.

I call you then, every one of you, to forget yourselves, as it were, and your own personal concerns, and to be swallowed up with love and pity for your perishing fellow-creatures! Remember that they are not a whit safer by reason of their delusions. They may call rebels, "the people of the Lord;" but that will not make them the Lord's people. They may cry out against God's judgments as injustice and cruelty; but that will not prevent those judgments from being inflicted, either on others or themselves; yes rather, it will bring down those very judgments the more speedily, and more heavily, upon them. Try then to stir up within you the feelings of Christians, "Of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh! Jude verses 22, 23."

#164

AARON'S ROD THAT BUDDED

**[Numbers 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 17.10)**

The LORD said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die."

One cannot read one page in the Bible without seeing abundant evidence that God delights in the exercise of mercy. Judgment is with great truth called, "his strange act;" it is an act to which he never resorts but from absolute necessity; but mercy is his darling attribute; and to that he is inclined, even when the conduct of his enemies calls most loudly for tokens of his displeasure.

Of this we have a surprising instance in the chapter before us. The competitors with Aaron for the high-priesthood had been struck dead by fire while they were in the very act of presenting their offerings to God; while their associates in rebellion, with their whole families, were swallowed up by an earthquake! These judgments produced a murmuring throughout the camp; and fourteen thousand seven hundred were swept off by a plague, which was stopped only by the interposition of Aaron. The people now were silent; but God knew that, though intimidated, they were not so convinced, but that they would on some future occasion renew their pretensions to the priesthood, and thereby provoke him to destroy them utterly. Of his own rich mercy therefore he proposed to give them a sign, which should forever silence their murmurings and preclude the necessity of heavier judgments.

In opening this subject we shall show,

I. What God did to confirm the Aaronic priesthood.

He commanded the head of every tribe to bring a rod or staff to Moses, who inscribed on every one of them the owner's name. These all together were placed before the ark; and the people were taught to expect that the rod belonging to that tribe which God had chosen for the priesthood would blossom; while all the other rods should remain as they were. On the morrow the rods were all brought forth. The owners severally took their own; and Aaron's was distinguished from the rest by the mark proposed, "it was budded, and brought forth buds, and blossomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."

The controversy being thus decided, God commanded that Aaron's rod should be brought again before the ark, and "be kept for a token against the rebels." How long it was preserved, cannot be ascertained; but that it was for a very long period, is certain; because Paul speaks of that, and the golden pot that had manna, as known appendages to the ark, [Hebrews 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.4). Thus its use was not confined to that generation; it remained to future ages:

1. An evidence of God's decision.

The change wrought upon the rod in one single night, together with its having at once all the different stages of vegetation, "buds, blossoms, fruit," this was sufficient to convince the most incredulous; no room could hereafter be left for doubt upon the subject. Nor do we find from this time even to the days of King Uzziah, that any one dared to usurp again the priestly office.

2. A memorial of his mercy.

Justly might the people have been utterly destroyed for their continued murmurings against God. But God here showed, that "he desires not the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn from their wickedness and live." This was the avowed design of the test which God proposed, "It shall take away their murmurings from me, that they die not." What astonishing condescension! Was it not enough for him to make the appointment, but must he use such methods to convince unreasonable men; to convince those, whom neither mercies nor judgments had before convinced? Had it been given, like Gideon's fleece, to assure a doubting saint, we would the less have wondered at it; but when it was given as a superabundant proof to silence the most incorrigible rebels, it remained a monument to all future ages, that God is indeed "full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great kindness."

3. A witness for God, in case he should be hereafter compelled to inflict his judgments upon them.

It is well called "a token against the rebels." God might at all future periods point to it, and ask, "What could have been done more for my people, than I have done for them? [Isaiah 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.3-4)." Have they not procured my judgments by their own willful and obstinate transgressions? [Jeremiah 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.17); [Jeremiah 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 4.18). By this means, whatever judgments he should from that time inflict, he would "be justified in what he ordained, and be clear when he judged, [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4)."

If we bear in mind that the Aaronic priesthood was typical, we shall see the propriety of considering,

II. What he has done to confirm the priesthood of Christ.

The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is written to show that the Aaronic priesthood typified that of the Lord Jesus, and was accomplished by it. This will account for the jealousy which God manifested on the subject of the Aaronic priesthood, and the care that he took to establish it on an immovable foundation. Whether there was anything typical in the peculiar means by which it was established, we will not pretend to determine; but certain it is that there is a striking correspondence between the blossoming of Aaron's rod, and those things by which Christ's priesthood is established.

Two things in particular we shall mention as placing beyond all doubt the appointment of the Lord Jesus to the priestly office:

1. The resurrection of Christ.

Christ is expressly called, "a rod out of the stem of Jesse, [Isaiah 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.1);" and so little prospect was there, according to human appearances, that he should ever flourish, that it was said of him, "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of the dry ground;" "He is despised and rejected by men, [Isaiah 53:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.2-3)." If this was his state while yet alive, how much more must it be so when he was dead and buried! His enemies then triumphed over him as a deceiver, and his followers despaired of ever seeing his pretensions realized. But behold, with the intervention of one single day, this dry rod revived, and blossomed to the astonishment and confusion of all his adversaries. Now indeed it appeared that God had "appointed him to be both Lord and Christ, [Acts 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.32); [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.36)." Now it was proved, that "his enemies should become his footstool, [Acts 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.34-35)." On his ascension to Heaven he was laid up, as it were, beside the testimony in the immediate presence of his God, to be "a token against the rebels." There is he "a token," that God desires to save his rebellious people; that "he has laid help for them upon one that is mighty;" that all which is necessary for their salvation is already accomplished; that their great High-Priest, having made atonement for them, is entered within the veil; and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them."

If any shall now reject him, he will be "a swift witness against them;" and God will be justified, yes he will glorify himself in their eternal condemnation.

2. The spread of the Gospel.

The Gospel is represented by God as "the rod of his strength, [Psalm 110:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.2);" and in reference, as it should seem, to the very miracle before us, its miraculous propagation through the earth is thus foretold, "God shall cause those who come from Jacob to take root; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit, [Isaiah 27:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.6) with [Matthew 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.14)." Consider how the Gospel militated against all the prejudices and passions of mankind, and by whom it was to be propagated, (a few poor fishermen,) and it will appear, that the blossoming of Aaron's rod was not a more unlikely event than that Christianity should be established in the world.

Yet behold, a very short space of time was sufficient for the diffusion of it throughout the Roman empire; and, from its first propagation to the present moment, not all the efforts of men or devils have been able to root it out.

The spread of Mohammadanism affords no parallel to this; because that was propagated by the sword, and tended rather to gratify, than counteract, the sinful passions of mankind. The doctrine of the cross not only gained acceptance through the world, but transformed the very natures of men into the divine image. Such operations, visible in every place, and in every stage of their progress from their first budding to the production of ripe fruit, could not but prove that:  
the priesthood which it maintained was of divine appointment;  
that the doctrine which it published was suited to our necessities;  
and that all who embraced it should be saved by it.

In this view every individual believer is a witness for God, and "a token against the rebels;" inasmuch as he manifests to all the power and efficacy of the gospel salvation; he is "an epistle of Christ, known and read by all men;" and, by his earnestness in the ways of God, he says to all around him, "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great a salvation?" Yes; every soul that shall have found mercy through the mediation of our great High-Priest, will, in the last day, rise up in judgment against the despisers of his salvation, and condemn them; nor will the condemned criminals themselves be able to offer a plea in arrest of judgment.

Address,

1. Those who are not conscious of having rejected Christ.

It is not necessary in order to a rejection of Christ that we should combine against him as the Israelites did against Aaron; we reject him, in fact, if we do not receive him for the ends and purposes for which he was sent. Our inquiry then must be, not, Have I conspired against him, and openly cast him off? But, Am I daily making him the one medium of my access to God, and expecting salvation through him alone? If we have not thus practically regarded him in his mediatorial character, we are decided rebels against God.

2. Those who begin to be sensible of their rebellion against him.

Men are apt to run to extremes; the transition from presumption to despondency is very common. See how rapidly it took place in the rebellious Israelites! No sooner did they see the controversy decided, than they cried, "We will die! We are lost, we are all lost! Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD will die. Are we all going to die?" verses 12, 13."

What consternation and terror did they here express! Just before, they would be priests, and come to the very altar of God; and now, they will not "come anywhere near the tabernacle," though it was their duty to bring their sacrifices to the very door thereof.

So it is too often with us. Before we are convinced of sin, we cast off all fear of God's judgments; and, when convinced of our sin, we put away all hope of his mercy. Let it not be thus. The very means which God has used for our conviction, are proofs and evidences of his tender mercy. Only let us come to him through Christ, and all our past iniquities shall be "blotted out as a morning cloud!"

3. Those who confess him as their divinely appointed Mediator.

From this time the Israelites never presumed to approach the Lord but through the mediation of the high-priest. Whether they offered sacrifices or gifts, they equally acknowledged the unacceptableness of them in any other than the appointed way.

Thus must we do. Not anything must be presented to God, or be expected from him, but in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. If we approach God in any other way, we shall find him to be "a consuming fire." Let this be remembered by us; it cannot possibly be too deeply engraved on our minds. If God manifested such indignation against those who disregarded the shadow, what must be the fate of those who disregard the substance? If we reject Christ, we have nothing to hope for; if we cleave unto him, we have nothing to fear.

#165

THE LAW OF PURIFICATION

**[Numbers 19:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 19.17-20)**

"For the unclean person, put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent and all the furnishings and the people who were there. He must also sprinkle anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or someone who has been killed or someone who has died a natural death. The man who is clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh days, and on the seventh day he is to purify him. The person being cleansed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and that evening he will be clean. But if a person who is unclean does not purify himself, he must be cut off from the community, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD. The water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, and he is unclean."

An inspired Apostle has acknowledged that the yoke imposed upon the Jews was quite insupportable. Where the reason of the ordinances was apparent, and the observance of them easy, we may suppose that the people would cheerfully comply with them; but, in many cases, the rites prescribed were very burdensome; they laid the people under severe restraints, entailed upon them heavy expenses, deprived them of many comforts, and subjected them to great inconveniences, apparently without any adequate reason. This might be illustrated by many of the ordinances; but in none so forcibly as in that before us.

The kind of defilement which was to be remedied, was as light and venial as could possibly be conceived; it implied no moral guilt whatever; nor could it possibly in some cases be avoided; yet it rendered a person unclean seven days; and everything that he touched, was also made unclean; and every person who might, however inadvertently, come in contact with anything that had been touched by him, was also made unclean. Moreover, if any person that had contracted this ceremonial defilement, concealed it, or refused to submit to this prescribed form of purification, he was to be cut off from God's people.

We do not wonder, that the proud heart of man should rise up in rebellion against such an ordinance as this; and still less do we wonder that the pious Jews should long for the Messiah, who was to liberate his people from such a yoke.

But if, on the one hand, this was the most burdensome ordinance, it was, on the other hand, the most edifying to those who could discover its true import. It may well be doubted whether in any other ordinance whatever there can be found so rich a variety of instructive matter, as may justly be deduced from that before us.

To confirm this assertion, we shall state:

I. Its typical import.

On this we shall dwell no longer than is necessary to prepare the way for the instruction which the subject is suited to convey. We will however, for the sake of clarity, call your attention to the ordinance under two distinct heads:

1. The preparation of the heifer for its destined use.

A red heifer was taken from the congregation; it was to be without spot or blemish; and it must be one that had never borne a yoke. Being brought outside the camp, it was slain in the presence of the priest, who with his finger sprinkled the blood "directly before the tabernacle, seven times." The whole carcass was then burned in his presence; (the skin, the flesh, the blood, the dung, were all burned together;) and some cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet wool were burned with it. Then the ashes of the heifer were gathered up by another person, and deposited in a clean place without the camp.

We shall not attempt to explain every minute particular of this ordinance; but its leading features are clear. We see here the Lord Jesus Christ, taken from, and separated for, the whole mass of mankind. We see him who was "without blemish and without spot," and who was under no previous obligation to suffer for us, coming voluntarily into the world for that express purpose. We see him suffering the most inconceivable agonies both in body and soul even unto death, outside the gates of Jerusalem. We see him sprinkling his own blood before the mercy-seat of the Most High God, in order to effect a perfect reconciliation between God and us. And that one atonement which was offered by him for the sins of the whole world, we see to be of perpetual efficacy in the Church, and ever ready at hand to be applied for the purification of those who desire deliverance from sin and death.

2. The application of it to that use.

A portion of the ashes being put into a vessel, running water was poured upon them; and then a bunch of hyssop was dipped in the water, and the unclean person, together with everything which had been defiled through him, was sprinkled with it. This was done on the third day, and on the seventh day; and then the unclean person was considered as purified from his defilement.

Here we behold the Holy Spirit co-operating with the Lord Jesus Christ in effecting the redemption of a ruined world. The Holy Spirit qualified the man Jesus for his work, and upheld him in it, and wrought miracles by him in confirmation of his mission, and raised him up from the dead, and bore witness to him in a visible manner on the day of Pentecost; and from that day to this, has been imparting to the souls of men the benefits of the Redeemer's sacrifice. By working faith in our hearts, he enables us to apply to ourselves the promises of God, and thereby to obtain a saving interest in all that Christ has done and suffered for us. And by such repeated applications of the promises to ourselves, he conveys to us all the blessings of grace and glory.

That this is the import of the type we can have no doubt, since God himself has so explained it in [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14). We see particularly in this passage, what was the import of the living water with which the ashes were mixed; it intimated, that "Christ offered himself through the eternal Spirit."

This may suffice for a general explanation of the ordinance; but we shall gain a still clearer insight into it by considering,

II. Its instructive tendency.

We do not apprehend that any Jew, perhaps not even Moses himself, could discover in it all that we do with our additional New Testament light. Yet we would be extremely cautious of indulging our imagination, or of deducing from the ordinance any instruction which it is not well fitted to convey. We certainly keep within the bounds of sober interpretation, when we say that we may learn from it:

1. Our universal need of a remedy against the defilement of sin.

The contracting of defilement from the touch of a dead body, or a bone, or a grave, and the communicating of that defilement to everything that was touched, and the rendering of that also a means of communicating defilement to others, intimated, that in our present state we cannot but receive defilement from the things around us; and that, whether intentionally or not, we are the means of diffusing the sad contagion of sin. "There is not a man that lives, and sins not;" "in many things we all sin;" so that we may well adopt the language of the Psalmist, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from my secret faults! [Psalm 19:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.12)."

Now as every one who was defiled, needed the purification that was appointed, so do we, even the most pure among us, need deliverance from guilt and corruption. However careful we are, we cannot plead exemption from the common lot of all; we are "corrupted and corrupters, [Isaiah 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.4)," every one of us; and are greatly indebted to our God, who has graciously appointed means for the purifying of our souls!

2. The mysterious nature of that remedy prescribed to us in the Gospel.

Some have said, Where mystery begins, religion ends. We rather would say that Christianity is altogether a mystery in every part. Look at this typical representation, and say whether there is no mystery in it. Can we fathom all its depths? Or, if enabled by the light of the New Testament to declare its import, can we reduce it all to the dictates of reason? Look at the truths that are shadowed forth; is there nothing mysterious in them?

Think of God's only dear Son, "in whom was no sin, becoming sin for us, that we might be mode the righteousness of God in him!" Think of the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, concurring with him in his work, and exercising his almighty power to render it effectual for our good. Is there no mystery in all this? Truly, "great is the mystery of godliness;" and the more we contemplate it, the more shall we be constrained to exclaim with the Apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

3. The precise manner in which that remedy becomes effectual.

What was it that rendered the ordinance effectual for the purifying of an unclean person? Was there any necessary connection between sprinkling the ashes of a heifer upon a person, and the cleansing him from sin? None at all. It was the divine appointment, and that alone gave efficacy to it. Indeed, so far was it from being able of itself to cleanse a person from sin, that the very observance of the ordinance rendered every person unclean who was engaged in it. The killing of the heifer, the sprinkling of its blood, the burning of it, and the gathering up of the ashes—rendered all the people who were occupied in those duties unclean until the evening; and laid them under a necessity of washing both their body and their clothes, in order to their purification from the defilement they had contracted.

All this showed clearly enough that the ordinance in itself had no purifying power. It went further; it intimated that neither could evangelical obedience cleanse us from sin. We cannot exercise repentance or faith, but we contract guilt through the imperfection of our graces. "Our tears," as a pious minister expresses it, "need to be washed, and our repentances need to to be repented of." There is no virtue in them to cleanse us from sin; nay, there is no necessary connection between the exercise of those graces in us, and the removal of guilt from our souls.

If the devils were to repent, or to believe, we have no authority to say that they must therefore be restored to the state from which they fell; and, independent of the divine appointment, there is no more connection between the death of Christ and our salvation, than between the same event and theirs.

It is from the divine appointment only, that the Gospel derives its power to save. It was from that source alone that the rod of Moses had power to divide the sea, or the bronze serpent to heal the wounded Israelites, or the waters of Jordan to cure Naaman of his leprosy. Consequently, if any of us obtain salvation, all ground of glorying in ourselves must be forever excluded; our repentance, our faith, our obedience are necessary, as the sprinkling of the ashes; but the ultimate effect, namely, the salvation of our souls, is altogether the free gift of God for Christ's sake!

Unless we view this matter aright, we shall never know how entirely we are indebted to the free grace of God, or be sufficiently on our guard against self-preference and self-delight.

4. The indispensable necessity of resorting to it.

If any person had contracted impurity, it signified nothing how the defilement came; he was unclean; and he must purify himself in the appointed way; and, if he refused to do so, he must be cut off. If, previous to his purification, he should presume to enter into the sanctuary, the sanctuary itself would be defiled.

Thus whether a man has sinned in a greater or less degree, he must seek to be cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ; he must embrace the Gospel as his only hope. It will be in vain to plead, that his sins have been small and unintentional, and that he does not deserve the wrath of God. One question only will be asked, "Is he a sinner? has he at any time, or in any way, contracted the smallest measure of defilement?" If any man is so free from sin, as never to have committed it once in his whole life, in thought, word, or deed—let him reject the Gospel as unsuited to his state; but if the smallest evil has ever been indulged in his heart, he must submit to the purification that is prescribed. No other can be substituted in its place.

He may say, as Naaman, "Are not the waters of Abana and Pharpar as good as those of Jordan?" But, allowing them to be as good, they will not have the same effect, because they are not appointed of God to that end.

I say then to every person, "Repent, and believe the Gospel;" "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" "He who believes shall be saved; and he who believes not shall be damned!" Think not to come to God in any other way than this; for Heaven itself would be defiled by your admission there, if you were not first purged from your sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ.

5. The efficacy of it when duly applied.

Every person who complied with the ordinance, was cleansed; and every one who has the blood and Spirit of Christ sprinkled on his soul, shall "be saved with an everlasting salvation." The argument which the Apostle uses in a fore-cited passage, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14), deserves to be attentively considered. It is this, "If the legal purification availed for the smallest good, how shall not the gospel method of purification avail for the greatest?" In this argument there would be no force at all, if only logically considered; but, if considered in connection with the deep mysteries of the Gospel, it has all the force of demonstration.

Consider who it was, whose blood was offered unto God for us? it was the blood of his co-equal, co-eternal Son!

Consider who that Agent was, who co-operated with him in the making of this offering? it was "The Eternal Spirit," who, with the Father and the Son, is the one Supreme God.

Consider these things, I say, and nothing will be too great for us to expect, if only we come to God in his appointed way. Yes, our consciences shall be purged from guilt, and our souls be transformed into the divine image. Whatever our sins may have been, even "though of a crimson dye, they shall be made as white as snow."

Let the sinner view an unclean person under the law, excluded from the society of his dearest friends, and prohibited from all access to the sanctuary; and then, on the renewed sprinkling of the ashes, instantly brought into communion with the Lord's people, and invested with the privilege of drawing near to God. Let him view this, I say, and he has a striking representation of the change that shall take place in his own condition, the very moment he is savingly interested in the atonement of Christ. He shall instantly be numbered with the saints below, and assuredly be fellow-heir with "the saints in light." Let then this sprinkling be performed without delay; exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Go to your great High-Priest, and say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!"

But remember that you must repeat this sprinkling from day to day. The unclean person was to be sprinkled on the third day, and on the seventh; so must we be from time to time, even to the last period of our lives.

Consider, brethren, what I say, "and the Lord give you understanding in all things."

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MOSES AND AARON SENTENCED TO DIE IN THE WILDERNESS

**[Numbers 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.12)**

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

Scarcely shall we find any portion of sacred history that is more calculated to affect a pious mind, than this. When we see judgments inflicted on the rebellious Israelites, we acknowledge without hesitation the justice and equity of God. We regret indeed that their impieties called for such severity; but we approve of the severity itself, or rather, regard it as lenient, in comparison with their deserts.

But here our proud hearts are almost ready to revolt, and to exclaim, "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" "Is it thus that God deals with his chosen servants, who for forty years have been indefatigable in his service? Does he thus for one offence exclude them from the promised land, to the possession of which they had looked forward with such ardent desire and assured expectation?"

But we are soon silenced with that unanswerable question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Sinful men are totally incompetent to determine what befits the holy God to do. But though we are not to sit in judgment on his dispensations, we may with propriety inquire into the reasons of them, if only we do so with a view to vindicate his ways, and to gain that instruction which they are intended to convey. Let us then, while contemplating the exclusion of Moses and Aaron from the land of Canaan, consider:

I. The offence they committed.

Slight as it may appear to us, it was a complicated sin.

There was in it a mixture of:

1. Irreverence.

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him! [Psalm 89:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.7)." But on this occasion Moses and Aaron seem to have forgotten that they were in the presence of God, or that there was any necessity to lead the murmurers to a becoming affiance in him. They should have reminded the people of his past mercies, and shown them how to secure the continuance of his favors by penitence and prayer. But, notwithstanding "the glory of the Lord appeared unto them," they omitted, as he complains, "to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel." This was a great offence. They should have remembered, that Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had been devoured by fire before the Lord for irreverently offering common fire in their censers, instead of the fire that was burning on the altar; and that God on that occasion had said, "I will be sanctified in them that come near unto me, and before all the people I will be glorified, [Leviticus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.3)." There would therefore have been no ground to arraign the justice of God, even if he had smitten them in like manner on this occasion. Their exclusion from Canaan, though grievous, was less than their iniquity deserved.

2. Anger.

A certain kind of anger is allowable; nor is it wrong to testify that displeasure in words; but it must not be such an anger as transports us into unfitting actions or vehement invectives. The expressions used by Moses on this occasion, show, that his anger was by no means duly moderated. It did not terminate on the offence, but struck at the person of the offenders; towards whom nothing but pity, joined with faithful remonstrances, should have been exercised. Doubtless, his indignation was very hot, when he addressed the people, "You rebels!" and in this it is evident that Aaron also was a partaker with him. How sinful this was, we may judge from that declaration of our Lord, that "Whoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of Hell fire! Compare verse 10, 11 with [Matthew 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.22)." Here then again we see that their exclusion from Canaan was justly merited.

3. Disobedience.

God had commanded Moses to "speak to the rock;" but Moses, in the paroxysm of his anger, smote it, yes "smote it twice." Had Moses forgotten how strict God's injunctions had been respecting the furniture of the tabernacle, that every the smallest vessel or pin should be "made according to the pattern shown to him in the mount?" Had he forgotten that, when bounds were set round Mount Sinai, even a beast, if he should pass them, was to be pierced through with a dart? Had he and Aaron forgotten how strictly the minutest service of the sanctuary was enjoined on the pain of death? How then could they dare thus to violate the divine commands? God himself complains of this as an act of direct rebellion against him, verse 21 with [Numbers 27:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 27.14).

Who then can wonder that God saw fit to mark it with a testimony of his displeasure? It is not improbable that God, in ordering Moses to speak to the rock, intended to reprove the Israelites, when they saw the rocks themselves more obedient to the divine command than they.

But the disobedience of Moses altogether defeated this intention; yes, it was calculated to convey a most erroneous idea to those who understood the mystic import of this dispensation. The rock that had been smitten thirty-nine years before was a type of Christ, from whom, as smitten for our offences, the waters of life and salvation flow, [Exodus 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.6) with [1 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.4). But Christ was not to be smitten twice, "he was once offered to bear the sins of many;" and it is henceforth by speaking to him, and addressing him in prayer and faith, that we are to receive renewed communications of his grace and mercy. But Moses and Aaron overlooked all this, (for what will not people forget, when under the influence of passion?) and justly brought upon themselves this severe rebuke.

4. Unbelief.

Of this in particular God accuses them, "You believed me not, to sanctify me." Whether they doubted the efficacy of a word, and therefore smote the rock; or whether they acted in their own strength, expecting the effect to be produced by their own act of striking the rock, instead of regarding God alone as the author of the mercy, we cannot say. We rather incline to the latter opinion, because of the emphatic manner in which they addressed the Israelites, "You rebels, must we fetch water out of this rock for you?" In either case they were under the influence of unbelief; for distrust of God, or creature-confidence, are equally the effects of unbelief; the one characterized the conduct of those Israelites who were afraid to go up to take possession of the promised land; and the other, those who went up in their own strength, when God had refused to go before them. This was the offence which excluded the whole nation from the promised land, "they could not enter in because of unbelief, [Hebrews 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.19);" no wonder therefore, that, when Moses and Aaron were guilty of it, they were involved in the common lot.

What has been said may suffice to show that their offence was not so light as it may at first sight appear to be; but its enormity will be best seen in:

II. The punishment inflicted for it.

The sentence denounced against them was, that they should die in the wilderness, and be denied the privilege of leading the people into the promised land. This was:

1. A **dreadful** sentence.

How distressing it was to them, we may judge from the prayer of Moses, who sought to have the sentence reversed, "O Lord God, I beg you let me go over and see the good land!" But, as Moses himself tells us, "God was angry with him, and would not hear him, [Deuteronomy 3:23-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 3.23-26)."

How loudly does this speak to us! If we reflect on the length of time that they had served the Lord; the exemplary manner in which they had conducted themselves; (oftentimes at the peril of their lives expostulating with the people, and seeking to avert the wrath of God from them;) and that this, as it respected Moses at least, was almost the only fault that he had committed. If we at the same time consider, how grievous the disappointment must have been to them to have all their hopes and expectations frustrated, now that they had nearly completed the destined period of their wanderings; truly we cannot but see in this dispensation the evil and bitterness of sin; and feel the importance of that admonition, "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of us should seem to come short of it! [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1)."

We know indeed that this sentence of exclusion did not extend to the Canaan that is above; and it is probable that many others who died in the wilderness, were therefore "judged and chastened of the Lord, that they might not be condemned with the world, [1 Corinthians 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.32);" nevertheless the record of their failure is "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come! [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11)." And as the great body of the nation were "examples unto us, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted," so may the example of Moses in particular teach us, that "if the righteous turn away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, all his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die, [Ezekiel 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24)."

Indeed this is the very lesson which Paul himself inculcates from the exclusion of the Israelites at large, and which is doubly forcible when arising from the failure of Moses, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls, [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12)." Were a man as eminent as Paul himself, it would behoove him to use the same vigilance as he, "keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway, 1 Corinthians 9:27." Not he who "runs well for a season," but "he who endures to the end, shall be saved."

2. An **instructive** sentence.

Besides the general idea above suggested, there are several very important things prefigured in this dispensation.

First, it intimated the insufficiency of the moral law to justify us.

Moses, the meekest of all the human race, had once "spoken unadvisedly with his lips, [Psalm 106:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.33);" and for that one trespass was excluded from the promised land, [Deuteronomy 32:48-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.48-51). Now, if we consider the typical nature of the whole Mosaic economy, we shall not wonder that he whose whole office and ministry were typical, was ordained to instruct us even by his death. In fact, he was himself a commentary on his own law; that denounced every one "cursed, who continued not in all things that were written in the book of the law to do them;" and he, for one offence, was doomed to die among the unbelieving Israelites, and thereby to show, that "by the deeds of the law should no flesh be justified! [Romans 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.20); [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16)."

Let this be remembered by us: the law condemns us as truly for one offence as for a thousand! [James 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10); it is of excellent use to lead us through the wilderness; but it never can bring us into Canaan; and, if ever we would be saved at all, we must trust, not in our own obedience to the law, but in Him who fulfilled it, and redeemed us from its curse! [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3) and [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13).

Next, it instructs us in the transitory nature of the ceremonial law.

Before the sentence was to be executed on Aaron, he was to go up to the top of Mount Hor, and there to be stripped of his priestly garments, which Moses was to put upon Eleazar his son, verse 25-28. By this transfer of the priesthood it was shown, that this typical priesthood was not to endure forever, but to be transferred from one generation to another, until at last it should be superseded by Him, who was to be "a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

This is no fanciful construction; it is the very idea suggested by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews; who tells us that the law was disannulled for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; the priests, its ministers, being unable to continue by reason of death, yielded up their office to "Him who lives for evermore." And thus the whole legal economy, not being able to make any one perfect, gave way to that better hope which does, [Hebrews 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.18-19); [Hebrews 7:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.23-24).

Thus, I say, Aaron's death illustrated the weakness of the ceremonial law, as the death of Moses did that of the moral law. Neither could introduce any one to the land of Canaan; but the one "waxed old and vanished away, [Hebrews 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.13);" and the other remained only to curse and to condemn all who were under its power, [Romans 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.10); [2 Corinthians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.9).

The last truth which this dispensation preaches to us is, that Christ is the appointed Savior of the world.

Moses and Aaron, being doomed to die in the wilderness, and Miriam having already died at the commencement of this fortieth year, the people were by God's command committed to the care and government of Joshua, [Numbers 27:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 27.18-23). He was to subdue all their enemies before them, and to put the Israelites into a complete possession of the promised land. Who does not recognize in Joshua the Lord Jesus Christ. Their very names are precisely the same in the Greek language; and their offices are the same. Jesus is "the Captain of our salvation;" God has given all his people into his hands, that he may give eternal life unto as many as the Father has given him! [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2).

Know then, all you who are going towards the promised land, to whom you must look for direction, support, and victory. Jesus is "given to be a Leader and Commander to his people;" and they who fight under his banners, shall be "more than conquerors."

In a word, the moral "law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ;" and the ceremonial law was a visible representation to shadow him forth; and in reference to both of them it may be said, "Jesus was the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes! [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4)."

To conclude.

Let us receive from this history the instruction it was intended to convey.

Let us learn from it the excellency of the Gospel, which reveals the Savior to us.

Let us see the importance of adorning the Gospel by a suitable conduct and life; ever remembering, that to them, and them only, who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality, will eternal life be assigned! [Romans 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.6-7).

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DEATH OF AARON

**[Numbers 20:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.27-28)**

"Moses did as the LORD commanded: They went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community. Moses removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain"

The lapse of time is so gradual and silent, that, for the most part, it escapes our observation; but there are seasons and occurrences which almost irresistibly force upon us the conviction that our days are coming to a close. The history before us is particularly calculated to impress our minds with this thought.

It was not until an advanced period of life that Moses and Aaron were called to their sacred office; and when, contrary to their expectation, they were turned back into the wilderness, and doomed to sojourn there during the space of forty years, it would appear as though that time would scarcely ever expire. But years rolled on; the destined period arrived; and death, which had nearly completed its work in the destruction of all the men who had come out of Egypt, received a new commission against those most distinguished servants of the Lord.

At the commencement of the fortieth year, Miriam died; before it was half expired, Aaron too was cut off. And before its termination, Moses himself also was constrained to yield to the stroke of death. In the death of Aaron, to which we would now call your attention, there are two things more especially to be noticed:

I. The transfer of Aaron's office.

Moses received an order to "strip off Aaron's garments, and to put them on Eleazar his son." That order was now executed; and in the execution of it we may see the true nature of that law, of which Aaron was the chief minister. We may see:

1. That the Law could not save.

In the preceding Discourse we have observed, that the sentence of death passed on Moses, marked the insufficiency of the moral law to justify; and now we observe, that the transfer of Aaron's priesthood marked the same respecting the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law was never designed to make any real satisfaction for sin. The annual repetition of the same sacrifices showed, that they had not fully prevailed for the removal of guilt. As they could not satisfy divine justice, so neither could they satisfy the consciences of those who offered them, "they were remembrances of sin," calculated to preserve a sense of guilt upon the conscience, and to direct the people to that great Sacrifice, which would in due time be offered for the sins of the whole world, [Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-4); [Hebrews 9:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9-10).

This, I say, was shadowed forth in the death of Aaron; for, if those sacrifices which he had offered could really atone for sin, why were they not accepted for his sin; or why was not some fresh sacrifice appointed for it? They could not so much as avert from him a temporal punishment, or procure for him an admission into the earthly Canaan. How then could they prevail for the removal of eternal punishment, and for the admission of sinners into the heavenly land? The Apostle tells us, that "it was not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin;" nor could a more striking evidence of its inefficiency be conceived, than that which was exhibited in the event before us.

2. That the Law was not to continue.

The sentence of death denounced against Aaron, manifested, as we have before shown, that the law itself was in due time to be abolished.

The stripping off of Aaron's garments, and putting of them upon Eleazar, still more clearly marked the changeableness of Aaron's priesthood; and intimated, that it should successively devolve on dying men, until he should arrive, who should never die, but "be a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek!"

But the manner in which this transfer was carried into execution deserves particular attention, inasmuch as it was peculiarly calculated to give the people an insight into the whole nature and design of the ceremonial law.

Whether the ceremony passed in the sight of all the congregation or not, we cannot say; but they were certainly informed of what was about to take place on the arrival of Moses and Aaron at the destined spot. Now Moses was the person who, by God's appointment, had put the priestly garments on Aaron, forty years before, [Exodus 29:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.4-7); and he also was the person appointed to strip them off.

Was this an accidental circumstance, without any mystical design? Can we suppose that, in a dispensation which was altogether figurative, such a singular fact as this was devoid of meaning? No; it was replete with instruction. We exceedingly dread the indulgence of imagination in interpreting the Scriptures; but we are persuaded that a very deep mystery was shadowed forth on this occasion.

Moses was the representative of the law, as Aaron was of our great High-Priest. Now it was the law which made any priesthood necessary.

If the law had not existed, there would have been no transgression.

If the law had not denounced a curse for sin, there would have been no need of a High-Priest to make atonement for sin.

And if there had been no need of a real sacrifice, there would have been no occasion for either a priesthood or sacrifices to shadow it forth.

The law then called forth, if I may so speak, the Lord Jesus Christ to his office; and therefore Moses put the priestly garments on him who was to prefigure Christ. But the same law which rendered a real atonement necessary, made the figurative priesthood wholly ineffectual; its demands were too high to be satisfied with mere carnal ordinances; there was nothing in a ceremonial observance that could be accepted as a fulfillment of its injunctions; nor was there anything in the blood of a beast that could compensate for the violation of them. Therefore, to show that nothing but the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ could be of any avail, the same hand that put the shadowy garments upon Aaron must strip them off again.

Thus in this transaction are we taught, not only that the ceremonial law was a mere temporary appointment, but that men should look through it to Him whom it shadowed forth. The language of it was, in effect, similar to that of the Apostle, "I through the law am dead to the law, [Galatians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.19)." That is, "I, through the strictness of the moral law, am cut off from all hopes of acceptance with God by any obedience to its commands. Yes, I despair of obtaining salvation by any works either of the ceremonial or moral law; and I trust wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ; I seek to be justified solely and altogether by faith in him."

While our minds are instructed by the transfer of Aaron's office to Eleazar his son, our hearts cannot but be affected by,

II. The surrender of Aaron's soul.

"The time was come when his spirit must now return unto God who gave it." He goes up to Mount Hor, the appointed place, where he must lay down his mortal body, and from whence he must enter into the presence of his God.

In this last scene of his life there is much that is worthy of observation:

1. The occasion was awful.

Aaron had sinned; and for that sin he must die. We doubt not indeed but that he found mercy before God; but still he died on account of his transgression; his death was the punishment of sin, verse 24. This, in fact, is true respecting every one that dies; though in some respects death may be numbered among the Christian's treasures—yet in another point of view it must still be regarded as an enemy, [1 Corinthians 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.26), and a punishment for sin. In this light it must be considered even by the most exalted Christian, no less than by the most ungodly, "his body is dead because of sin, even though his spirit is alive because of righteousness, [Romans 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.10)."

But in the death of this eminent saint we have a most instructive lesson. It was doubtless intended as a warning to all who profess themselves to be the servants of God. Like Lot's wife, it speaks to all succeeding generations, and declares the danger of departing from God. No length of services will avail us anything, if at last we yield to temptation, and "fall from our own steadfastness, [2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17)." The death of Aaron shadowed forth that truth which is plainly declared by the prophet Ezekiel, that "if a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, all his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned; but in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die, [Ezekiel 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24)."

Many there are, who, from an attachment to human systems and a zeal for truths of an apparently opposite nature, would almost expunge this passage from the sacred volume; but, whether we can reconcile it with other passages or not, it is true; and every one of us shall find it true at last, that not he who runs well for a season, but "he who endures unto the end, shall be saved! [Matthew 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.13)."

2. The manner was dignified.

Methinks I see Aaron, accompanied by Moses and Eleazar going up to Mount Hor "in the sight of all the congregation." There is in him no appearance of infidel hardness, or unbelieving fear, or pharisaic confidence; he acquiesces in the divine appointment, and, with meek composure, a firm step, and a cheerful countenance, ascends to meet his God. Thrice happy man! How enviable his state, to be so attended, and to be so assured!

What can a saint desire more than this: to have his pious relatives about him; to see, not only those with whom he has moved in sweet harmony for many years, and who are soon to follow him into the eternal world, but his children also, who are coming forward to fill the offices he vacates, and to serve the Lord as he has done before them; to see them around him, I say, in his last hours; to enjoy their prayers; and to bestow on them his parting blessings? How delightful, in that hour, to "know in whom he has believed," and to be assured that he is "entering into the joy of his Lord!"

Such may be the state of all; such ought to be the state of all. Hear how Peter speaks of his death, "I know that I must shortly put off this my tabernacle, [2 Peter 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.14)." Hear Paul also speaking of his, "I know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, I have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me, [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1); [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8)."

Shall it be said: These were Apostles; and we must not expect such attainments as theirs? I answer, These things are the privilege of all, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace! [Psalm 37:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.37)."

3. The outcome was honorable.

Upon every recurrence of difficulties, the whole people of Israel had vented their spleen against Moses and against Aaron. On some occasions they had been ready to stone these distinguished servants of the Lord. But now that Aaron was taken from them, the whole congregation of Israel bemoaned their loss, verse 29. Now they call to mind those services, which once they despised. Now they say one to another, 'How often have we seen him fall on his face before God, to implore mercy for us, at the very moment when we were murmuring against him as the source of all our troubles! How did we on a recent occasion see him rushing with his censer into the midst of the plague, to arrest the pestilence in its progress, even at the peril of his own life! Alas, alas, what a friend and father have we lost!'

Yes, thus it too generally is that men realize their blessings only by the loss of them. They enjoy a faithful ministry, but will not avail themselves of it, until "the lampstand is removed," and the privileges, which they have slighted, are withdrawn.

The same is too often experienced by children who have neglected the admonitions of their parents, and servants who have disregarded the instructions of their masters. Happy are those who "know the day of their visitation," and "walk in the light before the night comes!"

To those indeed who die, it is comforting to know that they shall leave such a testimony behind them; but, when we consider the augmented guilt and misery of those who have slighted our admonitions, our sorrow for them preponderates, and turns our self-congratulations into tender sympathy and grief; for the greater our exertions were for their salvation, the more certainly shall we appear as swift witnesses against them, to increase and aggravate their condemnation.

ADDRESS.

What if God were now to issue the command to any one of us: "Go up to your bed and die!" How would it be received among us? Would we welcome such an order? Would we rejoice that the period was arrived for our dismissal from the body, and for our entrance into the presence of our God? Such an order will assuredly be soon given to every one of us; the old and the young, the rich and the poor, those who have traveled all through the wilderness, and those who have but just entered into it—may have it said to them within a few hours, "This night your soul is required of you."

But, however men might receive the summons, its consequences to them would be widely different, according as they were prepared, or unprepared, to meet their God. Think:

1. You who are regardless of your eternal state.

You are now perhaps adorned in costly array, and filling some high station; perhaps, if not crowned with a mitre, like Aaron—you are at least officiating at the altar of your God. But your honors and your ornaments must all be laid aside; and your office, together with your wealth, must be transferred to others. "Naked you came into the world, and naked must you go from it."

But where must you go? To Heaven? Alas! people of your description can find no admittance there. You will be excluded, like the foolish virgins, who had no oil in their lamps. O think, from what you will be excluded; not from an earthly Canaan, but from Heaven itself; and not, to be merely bereaved of good, but to bewail your misery in Hell forever! Ah! fearful thought! May the Lord grant that it may sink down into all our hearts, and stir us up to "flee from the wrath to come!"

Do any inquire, What shall we do to he saved? My answer is, There is a High-Priest who never dies. Or rather, I should say: There is a High-Priest though once he died on Mount Calvary, now "lives, and behold he is alive for evermore!" It is to him who Moses directed you when he stripped off Aaron's robes; and to him Aaron himself directed you, when he surrendered up his soul. The typical priests being inefficient, "were not allowed to continue by reason of death; but the Lord Jesus has an unchangeable priesthood; and is therefore able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives! [Hebrews 7:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.23-25)." Believe in him, and the sting of death shall be removed; you shall have peace with God through his sin-atoning blood; and, when taken hence, shall be transported on the wings of angels to Abraham's bosom!

2. You who profess religion—yet are living at a distance from God.

Let us suppose for a moment, you are not so far from God, but that you shall find mercy at his hands in the last day; still it would be very painful to die under a cloud, and to leave your surviving friends doubtful of your state. Yet this is the best that you can expect, while you are relaxing your diligence, and "the things which remain in you are ready to die." But there is reason to fear that you are "drawing back unto perdition," and that "your last end will be worse than your beginning!"

Think not that this is an uncommon case; there are many who "seem to be religious, and yet deceive their own souls." How terrible then will be your disappointment, if, after walking, perhaps twenty, or, like Aaron, forty years, in expectation of reaching the promised land—you come short of it at last! Yet this will be the case with all who dissemble with God, [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.4-7).

When your minister, who had hoped that you would have been "his joy and crown of rejoicing" forever, shall inquire: "Where is he?" And your dearest friends also shall ask, "Where is he?" How painful will it he, and perhaps surprising too, to be informed, that you were counted unworthy of that heavenly kingdom, [Job 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.7). May the Lord grant that this picture may never be realized with respect to any of you! But I must caution you in the words of the Apostle, "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of you should seem to come short of it! [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1)."

3. You sincere and upright Christian.

What a glorious change will it be to you, when God shall bid you to go up unto your bed and die! Whatever honors you possess here, you need feel no regret at parting with them. You have found your trials in this wilderness great and manifold; and happy may you he to go unto the rest that remains for you. You have no need to be afraid of death; it should be regarded only as the stripping off of your garments, to retire to rest. Or rather, "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life! 2 Corinthians 5:4."

Go forward then in daily expectation of your summons; yes, be daily "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of that blessed day! [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12),"when you shall "depart, and be with Christ forever."

Who can conceive the bliss that awaits you at that hour? To behold Him, "of whom the Law and the Prophets testified," and in whom their testimony received its full accomplishment! To behold Him whom Aaron's love and services but faintly shadowed! Him, "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person!" Were death a thousand times more terrible than it is, it should be eagerly to be coveted as an introduction to such bliss! Methinks, impatience were a virtue with such prospects as these; or if you must wait with patience your appointed time, endeavor at least so to live, that, at whatever hour your Lord may come, you may be found ready, and have "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! [2 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.11)."

#168

THE ISRAELITES DISCOURAGED BECAUSE OF THE WAY

**[Numbers 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.4)**

"And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the journey."

The history of human nature is nearly the same in all ages. Successive generations ought progressively to advance in wisdom, because they have the advantage of others' experience. But youth will not avail themselves of the instructions of their forefathers; they will go forward in their own ways; exactly as if they had no compass whereby to steer, nor any chart of the rocks and shoals, on which so many thousands have been shipwrecked. "

A new generation had been born in the wilderness since the departure of the Israelites from the land of Egypt; and they had ample means of information respecting the rebellious conduct of their fathers, and the chastisements inflicted on account of it; yet on similar occasions they constantly acted in a similar manner, murmuring and complaining as soon as any new trial arose, and wishing themselves dead, to get rid of their present troubles. Thus it was with them at this time. We propose to inquire into:

I. The causes of their discouragement.

Doubtless, to those who could not implicitly confide in the wisdom and goodness of God, there was ground for discouragement:

1. There was **a perplexing providence**.

The period fixed for their entrance into Canaan was nearly arrived. They had just had a severe engagement with one of the Canaanite kings, who had come forth against them with all his forces; and, after suffering a partial defeat, had entirely vanquished him. But they were not allowed to follow up their success, or to proceed to the immediate invasion of his land. On the contrary, having been refused permission to pass through the territories of the king of Edom, they were directed to "compass his whole land, and to go back to the Red Sea," perhaps as far as to Ezion-geber, [Deuteronomy 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 2.8). This was after they had been thirty-nine years and six months in the wilderness; after two of their leaders, Miriam and Aaron, were taken from them by death; and when there remained but six months to the time fixed for their entrance into the promised land.

How perplexing did this appear! Must they wait to be attacked in the wilderness, and never be permitted to reap the reward of victory? Must they wait in the wilderness until their enemies would be willing to resign their land? Had God forgotten his promise, or determined that they should spend another forty years in the wilderness? If the promise was to be fulfilled, why give them the trouble of traversing the wilderness again? If it was not to be fulfilled, they had better die at once, than protract a miserable existence under such vexatious and cruel disappointments.

While they viewed the dispensation in this light, we do not wonder that "their soul was much discouraged."

In truth, this is a very common source of discouragement to ourselves. Persons, on their first commencement of their journey heaven-ward, are apt to be optimistic, and to expect that they shall speedily arrive at the promised land. At one time they seem near it, but are turned back again, in order that by a long course of trials, they may be better prepared to enjoy it. At another time they seem almost to possess it; and then, not long after, find themselves at a greater distance from it than ever. Thus "hope deferred makes their heart sick;" and being disappointed in their expectations, they yield to great dejection of mind: 'If I am not of the number of God's people, whence have I these desires? if I am, why have I not those attainments?'

The same disquietude arises from perplexities of any kind, where the *promise* of God and the *providence* of God appear at variance with each other. Not being able to account for the Lord's dealings towards them, "their souls are cast down, and greatly disquieted within them."

2. There was **a long protracted trial**.

Forty years of trial was a long period; and the nearer they came to its completion, the longer every day appeared. Hence this fresh order to go back to the Red Sea, and there to recommence their travels, quite overwhelmed them.

And how do long-continued afflictions operate on us? For a season we can bear up under them; but when pains of body, or distress of mind, are lengthened out; when the clouds, instead of dispersing, thicken, and storms of trouble are gathering all around us; then patience is apt to fail, and the mind sinks under its accumulated trials. Because "our strength is small, we faint under our adversity." Even Job, that bright pattern of patience, who after the heaviest losses could say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord;" even he, I say, fainted at last, and cursed the day of his birth! He must be endued with an uncommon measure of grace, who under such circumstances can say with Paul, "None of these things move me!"

That we may see how their discouragement operated, let us consider,

II. The effects produced by it.

Their minds being discomposed, they immediately gave way to:

1. A dissatisfied spirit.

Many were the blessings which they received from the hand of God; they lived by a continual miracle; they were provided with water out of a rock, and with manna daily from the clouds; and yet they complain, "There is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul despises this light bread." Because they did not partake of that variety which the nations around them enjoyed, they were discontented; or rather, because they were offended with the order to go back unto the Red Sea, they were displeased with everything.

What a picture is this of human frailty! The mind discouraged on one account, looks not out for circumstances of alleviation and comfort, but gives itself up to disquietude and dejection. Temporal blessings lose all their relish. Let even the bread of life be administered to people in such a frame, they can taste no sweetness in it; the promises of God seem not suited to their case; nor are they sufficient for their support. They "cannot hear the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely." If they even turn their minds to the right object, it is only to confirm their own doubts, and to augment their own sorrows. Their experience is like that of Asaph, "My sore ran in the night, and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God, and was troubled, [Psalm 77:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.2-3)."

2. A murmuring spirit.

How lamentable to hear them on this occasion accusing God and his servant Moses of having brought them out of Egypt with a view to deceive their expectations and to kill them in the wilderness! But the mind, once thrown off its bias, will stop short of nothing, unless it is restrained by the grace of God, [Isaiah 8:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.21-22). Let anyone that has been in deep affliction, look back and see, whether he has not found his mind rise against the immediate authors of his calamities, and ultimately against God himself, for having appointed him so hard a lot, [Proverbs 19:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.3).

It is true, we do not perhaps intend to accuse God; but we do it in effect; because, whoever is the instrument, it is his hand that smites. Whether Chaldeans or Sabeans invaded the property of Job, or tempests destroyed his family, the holy sufferer referred the events to God, as their true author. Without God, not a hair of our head could be touched, even if the whole world were confederate against us. When therefore we murmur at the calamities we suffer, we murmur in reality against God who sends them.

It may be asked perhaps: How could they help yielding to this discouragement? That they might have done so, will appear, while we show,

III. The way in which they should have fortified themselves against this severe affliction.

It behooved them in this trouble, as indeed in every other, to consider,

1. Whence this severe affliction came.

It did not spring out of the dust; it came from God; even from him who had brought them out of Egypt, and had supported them to that very hour. Had they not had evidence enough of God's power and goodness during the 39 years that they had continued in the wilderness? And did it not befit them to place their confidence in him, though they could not see the immediate reason of his dispensations?

Thus should we do, when tempted to disquietude and despondency; we should say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to Him," "the cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" Yes, "when walking in darkness, we should stay ourselves upon our God;" and determine with Job, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him." This was the expedient to which David resorted in the midst of all his troubles, and which he found effectual to compose his mind, "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God, [1 Samuel 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.6) with [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)."

2. For what end this severe affliction was sent.

God has expressly stated the end for which he tried them so long in the wilderness; it was, "to humble them, and to prove them, that they might know what was in their hearts, [Deuteronomy 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.2)." And was not the prospect of such an end sufficient to reconcile them to the means used for the attainment of it?

Let us also consider the ends for which our afflictions are sent; are they not sent with a view to make us "partakers of his holiness?" Who would be discouraged at his trials, if he reflected on the necessity which there is for them, and the blessed fruit that shall spring from them? Doubtless, they are "not joyous for the present, but grievous;" nevertheless the refiner's fire may well be endured, if only it purges us from our dross, and makes us, as "vessels of honor, fit for our Master's use."

3. The certain outcome of this severe affliction, if duly improved.

They were well assured that God would fulfill his promises. Even their recent victory over the Canaanites was a pledge of their future conquests. What if they did not understand the way of the Lord? The direction they had taken at their first departure from Egypt had appeared to their fathers to be erroneous; but it had proved to be "the right way;" and they should have been satisfied, that this, though alike mysterious, would have a similar outcome; and that the number and greatness of their trials would ultimately redound to the glory of their God, and to their own real happiness!

Thus we should bear in mind that all our afflictions are working together for good, and that, "light and momentary in themselves, they are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" Did we but consider this, we would be content to suffer, until we had filled up our appointed measure; yes, we would even "glory in our tribulations," knowing that we are to be "made perfect by them," and that "they are our appointed way to the kingdom of Heaven."

APPLICATION.

Certain it is that "we have need of patience, in order that, when we have done the will of God, we may inherit the promises." But let not any of the sons and daughters of affliction yield to discouragement. If their trials are great, their supports and consolations shall be great also. Are they particularly discouraged at the thought of their weakness and sinfulness? Let them recollect, what a fullness of merit and of grace is treasured up for them in Jesus; that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound; and that his strength shall surely be perfected in their weakness."

#169

THE BRONZE SERPENT

**[Numbers 21:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.8-9)**

The LORD said to Moses, "Make a serpent and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze serpent and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a serpent and looked at the bronze serpent, he lived."

It is said in Scripture, that, "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound." This declaration, if received as a licence for sin, would be pernicious in the extreme; but, if taken as an encouragement to repent, its tendency is most consolatory and beneficial. That God has magnified his grace towards the most unworthy of men, and even taken occasion from their wickedness to display the unbounded extent of his own mercy, is certain. We need only read the history of the Israelites in the wilderness, and we shall be fully convinced of this.

Their conduct was most perverse. They were truly a stiff-necked people. Notwithstanding all their experience of God's kindness towards them, they could never confide in him, but were always murmuring, and always rebelling. By their wickedness they brought down upon themselves the divine judgments; but no sooner did they implore forgiveness, than God returned to them in mercy, and put away his judgments far from them.

We have a very singular instance of this in the history before us; where we are informed, that God had, on account of their murmurings, sent fiery serpents to destroy them; but, on the intercession of Moses, had appointed them an easy remedy, by the use of which their wounds were healed, and their calamities removed.

We propose to consider,

I. The appointment itself.

The need of God's interposition was exceedingly urgent.

The wilderness abounded with serpents, such as the camp was now infested with [Deuteronomy 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.15). They were of a very malignant nature, causing by their bite a fatal inflammation. They are probably called "fiery" on this account, rather than from their color. Multitudes of the people had been bitten by them; many were dying; and many were already dead. In vain did any of them seek an antidote against the venom, with which they were in hourly expectation of being infected; nor could any means be devised to abate its force.

What then could the people do? To arm themselves against the danger, was impossible; they were assailable on every side; their assaults were irresistible. In this extremity, they apply themselves to Him, who alone was able to deliver. They humble themselves before their God; and they entreat Moses to intercede for them. If God does not have mercy on them, they must all perish. Such was the extremity to which they were reduced.

But the manner in which he interposed was perplexing.

God ordered a serpent to be made of brass, as like as possible to those which bit the people; and that serpent he commanded to be erected on a pole, in order that the wounded people might look unto it and be healed.

But what connection was there between the means and the end?

Of what use could a piece of brass be, or what could it signify of what shape it was?

Of what service could it be to look upon it?

If it were reduced to powder and swallowed; or any mixture were made with an infusion of brass in it; one might suppose it possible that such a prescription might be of some use; there might be some affinity between the remedy and the disease. But, when such an order as that in our text was given, it seemed rather as if God were only "laughing at their calamity, and mocking now that their fear was come."

Strange however as this might appear at the time, the reason of it is clear to us, who know,

II. The mystery contained in this appointment .

That the deepest mysteries of our holy religion were shadowed forth by it, we are well assured, because our blessed Lord has expressly referred to it as illustrative and explanatory of them. Let us, for distinctness' sake, consider:

1. The provision made.

God ordered that a bronze serpent should be made like unto the other serpents, (but without their venom;) and that it should be erected on a pole in the midst of the camp. And herein was a great mystery.

What, I would ask, is the provision which God has made for the recovery of a ruined world? Has he not sent his only dear Son into the world, to he made "in the likeness of sinful flesh," yes, to he "made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted, [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3) with [Hebrews 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17); [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15)." Has he not caused that glorious Person to be suspended on a cross, and to yield up his own life a sacrifice for sin? Has he not moreover commanded that in every place, and in every age, that adorable Savior should, by the preaching of the everlasting Gospel, be "evidently set forth crucified before the eyes of men, [Galatians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.1)."

Here then we behold that which was prefigured by the bronze serpent. In affirming this, we speak only what our Lord himself has declared in [John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14). Indeed on several different occasions did he refer to this type, as to receive in due season its accomplishment in him, [John 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.28); [John 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32).

O how are we indebted to God for the light of his blessed Gospel! Little did the Israelites know what a stupendous mercy was here exhibited to their view. Doubtless, as a mere ordinance for the healing of their bodies, they should be thankful for it; but how thankful should we be, who see in it such a wonderful provision for our souls! Let us contemplate it; God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, Jehovah's Fellow—made incarnate! The Deity himself assuming our nature with all its sinless infirmities, and dying an accursed death upon the cross! And this too for the salvation of his own rebellious creatures! O let us never for one moment forget that this is the means which God has appointed for our deliverance from death and Hell. Let us contemplate it, until our hearts are altogether absorbed in wonder, love, and praise.

2. The direction given.

The only thing which the Israelites had to do, was to look unto the bronze serpent. There was nothing else required of them; they were not first to heal themselves in part; or to apply any other remedy in conjunction with this; nor were they to do anything either to merit, or to increase its efficacy; they were simply to look unto the serpent, as God's ordinance for their recovery.

Here then we behold a further mystery. Never from the foundation of the world was the way of salvation more plainly, more fully, or more intelligibly declared, than in this simple method of obtaining the desired blessing. Salvation is only and entirely by faith in Christ. The direction which Christ himself gives us by the Prophet Isaiah, is this, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)." And when he sent forth his disciples to preach his Gospel, he especially charged them to declare, that "he who believed would be saved; and he who believed not would be damned, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16)."

Many other things indeed he requires of his people; he requires that they should repent, in order to evince that they truly desire mercy; and that they should obey, in order to manifest that they have obtained mercy; but both their repentance and obedience are carefully excluded from the office of justifying; justification is invariably declared to be by faith alone. "It is by faith in order that it may be by grace, [John 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.15) with [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16); [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6) and [Ephesians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8-9);" and, when we have learned how much the Israelites did for the healing of their bodies, then we shall know how much our own works are to procure the healing of our souls.

In this view the type before us is singularly instructive; it is so plain, that it is obvious to the lowest apprehension; so comprehensive, that nothing can be added for the elucidation of it; and so authenticated, that scepticism itself cannot doubt either its reference or its accomplishment.

3. The effect produced.

If any despised the remedy, they died; whereas not a single instance occurred, throughout all the camp of Israel, of any person resorting to it in vain. However desperate his state was, however distant he might be from the serpent, or however indistinctly he beheld it—the effect was still the same; every person who looked to it as God's ordinance for the healing of his wounds, was healed by it; he was healed immediately, and he was healed perfectly.

The man that can see no mystery here, is blind indeed. We may defy the ingenuity of men or angels to devise any means whereby the efficacy of faith in Christ should be more clearly ascertained. Plain indeed is that declaration of Paul, "All who believe, are justified from all things [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39);" but, as plain as it is, it does not so forcibly strike the mind, as does the typical representation in our text.

All the questions that can arise respecting the nature and the efficacy of faith, are here distinctly answered. If suppositions are made which can never be verified, then no wonder if difficulties occur which cannot be solved. But let us only remember, that faith is a looking to Christ for salvation, and that that faith is uniformly and universally productive of good works; and then we can no more doubt its efficacy to save the soul, than we can doubt the veracity of God.

We inquire not, whether that faith is strong or weak; (though doubtless the stronger it is, the more abundant will be its fruits.) We only ask whether it is genuine and sincere; and then we do not hesitate to affirm, that the possessor of it "shall be saved;" "he shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end! [Acts 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.31) with [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

Address,

1. Those who are averse to this method of salvation.

Many there are to whom the doctrine of salvation by faith alone is an object of disgust. It was so in the first ages of Christianity; and it is so still to the greater part of the professing Christian world. But though the cross of Christ is still, as formerly, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet is it at this time, as it was then, "the power of God and the wisdom of God! [1 Corinthians 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23-24)."

If it is objected, that to be saved by faith alone, and by faith in One who saved not himself, appears absurd; we answer, That such an objection might with just as much reason have been urged against the healing of dying men by the sight of a bronze serpent; and that it is not for us to prescribe to God in what way he shall save a ruined world. It is not for us to dictate, but obey. Were there therefore really as little connection between the means and the end in the gospel salvation, as there was in the typical representation of it, it would still be our duty thankfully to submit to the remedy proposed.

But this is not the case; it would be easy to show that there is a wonderful suitableness between the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and the mercy given to us for his sake; nor is there a less suitableness between our exercise of faith in him, and his communication of grace to us. But without entering into that discussion at present, we refer to the type as decisive of the point.

"Wash and be clean!" was said to Naaman.

"Look and be healed," was said to Israel.

"Believe and be saved," is said to us.

This is Christ's message to a guilty world; and "blessed is he who shall not be offended in him."

2. Those who have experienced its saving benefits.

The bronze serpent was carried by the Israelites throughout all the remainder of their journey; and, if they had been bitten again by the fiery serpents, they would doubtless have had recourse again to the remedy, which they had once found to be effectual.

Just so, the need of repeated applications to our remedy is daily recurring; and, thanks be to God! its efficacy is undiminished. To all therefore would we repeat the direction before given, "Look unto Christ and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" If those around you doubt, as certainly they will doubt, the efficacy of faith, then let them read it in your whole conduct; let them see that your corruptions are mortified, and your evil dispositions are healed. Let them see that there is a difference between you and those around you, and such a difference too, as nothing but faith in Christ can produce.

They will be boasting of other remedies, which, in spite of their utmost exertions, they will find ineffectual; but let them see in you the superior excellence of that which God has revealed in his Gospel. Declare to them the way of life; exalt the Lord Jesus in their eyes; commend him to them with your lips; but most of all commend him to them in your lives.

In a word, let your whole conduct be a visible commentary on those words of the Apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

#170

BALAAM'S CHARACTER

**[Numbers 22:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 22.18-19)**

But Balaam answered them, "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my God. Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the LORD will tell me."

The study of human nature is ever profitable. Much insight into it may be gained from history; much from converse with the world; and much from the examination of our own hearts. But that which we acquire from a perusal of the Holy Scriptures is the most clear and certain, because we have all the circumstances in one view before our eyes, and have infallible information respecting the motives and principles by which the different agents were influenced.

The character of Balaam is peculiarly instructive. He was a man eminent as a soothsayer; and it was supposed that he could influence the fate, not of individuals only, but of nations, by his sentence of blessing or malediction. Persons of his description were frequently employed by kings at the commencement of a war, to curse their enemies to destruction; and, among the Romans, an officer was appointed particularly to that office. This man was applied to by Balak, the king of Moab, to come and curse Israel; who, as they feared, would vanquish them all, as easily "as an ox licks up the grass." This message gave occasion to Balaam to display what was in his heart. We propose to show you,

I. The inconsistency of Balaam's character.

That we may have a more distinct view of his character, we shall notice:

1. The contrariety between his **opinions** and **desires**.

The desires of man by nature are altogether earthly and sensual; but when spiritual light breaks in upon his mind, and he is made to see in a measure the evil of such desires, a conflict begins within him. It is in this state that multitudes go on; they see the better path, and approve it in their minds; but they cannot, will not, follow it; there are some gratifications which they know not how to forego, and some interests which they cannot prevail upon themselves to give up; and hence they proceed in a painful opposition to the dictates of their own consciences, being habitually self-convicted and self-condemned. They "hate the light," and, as the Scripture strongly expresses it, "rebel against the light."

Such was the state of Balaam. His views of divine truth were very enlarged, when we consider the age and country in which he lived. He had a considerable knowledge of God and his perfections; yes, of Christ also, together with the kingdom which he should establish upon earth, [Numbers 24:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.17-19). He was acquainted with the nature of truly spiritual religion, [Micah 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.6-8); and saw, not only the certainty of a future state, but the certainty, that, in that state, there would be an inconceivable difference between the righteous and the wicked.

But still he was a covetous and ambitious man; and as soon as a prospect of gratifying his evil propensities was opened to him, he bore down the better convictions of his own mind, and determinately set himself to do evil.

2. The contrariety between his **professions** and **conduct**.

Who that had heard all the fine speeches which he made respecting his determination to adhere to the will of God, even though he should be able to gain "a house full of silver and gold" by disobeying it; and his pious advice to Balak, "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God;" who that had seen him apparently so fearful of stirring a step, or speaking a word, without the divine counsel and direction—would not have conceived him to be a pious character?

Yet from beginning to the end his conduct was a continued course of horrible impiety. After he had once consulted God, and had received from him a determined answer that "he should not go with the messengers, and that he should not curse Israel, for that they were, and should be, blessed;" what had he to do, but to dismiss the messengers with a plain, full, determined answer?

When the second company of ambassadors came, he should not have listened to them a moment; but should have been as peremptory in his answer to them as to the former. His second application for direction was only an insult to the Divine Majesty, and a spreading of a net for his own feet. God, seeing how bent he was upon the attainment of his own ends, (the acquisition of wealth and honor,) no more interposed with authority to prevent him, but on certain conditions gave him a permission to go. No sooner was a conditional permission given, than Balaam, without waiting for the conditions, set out upon his journey. God, in mercy to him, interposed by a miracle to obstruct his way; and caused a dumb donkey to reprove him, verse 22-34 with [2 Peter 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.16); but even this produced nothing more than a momentary conviction of his sin, which however he was still determined to persist in; and, having obtained from the angel what he construed into a permission to proceed, but which was rather a declaration that the ends of his journey should be defeated; (for that he should not be permitted to speak anything which was not put into his mouth by God himself;) onward he goes, and addresses himself to his impious work with activity and perseverance.

In all his renewed endeavors to curse Israel, he found himself constrained to bless them, insomuch that Balak, furiously enraged against him, dismissed him without any of the riches or honors which he had so eagerly sought after!

Now, it might be hoped, that Balaam at last should see his error, and humble himself for his iniquity. But, instead of this, he devised a plan whereby that people, who could not be subdued by war, might be beguiled into sin, and thereby subjected to the displeasure of their Almighty Protector. He advised Balak to make use of the Midianite women, first to allure them to fornication, and then to draw them to idolatry; and by this means to destroy the souls of those, whom he could not otherwise injure. Compare [Numbers 31:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.16) with [Revelation 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.14).

Now compare this with all his professions of reverence for God, of regard for holiness, and of a desire after everlasting happiness; and what an astonishing inconsistency will appear!

But, in truth, though his circumstances were peculiar, his state is common. Many, many are the people, who, amidst high professions of regard for religion—are as much actuated by love of wealth and honor as ever Balaam was; and, if they can only obtain their own ends, are as little scrupulous as he about the means to obtain the wealth they desire. Such are they who resemble the ancient Pharisees, on the one hand; and such also are the descendants of Judas and of Demas, on the other hand. Such characters abounded even in the apostolic age, [2 Peter 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14-15) with [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1) and former part of verse 9; and we must not wonder, if they be to are found also in the present day! [Ezekiel 33:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31).

In the course of this history, while we mark the inconsistency of Balaam, we cannot but notice also,

II. The consequences resulting from Balaam's character.

Let us attend to those which resulted,

1. The consequences to **Balak**.

Balak had raised his expectations high, and had hoped to derive great advantage from the aid of Balaam, "I know that he whom you bless, is blessed; and he whom you curse, is cursed." But, after all his expense and trouble, he found that he had trusted to a broken reed; and was constrained to dismiss with indignation the man, whom he had so anxiously endeavored to interest in his favor.

What a picture does this afford us of the disappointment too often generated in the minds of men by hypocritical professors!

One perhaps, having heard of the religious principles of such or such a servant, promises himself the highest satisfaction in connection with him; but finds him, after all, conceited, idle, deceitful, disobedient.

Another deals with such or such a tradesman, in expectation that he shall find in him the integrity suited to his religious professions; but soon learns that others who know nothing of religion, are more honorable, and more to be depended on, than he.

Another contracts a matrimonial alliance, from the presumption that the person's opinions will have a suitable influence on his conduct; but learns afterwards by bitter experience, that asperities of temper, and imprudences of conduct, even such as any moral person would be ashamed of, are too often cloaked under a garb of religion, and gratified, to the utter subversion of domestic happiness.

Need we say, what a wound such conduct gives to religion, or what a stumbling-block it lays in the way of the ungodly? Truly, through such people "the way of truth is evil spoken of," the prejudices of thousands are confirmed, and the name of our God and Savior is blasphemed.

2. The consequences to **Israel**.

Though the enchantments of Balaam were unavailing, his diabolical advice was but too successful; the Israelites, unable to resist the allurements of the Midianite women, were betrayed into an unlawful commerce with them; and thus fell into the snare which Balak had laid for them, and brought upon themselves the heavy displeasure of their God.

And are not hypocritical professors a snare to many? Do they not, either, by a spirit of disputation, turn weak believers "from the simplicity of the Gospel;" or, by a spirit of licentiousness, (which they call liberty,) induce them to violate their own consciences? Multitudes of such professors there have been, and yet are, in the Christian Church; nor will it ever be known until the day of judgment, how many "weak brethren, for whom Christ died, have perished" through their mean, 1 Corinthians 8:9-12.

3. The consequences to **himself**.

It might have been hoped, that after having been constrained to bless Israel, and thus to lose "the rewards of divination" which he coveted, he would have seen "his error," and repented of it. But this is very rarely the lot of those who proceed for any time in a willful opposition to the convictions of their own minds; they generally become "seared in their consciences," and hardened in their sins.

Thus it was with Balaam. Though foiled for the present in his hopes of gain, he would not relinquish his pursuit of it, but still continued among the Midianites, and soon afterwards was involved in their destruction, [Numbers 31:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.8); [Joshua 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 13.22).

What a lesson does this teach us! What a prospect does it afford to all who yield themselves to the dominion of an unhallowed appetite! How vain his wish to have "his end like that of the righteous," when he would not resemble them in his life! And truly, if we follow his steps, we shall, like him, perish miserably at last among the enemies of God.

Learn then from this history:

1. The danger of indulging any besetting sin.

The sin of Balaam was covetousness; and we see how it hurried him from one iniquity to another, until it brought him finally to destruction, both of body and soul! Nor is this an uncommon case. There is scarcely any principle more common, or more destructive, than a desire after wealth and preferment. "The love of money," says the Apostle, "is the root of all evil; and many, by coveting after it, have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows! [1 Timothy 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.9-10)."

The facility with which men deceive themselves in relation to this principle, renders it peculiarly dangerous. It scarcely ever appears in any other light than as a venial, at least, if not a commendable, quality. It is likely that Balaam himself did not see the extent of his own iniquity; he probably conceived himself to be solicitous only to know and do the will of God. But an inspired Apostle says of him, that "he loved the wages of unrighteousness," and "ran greedily after error for reward!"

Beware then, brethren, lest, while you think yourselves only prudent and discreet, God himself should "choose your delusions," "give you up to a reprobate mind," impute the same as sin unto you, and assign you your doom among his enemies. Whatever excites in you even a wish to violate the commands of God, will, if not restrained and mortified, assuredly "drown you in destruction and perdition!"

2. The necessity of acting conformably with our principles and professions.

Happy would it have been for Balaam, if he had so done!

Of what use was his knowledge of God, whom he did not fear?

Of what benefit was his views of Christ, whom he did not love?

Of what benefit was his knowledge of his duty, when he would not practice it?

Of what benefit was his persuasion of a future judgment, for which he made no exertions to prepare?

These things served only to enhance his guilt, and to aggravate his condemnation. Thus will it be with us, "it would have been better never to have known anything of the way of righteousness, than to" oppose it, or "depart from it." "The servant that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with more stripes, than the servant who sinned through ignorance."

I would earnestly entreat you therefore, brethren, to walk according to the light which you possess. Do not, like Balaam, "hold the truth in unrighteousness;" do not "profess that you know God, and at the same time in your works deny him;" but rather be yourselves examples unto others, that they may in you behold the sanctifying efficacy of your faith, and the excellency of that religion which you profess.

#171

BALAAM OBSTRUCTED BY THE ANGEL

**[Numbers 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 22.31)**

"Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown."

The ministry of angels is frequently asserted both in the Old and New Testament; but, because the angels are not seen, it is scarcely believed among us. Nevertheless, there is not any doctrine more fully established than this; nor scarcely any more clearly exemplified. We need only look to the passage before us; and there we see an angel deputed to intercept Balaam in his way to Midian, and to stop him in his career of wickedness.

Whether the angel were the Son of God himself, "the Angel of the Covenant," with whom Jacob afterwards wrestled, [Hosea 12:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.3-5), we will not absolutely determine; but the context seems to countenance the idea that it was. See verse 32, 35. At all events he had the appearance of an angel, and acted in the capacity of a messenger from Heaven. For a considerable time Balaam did not see him; though the donkey on which he rode, both saw, and endeavored to avoid him. The whole story is so singular, that some have represented it as a vision. But, while that mode of accounting for the circumstances renders them not at all less miraculous than the more obvious interpretation, (for a divine agency would be as necessary in that case, as in the other,) it directly opposes the assertions of the historian, and the testimony of an inspired Apostle, [2 Peter 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.16). We can have no doubt but that the facts happened as they are related; and, that we may present them before you in a more easy manner, we will call your attention to some observations founded upon them.

I. God often mercifully interposes to obstruct sinners in their evil ways.

Balaam, though he professed to be acting by the divine appointment, was in reality going in opposition to the will of God. The permission which had been granted him conditionally, he had construed as unconditional; and when God had declared that Israel should be blessed, Balaam was going with a desire and purpose to curse them. God, to awaken him to a sense of his wickedness, sent an angel to stop him in his way, and to make known to him the evil of his conduct.

It is thus that God often interposes to arrest the progress of sinners, and prevent the commission of iniquity. We do not say that he often proceeds precisely in this way; he has a great variety of ways in which he carries this gracious purpose into execution. Elihu, in his address to Job, directly affirms, that God does interpose, and in a variety of ways too, for this gracious end, [Job 33:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.14-17); and the Scriptures universally attest the truth of his remark.

Sometimes God endeavors to divert men from their purpose by a dream, (as Pilate, by a dream of his wife, [Matthew 27:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.19);) sometimes by a vision, (as Saul, in his way to Damascus, [Acts 9:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.3-4);) sometimes by a judgment, (as Jeroboam, when he stretched out his hand against the man of God, [1 Kings 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 13.4);) sometimes by a human monitor, (as David, by Abigail, 1 Samuel 25:32-33;) and sometimes by an unforeseen occurrence, (as Saul, when having encompassed David with his army, was called away from him by a sudden invasion of the Philistines, [1 Samuel 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.28).) We cannot enumerate, nor indeed conceive, the infinite variety of methods by which God withstands sinners; but all of us, on reflection, must acknowledge both the reality and frequency of his interpositions.

How often has it happened that the thief, the robber, the housebreaker, and the murderer, have been deterred from their purpose by the approach of some unexpected person, or by some suggestion of their own minds!

How often have people under a strong temptation to gratify their lusts, been kept from the actual commission of fornication or adultery by some little occurrence, some noise, some apprehension, some qualm of conscience, which God, in mercy to their souls, has sent to interrupt them!

How many unhappy women have been kept from destroying their infant children, either before or after their birth, by some considerations widely different from the fear of sin!

It is a well-known fact, that many people, but for such restraints as these, would have even destroyed their own lives; and perhaps, of the many who actually do commit suicide, there is scarcely one, who has not been repeatedly diverted from his purpose, before he could find it in his heart to carry it into execution.

So common are the interpositions of God for the prevention of sin, and the rescue of those who would commit it! But,

II. God's most signal interpositions often excite only the wrath of those for whose benefit they are sent.

Thrice was Balaam interrupted in his course.

The first time, his donkey turned aside into a field, to avoid the angel.

The next time, he ran up against a wall.

The third time, having no other method of avoiding him left, he fell down.

At each time Balaam's anger was kindled; and at last it rose to such a height, that even the strange phenomenon of the donkey speaking, as with a human voice, and expostulating with him, was not sufficient to arrest his attention; his only reply was, that he wished for a sword that he might kill her. Had he known at the time what danger he was exposed to, and what obligations he owed to his beast for that very conduct which so incensed him, he would have seen that he had reason for unbounded thankfulness, where he thought that he had the greatest reason to complain.

And is it not thus oftentimes with us? If nothing had been revealed to us respecting the deliverance of Balaam, we would have thought him fully justified in his anger. Just so, because we do not see the particular mercies which God gives to us, we think ourselves justified in raging against the means and instruments that he employs.

There are a thousand things which we call accidents, on which the greatest events depend. Evils might have come to us, or blessings might have been lost, if some circumstance, which at the time we deemed most unfortunate, had not taken place. Nor can any but God himself conceive the extent to which we are indebted to him for things, which at the time excited our grief and indignation.

On this subject, I must leave everyone to consult his own experience. But there is one view of it which will come home to the hearts of all. How often, when God has sent a guardian angel, a friend or minister, to instruct and warn us—have his reproofs kindled resentment, rather than gratitude, in our minds! How many of us now see reason to be thankful for warnings which once excited our displeasure, while others have been eternally ruined by continuing to disregard them! Think only of the ministry of Christ and his Apostles, and of the different states of those who rejected or received their testimony, and this part of our subject will need no further comment. Moreover,

III. Those interpositions which are acknowledged to have been sent in mercy, produce, for the most part, a very transient effect.

Balaam, when his eyes were opened, and he was informed that he had narrowly escaped death, acknowledged his sin, and professed a readiness to return. But it is observable, that his very confession touches only on the supposed guilt of attempting to proceed in opposition to the angel, and not on the real guilt of going with a disposition and purpose directly opposed to the known will of God. So far from being humbled for this offence, he was glad at any rate to gain a renewed permission to prosecute his vile designs. Nor did he afterwards reflect, or repent of his evil ways; but persisted in them, until vengeance overtook him, and he perished among the enemies of God!

Just so, have we at times been made sensible of our danger. Some great calamity has overtaken us, or disease has brought us to the gates of death. Then we have acknowledged our sins, and professed a willingness to forsake them. But no sooner have the impediments been removed, than "our goodness has proved as the morning dew; and as the early cloud it has passed away."

Thus it was with Pharaoh, when God, by many successive judgments, strove to overcome his obstinacy; and thus it was with Saul, when David repeatedly spared his life. The judgments and mercies of God affected both of them for a moment, so that they confessed their sins; but the effect was transient, and they perished under an accumulated weight of guilt!

O that it may not be so with us! O that we may not any longer resemble the rebellious Israelites, [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-37); lest, like them, we exhaust the patience of our God, and provoke him to "swear in his wrath that we shall never enter into his rest!"

Address,

1. Those who are bent on their evil ways.

Covetousness is a common and destructive sin; and many are guilty of it, while they seem unconscious of any great evil. They are decidedly guilty of it, who prefer the prosecution of their interests to the will of God and the welfare of his people. Let such offenders know then, that God and his Angel stand before them with a fiery sword; and that, for anything they know, the very next step they take may transmit them to the presence of an angry God. Methinks the brute creation that obey their will, would, if their mouths were opened, rebuke their disobedience, more pointedly than ever Balaam's donkey rebuked him, [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.2-3); [Jeremiah 8:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.5-7).

See, brethren, how Solomon describes your state, [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3). see how he warns you of your end, [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1). O beg of God, that he would never give you his permission to proceed, but contend with you effectually, until he has gained his point! If once "he gives you up," and says, "Let him alone! [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12); [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)," It would have been better for you that you had never been born!

2. Those who desire to return from their evil ways.

Whatever have been the means of stopping your career, be thankful for it; falls or bruises, such as Balaam had, are mercies when sent for such an end. Bear in mind what your conduct has been [Isaiah 57:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.17), and be humbled on account of it in dust and ashes. Bear in mind too that you will assuredly "return, like the dog to his vomit," if Almighty God do not keep you by his grace. But he has promised to his people to "hedge up their way with thorns, and to build a wall against them, that they may not find their former ways [Hosea 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.6-7);" entreat him earnestly to do this for you; and to "keep you by his own power through faith unto salvation."

#172

BALAAM'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL

**[Numbers 23:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.7-10)**

Then Balaam uttered his oracle: "Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. 'Come,' he said, 'curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.' How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the LORD has not denounced? From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them. I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like theirs!"

It is scarcely to be conceived to what a degree *superstition* will blind the eyes of men. There is nothing so absurd or incredible, which a person under the influence of it is not ready to believe. Who would imagine that people could be brought to believe the infallibility of the Pope, and the power of the Popish priests to forgive sin? Who would suppose that any person could be brought to believe, that a priest is able to convert bread and wine into the body and soul; yes, and into the Godhead also, of Christ; and that every individual who partakes of that bread and wine, eats and drinks the whole body, the whole soul, and the whole Godhead of Christ? Yet these things are credited by millions of people, as firmly as they believe that there is a God.

Were it not that we have such evidence of the power of superstition in later ages, we could scarcely conceive, that any Being endowed with reason would act like Balak, when he sent for Balaam to curse Israel. How could he entertain such a foolish thought, as that Balaam should be able to inflict a curse upon the whole Israelitish nation, so as to ensure the conquest of them to the king of Moab? Yet this superstition prevailed, not only there, and at that time, but fifteen hundred years afterwards at Rome also, where there was an officer expressly appointed to imprecate curses on their enemies.

How little it was in the power of Balaam to effect, we see in every renewed attempt that he made. So far from being able to inflict a curse on Israel, he was not able even to denounce one; for God overruled and constrained him to bless the people whom he desired to curse.

Having offered seven bullocks and seven rams on as many altars, he came to Balak, who was anxiously expecting the accomplishment of his wishes. But, behold, the man on whose power he relied to curse Israel, was constrained explicitly to declare,

I. Israel's **security**.

Balaam acknowledges that it was not in his power to curse them; and declares that, instead of being vanquished by Balak, they would prevail against every enemy, and be a peculiar people to the end of time.

This has ever since been verified in relation to those who are Israelites after the **flesh**.

That nation did prevail over their enemies. They did get possession of Canaan. They did maintain it against all their enemies, until, for their iniquities, God sent them into captivity in Babylon. Yet even there did they retain their peculiarities; yes, even at this day, though dispersed through every country under Heaven, they are as much a peculiar people as ever. Other nations, when vanquished and dispersed, have become incorporated with their victors, and been assimilated to the people among whom they have dwelt; but the Jews in every country are still a distinct people; and are living witnesses of the truth of this prophecy.

It is no less verified in relation to the **spiritual** Israel.

Every blessing promised to Abraham and his natural seed was, in a spiritual sense, made also to his spiritual seed. The Gospel itself, with all the blessings of salvation, was contained in that promise, "In your seed shall all nations be "blessed, [Galatians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.8)." It is evident, moreover, that Balaam himself was instructed by God to prophesy of people under the gospel dispensation, even of those who should be the subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ, [Numbers 24:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.17-19).

Now they are indeed a peculiar people, [Exodus 19:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.5-6); 1 Peter 2:9." They "dwell alone;" "though in the world, they are not of the world, even as Christ himself was not of the world, [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16);" they "are not conformed to it;" "they come out from it and are separate;" they can "have no more communion with it, than light can have with darkness, or Christ with Belial." They dwell in the midst of enemies. Wherever they are, they are, and ever have been, in a greater or less degree, objects of hatred and persecution. Every possible method has been used to extirpate them; but no enemy has ever been able to prevail against them. They are still, and ever shall be, monuments of God's saving power, and objects of his saving love.

II. Israel's **increase**.

The Israelites, as a nation, became very numerous.

At the time that Balaam saw them, they probably amounted to two million people; but after their settlement in Canaan they multiplied exceedingly, so as to fulfill the promise made to Abraham, [Genesis 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.14), and to justify the declaration in the text.

But the true Israel shall indeed be "as the dust of the earth".

In the first ages of Christianity they were spread over the whole Roman empire; and though we acknowledge that hitherto they have not been numerous, when compared with their enemies—yet we are assured, that they shall in due time cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and for the space of a thousand years fill the whole earth. And, if we consider how they will multiply when wars shall cease, when the diseases arising from men's folly and wickedness shall be removed, and "the man dying at a hundred years old shall be considered but a child" brought to an untimely end, [Isaiah 65:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.20); we may well imagine, that their numbers shall far exceed that of all who have perished in their sins. We are sure at all events, that, in the last day, they shall be "a multitude, which no man can number, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue;" and that they shall join together in everlasting hallelujahs, "saying, Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb! [Revelation 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.10)." O blessed period! May "God hasten it, in His time!"

III. Israel's **happiness**.

Balaam proclaims them happy also in their eternal state.

Here he must refer to those who were the true Israelites; since an ungodly Jew can no more be saved, than an ungodly heathen. And it is worthy of notice, how strongly he asserts the happiness of the godly in the future world. He looked forward to their future state; he saw them distinguished from the ungodly; he saw, that, however they might be involved in the calamities of the wicked here, they would be translated by death to a state of endless felicity; hence he envied them, and desired to have "his last end like theirs!"

And truly in this view believers are objects of **envy**to the whole world.

The wish that Balaam expressed is the wish of every man, even of the most abandoned. There is no one living under the light of the Gospel, but feels an inward persuasion that God will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked. However much he may hates the godly, he envies their state; and has at some time the thought arising in his mind, 'If I were now to die, I should be glad to be found in your state.' And well may this be the case, seeing that God has prepared for them "such good things as surpass man's understanding". Were it not for their future prospects, Christians would be rather in a pitiable condition, especially in seasons of bitter persecution [1 Corinthians 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.19). But, with such hopes before them, they can be in no condition whatever, wherein they are not greatly to be envied.

To improve this subject, we shall add:

1. A word of **warning**.

Balaam by all his efforts could not prevail on God to reverse his word respecting Israel; on the contrary, the word which he delivered by God's command has been fulfilled to them in all ages.

Just so, shall not what God has spoken both here and elsewhere, respecting the end of the righteous and the wicked, be fulfilled? Shall any man die the death of the righteous, if he will not live his life; or shall he attain his end without walking in his way? If God has declared that he will "put a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not," who shall prevail upon him to change his mind? Or "who shall harden himself against him, and prosper?" O, think of this, beloved, and do not buoy up yourselves with unfounded expectations of Heaven at last; for "God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent."

2. A word of **consolation**.

Little did Israel know what plots were formed against them; but God knew, and counteracted them all. Thus it is with God's Israel now. Both men and devils are confederate against them. Satan especially, "like a roaring lion, goes about seeking, if possible, to devour them;" but God overrules all their devices for good, and gives us a blessing where they would have sent a curse. He has promised, that "no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper;" and he will fulfill it even to the end; he will "keep us by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation."

Let us then not say, "A conspiracy! a conspiracy!" But let us "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and make him our fear, and him our dread." He will be "a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us;" he will keep us even as the apple of his eye; nor "shall any one who trusts in him, ever be ashamed or confounded world without end."

As Balaam could not prevail against Israel of old, so "not all the gates of Hell shall prevail against us!" Only put your trust in God, and you may, in the language of the Apostle, defy the whole universe to "separate you from the love of God! [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)."

#173

BALAAM'S SECOND ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL

**[Numbers 23:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.18-23)**

Then he uttered his oracle: "Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it. "No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of a wild ox. There is no sorcery against Jacob, no divination against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'See what God has done!'"

The distinct answers which God gave to Balaam are surely deserving of distinct consideration. The general scope of them indeed is the same; namely, that Israel should be blessed; but the terms in which that declaration was made, are diversified, and contain in them a great variety of important matter.

We are astonished indeed that God would condescend to notice Balaam a second time, more especially as he had the impiety to approach him with divinations and enchantments, [Numbers 24:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.1). But, for the sake of his Church and people, the Lord himself met Balaam again, and constrained him, in his reply to Balak, to declare,

I. The **immutability** of God.

Balaam had endeavored to turn God from his purpose; and perhaps, from having, as he conceived, prevailed upon him to reverse his word before, he hoped to succeed in like manner again. But he was compelled to confess to Balak the inefficacy of his attempts to change the mind of God.

Balak had supposed Balaam to be capable of effecting great things; and had imputed his former answer to a lack of inclination, rather than of power, to comply with his wishes. But Balaam here distinctly confesses, that it was not in his power to "reverse," or alter, what God had spoken; and that, consequently, it was in vain to make any renewed attempts.

Man, from a variety of causes, might be led to change his mind; he might gain a further insight into a matter than he had possessed before; or he might be biased by some intervening interests; or he might find himself incapable of executing his projects for lack of power.

But no such occasions of change can exist in God, for "He is not a man that he should lie;" there is in him "no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" "He cannot lie;" "it is impossible that he lie, [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2); [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18)." He is as unchangeable in his purposes, as he is in his perfections, "He is of one mind; and who can turn him?" So self-evident was this truth, that Balaam appealed even to the conscience of Balak himself respecting it, "Has he said—and shall he not do it?"

This view of the Deity was a sufficient answer to Balak; it was a pledge to him, that the promises originally made to Abraham would be fulfilled to his descendants. And it is an answer too to all the unbelieving fears which occasionally arise in our minds. "God's gifts and callings are without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)." "He will not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22);" and it is owing solely to the unchangeableness of his mercies, that anyone of his people escapes destruction, "He changes not; and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed! [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6)."

The immutability of God being established, Balaam proceeded to recite,

II. The **kindness** which God had **already**shown to his people.

This was such as gave Balak but little hope of ever succeeding against them.

God had forgiven their sins, so that nothing which they had done amiss should ever provoke him to destroy them. Doubtless there was in them much "iniquity," and much "perverseness;" but they had not renounced their allegiance to him or their affiance in him; and therefore he would not give them up to their enemies. He had "cast all their sins behind his back into the depths of the sea," and he viewed them only with an eye of love and mercy. He considered them still as his peculiar people; and he dwelt in the midst of them as their God. Moreover, such manifestations did he afford them of his love and favor, that they could not but rejoice in their security, and triumph in him, with shouts and acclamations, as their Almighty Protector.

It shows us also what God does for his redeemed people at this time.

The best of God's people are but imperfect creatures, "in many things we all sin." But, if we are truly his, "he does not behold iniquity or wickedness in us." We are not by this to understand, that sin, if committed by the Lord's people, is not sinful; or that it is not most hateful in his eyes; but we are to understand that he is "not extreme to mark what we do amiss;" that, on the contrary, he views us as "perfect in Christ Jesus," by whom we are "presented faultless before him," and through whose blood and righteousness we are made "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, yes holy, and without blemish! [Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27); Jude verse 24."

Regarding us thus as objects of his favor, he delights to dwell among us, to abide with us, to manifest himself to us, and to "fill us with joy and peace in believing;" so that he enables us to say with the Apostle, "Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus!" Truly, "the children of Zion are made joyful in their King," yes, they "ever shout for joy, because he defends them;" "they sing unto him for the excellent things which he has done; they cry out and shout, because great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of them! [Psalm 126:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.1-2) and [Isaiah 12:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.5-6)."

From the mention of what God has done for his people, Balaam went on to declare,

III. The **kindness** which God has **yet**in reserve for his people.

The time was soon to come when all the surrounding nations would be astonished at it.

God had already "brought them out of Egypt, and given them, as it were, the strength of an ox." He had suffered no machinations of men or devils to prevail against them. He had fulfilled all his promises to them hitherto; and the time was now nearly arrived, when he would accomplish them in their full extent. However formidable the opposition to them might be, "His people rise like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion that does not rest until he devours his prey and drinks the blood of his victims." In a word, such should be his marvelous interpositions in their favor, that all who beheld them would exclaim, "See what God has done!"

All of this was but a mere shadow of the kindness God has laid up for us, his redeemed people.

It is not from an Egyptian tyrant that we are delivered, but from sin and Satan, death and Hell! Nor are we endued with strength against an earthly enemy, but against all the powers of darkness; insomuch that "Satan himself shall shortly be bruised under our feet." Not only shall "the gates of Hell never prevail against his Church" at large, but not against even the weakest of his people; both Christ and his Father are pledged, that "however weak the believer may be, none shall ever be able to pluck him out of their hands! [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)." The least of the flock have no more cause to fear than the greatest; for "it is the Father's good pleasure to give the possession of his kingdom to the one as well as to the other, [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)." The weakest shall be "strong in the Lord," yes, strong as a lion; he shall be "able to do all things" that are conducive to his welfare; and shall be "more than conqueror through Him who loved him."

O what "a wonder is he unto many," even at this time! and what a wonder will he be, both to himself and others, in the eternal world! When the whole Israel of God shall be in possession of the heavenly land, how will each say, on a review of his own mercies in particular, as well as those given to the whole collective body, "See what God has done!" Truly, they will all be lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Let none dismiss this subject from their minds without reflecting,

1. How great our obligations to God are!

Here, as in a looking-glass, we may see them very distinctly; and we read this history to little purpose, if we see not in it transactions of the present day. To recapitulate the mercies of God towards us, or to point out their correspondence with those that were given to Israel, is needless. The slight mention we have already made of them is sufficient. But it is of importance to ask, What effect have they produced upon our minds? Have we not again and again been constrained to say, "See what God has done!" "What manner of love is this with which the Father has loved us!" Be assured, that the man who is not frequently (I might almost say, habitually,) impressed with this thought, knows nothing of God, nor has he any part or lot in the gospel salvation.

2. How strenuous should be our exertions to walk worthy of the mercies of God towards us!

It is thought by some, that views of God's sovereign grace and unchanging love will lead men to carelessness and presumption. It behooves us all to show, that there is no foundation for this calumny; and that the stupendous love of Christ will rather constrain us to obedience. Let us remember, that, if the promises of God are sure, so also are the threatenings; and that we can no more reverse these, than Satan can reverse the others, if we are found in a state against which God has threatened his displeasure.

How painful is the thought, that, notwithstanding all the warnings which God has given them, most will yet perish in their sins! Methinks, if God's mercy will excite wonder among those who are saved, so will sin excite wonder among those who perish. With what force will that reflection strike us in the day of judgment, "What has SIN wrought!" O think upon it now; and let us not only flee from it, but endeavor so to "walk, that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus!"

#174

GOD WILL FULFILL HIS WORD

**[Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)**

"God is not a man, that he should lie."

There is scarcely anything that more strongly manifests the depravity of our nature, than that propensity to lying which we perceive in children, as soon as they begin to speak! [Psalm 58:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 58.3). Even when men are grown to the full exercise of their reason, they too often deviate from truth, sometimes through forgetfulness, sometimes from a change of sentiment or inclination, and sometimes from an inability to perform their word. Hence it is characteristic of man to lie; and we are all so sensible of this, that in matters of great importance we require of men an oath to confirm their word, and enter into written covenants with them, which we take care to have properly attested, [Hebrews 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.16); [Galatians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.15).

Now we are apt to "think that God is even such a one as ourselves;" and that he also may be prevailed upon to "alter the word that has gone out of his lips." Balak evidently entertained this idea of him; and labored by many repeated sacrifices to divert him from his purpose. But Balaam was inspired to declare the vanity of such a hope, and to assert in a most humiliating comparison the unchangeableness of Jehovah.

To unfold the full meaning of his words, we observe,

I. Some think that God **will**lie.

God has told us with strong and repeated asseverations, that "we must be born again, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3). See the full import of this in Discourse on that text." But this is totally disbelieved by:

1. The profane.

They persuade themselves, that such strictness in religion as is implied in the new birth, is not necessary; and that they shall go to Heaven in their own way.

2. The self-righteous.

These consider regeneration as a dream of weak religious enthusiasts; and are satisfied with "the form of godliness without" ever experiencing "the power of it".

3. The hypocritical professors of religion.

These, having changed their creed together with their outward conduct, fancy themselves Christians, notwithstanding their faith:  
neither "overcomes the world,"  
nor "works by love,"  
nor "purifies their hearts!"

That all these people think God will lie, is evident beyond a doubt; for if they really believed that "old things must pass away, and all things become new, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)," before they can enter into the kingdom of Heaven, they would feel concerned to know whether any such change had taken place in them; nor would they ever be satisfied until they had a scriptural evidence that they were indeed "new creatures in Christ Jesus." But as this is in no respect the case with them, it is manifest that they "do not believe the record of God," and consequently, however harsh the expression may seem, "they make God a liar! [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10)."

While some do not hesitate to entertain these dishonorable thoughts of God,

II. Others fear that God **may**lie.

This is common with people,

1. Under conviction of sin.

When men are deeply convinced of sin, they find it exceedingly difficult to rest simply on the promises of the Gospel. God promises to cast out none who come to him by Christ Jesus; to wash them from sins of deepest dye; and to bestow on them all the blessings of salvation freely, "without money and without price, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37); [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18); [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)."

Now this appears too good to be true; they cannot conceive how God should "justify the ungodly, [Romans 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.5)," and therefore they seek to become godly first, in order that they may be justified; and if they cannot bring some price in their hands, they keep back, and give themselves over to desponding fears.

2. Under temptation or spiritual desertion.

God has declared that "he will not allow his people to be tempted above what they are able to bear, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)." But when they come into temptation, they are apt to say, as David, "I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul! [1 Samuel 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 27.1)." They see no way for their escape; and therefore they fear that the very next wave will overwhelm them utterly.

If God at these seasons hides his face from them, they conclude "there is no hope;" they think "his mercy clean gone forever, and his loving-kindness come utterly to an end for evermore, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9)," notwithstanding God has so frequently and so expressly declared, that he will never leave them nor forsake them! [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5).

Now these people do not, like the ungodly, deliberately think that God will lie; but they have many misgiving fears lest he should; and that they do so is obvious; for, if they did not, they would take God at his word, and "stay themselves on him when they are in darkness, and have no light, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10)."

Thus generally is the veracity of him who is truth itself, either questioned or denied.

III. But God neither will nor can lie.

It is humiliating beyond expression that ministers should be forced to vindicate the veracity of God. But as he himself has seen fit to do so in the sacred oracles, and as the unbelief of men is so inveterate, we submit to the necessity, and proceed to show that,

1. God **will** not lie.

First, let us hear the testimonies of those who have tried him. Had ever any one more opportunities of proving his fidelity than Moses, Joshua, and Samuel? Yet they all attest in the most solemn manner that he neither had deceived them in anything, nor ever would, [Deuteronomy 32:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.4); [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14); [1 Samuel 15:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.29).

Next, let us attend to God's own assertions and appeals, [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.4); [Isaiah 49:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.19). Would he ever venture to speak thus strongly on his own behalf, if his creatures could make good their accusations against him?

Lastly, let us look to matter of fact.

He threatened to punish the angels if they should prove disobedient.

He denounced a curse on Adam if he should eat of the forbidden tree.

He threatened to destroy the whole world with a deluge.

He threatened to overwhelm Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone

He threatened to scatter his once chosen people over the face of the whole earth.

See now whether he has forborne to execute any of these threatenings.

He also promised to send his only dear Son to die for sinners; and to make him great among the Gentiles, while his own nation should almost universally reject him. Have either of these promises been forgotten? Or, if such promises, and such threatenings have received their accomplishment, is there any reason to doubt respecting any other that are yet unfulfilled? Are not his past actions so many types and pledges of what he will hereafter perform, [2 Peter 2:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4-9); Jude verse 7.

2. God **can**not lie.

Truth is as essential to the divine nature as goodness, wisdom, power, or any other attribute; so that he can as easily cease to be good, or wise, or powerful, as he can allow "one jot or tittle of his word to fail." If for one moment he could divest himself of truth, he would cease to be deserving of all confidence or affection. Let it only be said of any man, "He is great, and wise, and generous—but no dependence can be placed on his word," would he not on the whole be deemed a contemptible character? How then would Jehovah be degraded, if any such sin could be laid to his charge?

It would seem that Paul was peculiarly solicitous to guard us against entertaining the smallest possible doubt of the divine veracity; for he abounds in expressions declarative of this perfection. "God," says he, "cannot lie, [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2);" and again, "he cannot deny himself, [2 Timothy 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.13);" and again in still stronger terms, "It is impossible for God to lie, [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18)." Nor let it be thought that this detracts from God's power; for to be able to lie, would be a weakness rather than a perfection; and as it is man's disgrace that he is prone to violate his word, so it is God's honor that he neither will nor can lie.

Inferences:

1. How vain are the **hopes of unconverted men**!

Men, whatever may be their state, persuade themselves that they shall be happy when they die. But how delusive must be that hope, which is built upon the expectation that God will prove himself a liar! Who are we, that God should, (if we may so speak) undeify himself for us? And what security would we have if he were even to admit us into Heaven in direct opposition to his own word? Might he not change his word again, and cast us into Hell at last? Surely Heaven would be no Heaven, if it were held on so precarious a tenure. Let us then lay aside all such delusive hopes. Let us learn to tremble at God's Word; and seek to attain that entire change both of heart and life, to which the promises of salvation are annexed.

2. How groundless are the **fears of the converted**!

There is a holy fear or jealousy that is highly desirable for everyone, however eminent, however established. But there is a tormenting slavish fear that arises from unbelief, and which greatly retards our progress in the divine life. Now we ask, Does this fear arise from an apprehension of our own unfaithfulness, or of God's? If it is God's faithfulness that we doubt, let us know that "his gifts and callings are without repentance. Compare [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29) with the words following the text," and that "where he has begun a good work, he will perfect it unto the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)."

If, on the other hand, we suspect our own faithfulness, let us recollect on whom our faithfulness depends; if it depends wholly on ourselves, who among us will be saved? [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5); [Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6). Thanks be to God, he who has been the author of our faith, has engaged to be the finisher of it, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2); [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.9). He has promised, not only that he will not depart from us, but that he will put his fear in our hearts, so that we shall not depart from him, [Jeremiah 32:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.39-40). Let us then "set to our seal that God is true, [John 3:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.33)." Let us commit ourselves to him, knowing in whom we have believed, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12), and assured that, while we stand on the foundation of his Word, we are immovably secure, 2 Timothy 2:19.

#175

BALAAM'S THIRD ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL

**[Numbers 24:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.5)**

"How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!"

**[Numbers 24:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.9)**

"May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!"

If there were no other instance than that before us, we could never doubt the influence of God over all his creatures. Balaam had shown strongly enough his desire to curse Israel; but had been twice constrained to speak the words which God had put into his mouth. On this third occasion, he saw that it was in vain to use enchantments; and therefore he laid them all aside; and gave himself up, without any further resistance, to declare whatever God should say unto him.

His preface is usually represented as a pompous recital of his own peculiar privileges and attainments; but it is rather a relation of the circumstances that occurred while he was on his way to Balak. He speaks of himself as "the man whose eyes were shut," (so it should be read; and so it is read in the margin of our Bibles,) and who "had a vision of the Almighty, falling, but having his eyes open;" (the words, "into a trance," are printed in italics, to show that they are inserted by the translators, and are not in the original,) his donkey fell, and he fell also; and then his eyes were opened, to see the angel; whom, though his donkey had seen, he had not until then been enabled to behold.

On a view of the orderly manner in which the Israelites were encamped, he expressed his admiration of them; and then, in the concluding words of our text declared the irreversible decree of God respecting them, "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed!"

We shall consider these words,

I. In reference to **national** Israel.

To them, in their primary sense, the words must certainly refer. But, when we read such a solemn declaration respecting them, we are naturally led to ask:

1. How can we account for it?

Was there any peculiar merit in them, that had induced Jehovah so wonderfully to signalize them with his favor? No! They were a stiff-necked people from first to last. But God had "chosen them for himself to be a peculiar people;" and had pledged himself to fulfill to them all the promises which he had made to Abraham respecting them. Whoever therefore should set himself against that people, would be endeavoring to thwart the divine counsels; while every one who should promote the prosperity of Zion, would, in fact, advance the designs of God. No wonder therefore that God pronounced a blessing or a curse on all, according as they co-operated with him, or opposed his will.

2. How was it fulfilled?

In addition to all that has been stated on the two former occasions, we are here led to contemplate the prosperity of Israel under the images of a verdant valley, a well-watered garden, and fragrant or stately trees; they are further spoken of as marvelously enriched, prolific, powerful.

But we may particularly notice the discrimination made between the Gibeonites and all the other nations of Canaan. These, because they made a league with Joshua, were spared, protected, and preserved; while all the others, without exception, were destroyed! [Joshua 9:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 9.25-27); [Joshua 10:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.1-11). And, many hundred years afterwards, when Saul had broken the covenant with them, and had sought to destroy them, God avenged their cause by a famine during three successive years, and caused the injustice of Saul to be punished in the destruction of almost all his family! [2 Samuel 21:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 21.1-9). When at last the Israelites had provoked God utterly to abandon them, they became as weak as others, and were left, as at this day, to experience all the evils which, as God's instruments, they themselves had inflicted upon other nations.

The declaration in our text must further be considered,

II. In reference to the **spiritual** Israel.

If only we reflect, that this declaration was a repetition of the promise made to Abraham and to Jacob, its application to the spiritual seed of Abraham will be obvious and undeniable, [Genesis 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.3); [Genesis 27:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.29). Let us consider then,

1. What is implied in this declaration.

It does not relate to temporal benefits or evils, but to those which are spiritual and eternal. And it shall assuredly be fulfilled to men in its utmost extent, according as they shall be found to have loved and aided the true spiritual Israelites, or to have hated and opposed them, [Isaiah 54:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.15-17); [Isaiah 60:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.14); [Isaiah 65:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.13-14). Divine Providence even in this world may be expected to put a difference between the friends and enemies of Zion, [Psalm 122:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 122.6); [Psalm 129:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.5-8); but, if no differences are visible in this world, they shall be made visible enough in the world to come! [2 Thessalonians 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.6-7).

2. On what ground we may expect its accomplishment.

The circumstance of its being uttered by the voice of inspiration, is a pledge of its accomplishment. It may appear strange indeed that God should interest himself to such an extent in behalf of his believing people; but there are two grounds on which we may be well assured that he will do so:

the one is that he considers our conduct towards his Church, as a criterion of our true character, [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34-35); [1 Peter 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.6-8);

and the other is, that he identifies himself with his Church, accounting everything which is done to them, as done to himself. Whether good, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40); or evil, [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8); [Acts 9:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4-5). Realize these thoughts, and all doubt respecting the accomplishment of the declaration will vanish forever.

Learn,

1. The importance of ascertaining our true character.

"Everyone who loves the father loves his child as well, 1 [John 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.1)." Let us bring ourselves to this test, and carefully judge ourselves as in the presence of God.

2. The blessedness of being **Israelites indeed**.

If God is so interested about you as to deal with men according to their conduct towards you—then what blessings may you yourselves expect at his hands?

#176

CHRIST THE STAR SPOKEN OF BY BALAAM

**[Numbers 24:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.15-17)**

Then he uttered his oracle: "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of one whose eye sees clearly, the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth."

It has pleased God on various occasions to make known his will to people of a very unworthy character; and to show that his ways and thoughts are not regulated by the vain maxims of human wisdom. He proclaimed to Ahaz the conception of our Emmanuel in the womb of a virgin. To Nebuchadnezzar he revealed the successive destruction of the four great monarchies, and the erection of the Messiah's kingdom on the ruins of them all.

Thus, in the passage before us, we are informed, that he declared to Balaam not only his purposes respecting Israel and the nations that surrounded them, but the advent of that glorious person, who, as a star should enlighten, and as a prince should govern, the whole world!

Let us consider,

I. The prophecy.

The introduction to this prophecy is worthy of our notice.

It seems very strongly to characterize the person who delivered it. When prophecies have been delivered by pious men, they have either been introduced with a plain declaration, "Thus says the Lord;" or the prefatory observations have been calculated to exalt and glorify God.

But Balaam's prediction is ushered in with a pompous exhibition of his own attainments, intended, as it would seem, to wrest from Balak that respect and honor, which he had failed to procure by his preceding prophecies.

It shows us too, in a very solemn and convincing light, how much knowledge we may possess, while yet we are utterly destitute of converting grace. The most highly favored of God's servants from the beginning of the world had not delivered a clearer prophecy of Christ than that which was uttered by Balaam on this occasion.

Nor is it improbable that the expectation which prevailed throughout the East, that a prince should arise out of Judea and rule the whole world, was occasioned very much by this prophecy. It is remarkable that the Eastern Magi no sooner saw the supernatural star, than they concluded that this Prince was born, and came immediately to Judea to inquire, Where is he who is born King of the Jews?

Yet where shall we find a baser character than Balaam's? Having considerable knowledge of the true God, he still continued to use enchantments as a magician. He was so covetous that he "ran greedily after a reward," and preferred "the wages of unrighteousness" to every consideration, either of duty to God or of love to man, Jude verse 11; 2 Peter 2:15-16.

His hypocrisy was conspicuous from first to last; for in the midst of all his high professions of regard to the will and Word of God, he labored to the utmost to counteract the designs of God, and to reverse his decrees. More murderous purposes never were entertained in the heart of man; for it was his most earnest desire to curse all the people of God, and to consign them over to destruction by the sword of their enemies.

His last act especially was truly diabolical; when he found he could not prevail to destroy their bodies, he taught their enemies how to tempt them and to destroy their souls! [Revelation 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.14).

After comparing his character with his professions and attainments in divine knowledge, what shall we say? Shall we not tremble for ourselves, lest we should rest in a mere speculative knowledge of Christ, and fail, after all, of obtaining any saving interest in him?

We are elsewhere informed that we may have the gifts of prophecy, of tongues, and of a miraculous faith—and yet be only as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3). Our Lord assures us that many will in the last day plead the miraculous works that they have performed, but be dismissed with this humiliating answer: Depart from me, I never knew you! [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23). Even Judas himself was not, in respect of gifts, behind the very chief Apostles. Let us never value ourselves on any discoveries of the truths of Scripture, unless we have suitable affections and a correspondent practice.

The prophecy itself is deserving of particular attention.

In its primary sense it must be understood in reference to David. The immediate intention of Balaam was to inform Balak "what the Israelites would do unto his people in the latter days." Accordingly he declares that one, like a star for brightness, should arise from among the Jews at a distant period, to sway the Jewish scepter, and to destroy the kingdoms of Edom and Moab. This was fulfilled in David, who subjugated the Moabites, and slew every male in Edom, [2 Samuel 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 8.2); [2 Samuel 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 8.14); [Psalm 60:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 60.8); [1 Kings 11:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.15-16).

But there can be no doubt that this prophecy ultimately referred to Christ himself. Christ is called in Scripture "the Day-star," "the bright and morning Star;" nor did ever anyone arise with splendor comparable to his. He too sat upon the throne of his father David, and exercised unlimited dominion.

The children of Edom and Moab may be justly considered as representing the enemies of his Church and people. These he subdues and will finally destroy; not one shall live before him, "he will reign until he has put all enemies under his feet."

Doubts have arisen whether by "Sheth" we are to understand that son of Adam, whose posterity alone survived the flood; or some person or place of eminence in Moab; (which on the whole is the more probable) but in both senses the prediction was equally fulfilled in Christ, who "has the heathen for his inheritance and the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." Him then did Balaam see, as Abraham also had seen four hundred years before, but not, alas! with Abraham's joyful hope. Of his victorious career he spoke, saying, "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not near."

Having ascertained the import of the prophecy, let us consider,

II. The **improvement**to be made of it.

1. Let us be thankful for its accomplishment.

We have not to look forward at the distance of fifteen centuries; nor yet to travel, like the Eastern Magi, through trackless deserts, to behold the Lord. We see him "now," we behold him "near." We have not to go up to Heaven, to bring him down, or to go down into the deep, to bring him up. No, he is near unto us, even in the word of faith which we have both in our hands and our hearts, [Romans 10:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.6-8). Truly he is not only arisen on our benighted world, but, if it is not our own fault, "he is arisen in our very hearts, [2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19)," so that "we behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of his Father, full of grace and truth, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)."

We see his "dominion" already established in the world, verse 19. From the hour in which he sent down his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost even to the present moment, has his kingdom been extending over the face of the earth; and the hour is fast approaching when "all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him, [Psalm 72:3-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.3-11)," and "all the kingdoms of the world become his undivided empire."

I may say also, that even in the hearts of many here present he has set up his throne! Yes, and I hope that in due season "he will bruise Satan himself under our feet," and "bring every thought into captivity" to his holy will. If we then are not thankful, methinks "the very stones will cry out against us."

2. Let us receive the Lord under the very characters by which he is here revealed.

Let us give up ourselves willingly to his guidance, and not regard any difficulties we may encounter in our way. Truly we may see our way traced out with accuracy in his blessed word, the way which he himself trod when he was upon earth. It is impossible to miss our end, if only we follow his steps.

Let us also surrender up ourselves to him in a way of holy obedience, knowing no will but his, and doing it without reserve. Under him we ourselves also are to fight; and if we "do valiantly, verse 18," we have nothing to fear; for "through his strength we can do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)." You have seen how Edom and Moab fell before David, and how Christ's "scepter" has prevailed over the great enemy of our salvation. And so shall "all enemies be put both under his feet," and under ours, until, having overcome like him, we are exalted to his throne forever and ever.

See Israel at the time of Balaam's prophecy. They were altogether unused to war; yet did they vanquish all the kingdoms of Canaan. And so shall we, though weak as "worms, thresh the mountains" before us, [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-15), and be "more than conquerors through him who loved us." In vain shall any attempt to "curse us;" for "there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel;" and to all eternity shall we, as monuments of our Redeemer's love, be occupied with adoring gratitude, each exclaiming for himself, and all uniting in that overwhelming sentiment, "What has God wrought! [Numbers 23:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.23)."

#177

PHINEHAS REWARDED FOR HIS ZEAL

**[Numbers 25:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 25.10-13)**

The LORD said to Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites."

Satan is incessant in his endeavors to destroy the people of God; and, if one device fails, he has recourse to another; nor is he ever at a loss for a succession of expedients, whereby to accomplish his malignant ends. He had labored hard, in concert with Balaam his willing agent, to bring a curse upon Israel; but he had been foiled in every attempt. What, however, he could not effect by the sword of Moab, he more successfully essayed to do through the influence of their own corruptions, and the fascinations of abandoned women; and, if the zeal of Phinehas had not intervened to arrest the arm of divine vengeance, we know not to what an extent the calamities of Israel might have reached.

In considering what is here recorded concerning Phinehas, we shall notice,

I. The act for which he was rewarded.

A most grievous iniquity was committed in the camp.

Balaam had advised Balak to ensnare the Israelites by means of the Midianite women [Numbers 31:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.16); [Revelation 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.14). A fellowship between them had been opened; the Israelites fell into the snare; and were drawn into unlawful connections with them, and then into idolatry itself! Thus God was incensed against his people; and after having protected them from the imprecations of Balaam, he himself became the executioner of heavy judgments upon them. In addition to the plague which he himself inflicted upon the people, he ordered Moses to send forth and slay the chief offenders, and to hang them up in the sight of all the congregation.

While these judgments were being executed, and the unoffending part of the congregation were "weeping before the door of the tabernacle," behold, a man of distinction in one of the tribes brought a Midianite woman to his tent, in the very sight of Moses and of all the congregation. The guilt of such an illicit sin would under any circumstances have been exceeding great; but at such a time, and in such a manner, was criminal in the highest degree; it was shameless in the extreme; it was an open defiance both of God and man!

To punish it as it deserved, Phinehas stood forth with holy zeal.

He seized a javelin, and followed the abandoned criminals to the tent, and pierced them through in the midst of their guilty pleasures! This might appear to have been a usurpation of legal authority; but it was not so; for the chief magistrate himself had given the command to all the judges of Israel; moreover, being the son of the high-priest, it is reasonable to suppose that Phinehas was himself a magistrate. At all events, he acted by a divine impulse, and was "God's minister, a revenger to execute wrath upon these evil-doers."

Such an act in us would be unjustifiable; because we have received no such commission either from God or man; but the spirit from which it proceeded, would be commendable in whoever it was found.

We ought to be filled with a zeal for God's honor.

We ought to feel indignation against sin.

We ought to be penetrated with compassion towards those who are in danger of perishing through the impiety of others.

We ought to be ready to assist the civil magistrate in the suppression of iniquity.

God's approbation of Phinehas' conduct was strongly marked in:

II. The reward conferred upon him.

Instantly was God pacified towards his offending people.

Already had twenty-three thousand people fallen by the plague, and another thousand by the sword of justice; compare verse 9 with 1 Corinthians 10:8; but, on the execution of this signal vengeance, God stopped the plague, and commanded the sword of justice to be sheathed. He accepted this as "an atonement for the children of Israel." Not that there was anything in the blood of the victims, that could expiate sin; but their death was considered as a sacrifice to divine justice; and God took occasion from it to return in mercy to his repenting people. What a glorious reward was this! Not a family throughout all the tribes of Israel could help feeling its obligations to Phinehas, and acknowledging him as its benefactor.

Immediately too did "God give him his covenant of an everlasting priesthood".

True it was, that Phinehas was next in succession to the priesthood; but it was not ensured to him, and his seed, until God now gave it to him by an express promise. The covenant of priesthood is called "a covenant of peace," both because it was a testimony of divine acceptance to Phinehas himself, [Psalm 106:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.28-31), and (as long as the priesthood should last) the means of maintaining peace between God and his people; it also shadowed forth that better priesthood, which should be the means of reconciling the whole world to God, and God unto the world.

This priesthood, we know, was typical of Christ; but, whether the giving of it in consequence of "the atonement made" by Phinehas was typical of him, we cannot say; but this is clear, that the giving of the priesthood to Phinehas, as a reward for the zeal he had exercised, was intended to show to the remotest ages, that "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, [Galatians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.18);" and that those who serve God with their whole hearts, shall have the most intimate access to him in this world, and participate his glory in the world to come, "they shall be kings and priests unto their God forever and ever!"

III. We cannot reflect on this history without seeing in a striking point of view,

1. The danger of indulging sin in **ourselves**.

While the Israelites were obedient to the divine commands, they were safe; God turned all the execrations of their enemies into blessings, [Deuteronomy 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 23.5). But when they allowed themselves to be tempted by the Midianite women, they fell from one sin to another, and provoked God himself to become their enemy. Happy will it be for us, if we learn from their experience to resist iniquity in its first approaches; lest we fall and perish after their example.

Do not let this caution be deemed unworthy the attention of any. If David, and Solomon, were betrayed into the most grievous iniquities by means of their ungoverned appetites, who is he who shall think himself secure? Solomon's description of an abandoned woman is but too just, "Her heart is as snares and nets, and her hands as chains! [Ecclesiastes 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.26);" he tells us too, that "many strong men have been slain by her; and that her house is the way to Hell! [Proverbs 7:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 7.24-27)."

Many who once appeared to be in the way to Heaven, have found this to their cost; and many of us who are yet out of Hell, owe it more to the long-suffering of God than to any virtue of our own. Let such people then be thankful to God for his mercy; and, "if any man thinks that he stands, let him take heed lest he falls."

2. The duty of restraining sin in **others**.

Why were these rewards conferred on Phinehas, but to show the world the acceptableness of such services as his? And to what purpose has he committed the power of the sword to magistrates, if they are not to be a terror to the workers of iniquity? This power is a talent for which magistrates are responsible to God; and, if they shrink not from using it, because the exercise of it would subject them to the reproaches of the ungodly, let them bear in mind that they shall receive commendations from their God; and that, by every friend of piety and of order, they will be reckoned, like Phinehas, the truest patriots of their day.

Ministers also, in their respective spheres, should use influence for the suppression of iniquity; boldly rebuking it in public, and using every lawful method of discountenancing it in private.

Persons too in every sphere of life should co-operate for the same benevolent purpose; assured that, by obstructing the progress of sin, they approve themselves the best friends both of God and man.

3. The greatness of our obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If Phinehas was so great a benefactor to his country, and deserved the thanks of all for sacrificing the lives of two licentious profligates—then what thanks are due to the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered his own life a sacrifice for us! Here was love unsearchable, and zeal unparalleled. To him must every human being confess his obligations; to him must every one that shall finally be saved, render everlasting praise and honor.

O let every one throughout the camp of Israel behold his Benefactor; let every one contemplate Jesus as appeasing the wrath of God, and effecting our reconciliation with him; and, inasmuch as "for his obedience unto death God has highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name," let every heart acknowledge him; let every knee bow to him; and every tongue be occupied in ascribing glory to his name!

#178

PERISHING OF THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS

**[Numbers 26:63-65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 26.63-65)**

"These are the ones counted by Moses and Eleazar the priest when they counted the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. Not one of them was among those counted by Moses and Aaron the priest when they counted the Israelites in the Desert of Sinai. For the LORD had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun."

The Israelites in some respects had an advantage over us, inasmuch as they had the most stupendous miracles wrought before their eyes; but we have an incomparably greater advantage over them, in seeing the accomplishment of many prophecies relating to them, and the design of God in his diversified dispensations towards them. The miracles would strike the senses more forcibly for a little time; but the accomplishment of prophecy commends itself to our judgment, and operates with more permanent effect.

The event before us, for instance, carries an irresistible conviction with it to every reflecting mind. The Israelites had been numbered in the wilderness of Sinai, [Numbers 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 1.1-3); but for their sin at Kadesh-barnea, where they refused to go up and possess the land, they were doomed to die in the wilderness, [Numbers 14:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.28-30). Two exceptions alone were made, Caleb and Joshua, who had boldly testified against the wickedness of the people on that occasion, and encouraged them to maintain a confidence in their God.

Now the time for entering into Canaan was nearly arrived; and Moses and Eleazar were commanded to number the people again, and to ascertain, for the instruction of the nation at large, the perfect accomplishment of this prophecy. Accordingly, it was ascertained by minute investigation, and it is here distinctly affirmed for the benefit of the whole world. The fact that is here asserted, is often mentioned in the New Testament for the benefit of the Church at this day; and it is in this particular view that we shall insist upon it. It was intended to show us:

I. That sinners derive no security from their numbers.

There is a conceit in the minds of men, that God can never condemn so many as are walking in the ways of sin. Though they cannot but acknowledge that the lives of a few pious people are far more agreeable to the Scriptures than those of the generality of mankind—yet they deem it presumptuous in these to imagine themselves in a safer state than others. As for the distinctions which are made in the Word of God, the promises of life to the godly, and the threatening of death to the ungodly, they are accounted of but little weight. Men's own surmisings, however groundless, are made to outweigh the plainest declarations of Holy Writ.

Here then the matter has been put to a trial. The whole nation of Israel had offended God, and were to be excluded from the promised land; but two individuals, who had withstood the torrent of iniquity, were to have the honor and happiness of entering into Canaan. Now on the borders of that land the people are numbered a second time; and after a complete survey of every tribe, it is declared, yes twice declared, that "not a man" against whom the judgment had been denounced, had survived.

Thus it will assuredly be in the eternal world.

Men are now told that the unrighteous shall not enter into Heaven; but, because they constitute the great mass of mankind, they doubt whether the threatening will be executed. Nevertheless, when a scrutiny shall be made of those who shall be at the right hand of God, there will not be found a single man whom God in his word had consigned to Hell. The "broad and frequented road will be found to have led to destruction;" nor will so much as one have attained to life, who did not "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way! [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14)."

II. That no outward privileges or professions will save them.

In this view in particular is the destruction of the Israelites proposed to our consideration in the New Testament, Jude verse 5 and [1 Corinthians 10:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-6) and [Hebrews 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.17-19); [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1). Their privileges were exceeding great, and they could boast of having experienced the most marvelous interpositions of God in their behalf. But were they therefore saved? Was not God so offended with them, that he even "swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest?"

To what purpose then is it that we have been baptized into the name of Christ? To what purpose is it that we have:  
his word in our hands,  
his presence in our assemblies,  
his promises on our lips?

To what purpose is it that we have "eaten spiritual food, and drank spiritual drink," at his table, if we are yet children of disobedience?

Were the Jews rejected for their unbelief? So shall we be, if we have not that "faith, which purifies the heart." If "Christ is not formed in our hearts," so as to make us "partaken of a divine nature," "the labor bestowed upon us will be in vain." We must "live by faith in the Son of God," and "walk as Christ himself walked," or else we shall never find admission into his rest. Nor is it by "running well for a season," but "by a patient continuance in well-doing," that we shall attain eternal life. We must both begin well, and "endure unto the end," if ever we would be counted worthy of that heavenly kingdom.

III. That the divine judgments, however long delayed, will overtake them at last.

Though at first, when sent back into the wilderness, the people confessed their sins with apparent contrition, they soon relapsed into their former habits; and probably, after a season indulged a hope, that they should succeed as well as those to whom the promises had been made. This is the way of sinners: "because judgment is not executed speedily upon them," they think it never will. "The scoffers in the last days will say: Where is the promise of his coming?" But God assures us, that "the judgment of sinners now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not."

God had respect to the posterity of Israel, when he endured their evil conduct in the wilderness forty years. He had a chosen seed who were yet in their loins, and who were in due time to enjoy that inheritance, which their fathers had despised. "He gave them also space for repentance," that they might not be excluded from Heaven itself.

Thus "is he long-suffering towards us also, not willing that any of us should perish, but that we should come to repentance and live." But we deceive ourselves, if we think that he will never call us into judgment; on the contrary, he will require at our hands every talent he has entrusted to us, and increase our punishment in proportion to the mercies we have abused.

O that those who are more advanced in life would contemplate this! that they would "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation," and not make it the occasion of a more aggravated condemnation!

IV. That not one of God's faithful servants shall ever perish.

At this numbering of the people, Caleb and Joshua were found alive, though all the rest were dead; so exactly had death executed its commission!

Of six hundred thousand offenders, not one had escaped God's dart of death. But the two who had "followed the Lord fully" remained unhurt. This shows how certainly the promises of God shall be fulfilled to every believer. Be the numbers of the Lord's people ever so few, they shall not be overlooked; though the whole universe be sifted and blown away as chaff, "not the smallest grain of true wheat shall be lost! [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9)." They have many and powerful adversaries; but "none shall pluck them out of their Father's hand." "It is not His will that one of his little ones should perish." They may be so weak in faith as to indulge many fears of the outcome of their warfare; but God himself pledges his word, that "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life."

Be not discouraged then, believers, because you are few, or weak, or despised, or beset with enemies all around; for the word of Christ to you is, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!" Only "commit your souls to God in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator," and he will "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."

#179

APPOINTMENT OF JOSHUA TO SUCCEED MOSES

**[Numbers 27:15-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 27.15-21)**

Moses said to the LORD, "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."

So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in."

When great and good men are taken away, we are apt to suppose that their places cannot be adequately supplied. But God can raise up instruments at any time to carry on his gracious purposes in the world. When Elijah was taken up to Heaven in a fiery chariot, his servant Elisha was ready to imagine, that all the stay and support of Israel was removed, "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" but Elijah's mantle fell upon Elisha. Thus, when Moses had received God's final decision respecting his dying in the wilderness, it seemed as if the nation of Israel would be left as sheep without a shepherd; but God, in answer to the prayer of Moses, appointed one to succeed him, who fulfilled his trust as well as Moses himself could have done.

The points for our present consideration are,

I. The concern of Moses for the people committed to him.

The last forty years of his life he had spent entirely in their service; and now that he could superintend them no longer, he was concerned that a successor should be appointed by God himself; so that all occasion for rivalship might be cut off, and all discord and anarchy be prevented. In this he acted,

1. As a true patriot.

Patriotism is a virtue which all public men affect, but which very few possess. Selfishness is by far the more prevailing character. Many, when they can hold the reins of government no longer, would rather be succeeded by one of moderate talents, whose inferiority should cause regret for their departed worth, than by one of transcendent abilities, whose eminence should eclipse their virtues, and cause their services to be forgotten. A regard for their own credit would outweigh their desire for the public good.

Besides, the generality of patriots exert all their influence to aggrandize their own families; and appoint to places of trust and honor, not those whom in their consciences they think most fit for the office, but those who from family or party considerations will most confirm their power, or perpetuate the honor of their name.

The very reverse of all this was displayed in the conduct of Moses. He was fearful lest the people should have any reason to regret his loss. He was anxious that a person should be selected and qualified by God himself; so that the administration of their affairs might be conducted to the greatest possible advantage. And though he had children of his own, he placed them in no peculiar situation either of church or state; but left them to occupy the humbler post of common Levites, while Aaron's children succeeded to the priesthood, and one of another tribe was nominated as his successor in the government.

Moreover, the manner of evincing his concern for the people's welfare, was such as is little known to modern patriots; he evinced it not by declamatory harangues, but by praying to God for them. Happy would it be, if those who in this day make such professions of zeal in the service of their country, would manifest it before God in their secret chamber, entreating him to direct their counsels and prosper their endeavors! To secure his direction and blessing for those in power, would be a better proof of patriotism, than to be aiming incessantly at their subversion and ruin.

2. As a faithful minister.

Moses presided over Israel, both as a Church, and as a Nation; and he showed the same regard for their spiritual interests, as for their temporal interests. He well knew, that the appointment of a truly religious governor would equally conduce to their good in both respects. Hence he prayed, that God would set one over them, who would "go in and out before them," leading them by his example, as well as directing them by his authority; and though doubtless this might principally refer to the wars which they were about to wage—yet it certainly comprehended also every part of the governor's office, whether civil or religious.

Such is the prayer which every pious minister must offer, when he finds the time of his dissolution drawing near. He must not be satisfied with having discharged his own duties conscientiously, but must "labor earnestly for them in prayer," desiring to have his flock committed to one who shall watch over them with diligence, and minister unto them with fidelity; one who will not merely direct them aright, but will go before them in the way, as the eastern shepherds were accustomed to do.

In this he must manifest his resemblance to the Savior, who "had compassion on the people, because they were as sheep having no shepherd, [Matthew 9:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.36);" in this too he must follow the footsteps of the Apostles, who strove, both by oral and written communications, to perpetuate the effect of their labors, [Acts 20:25-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.25-32); [2 Peter 1:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.12-15).

How pleasing and acceptable this intercession was, we see in,

II. The gracious provision which God made for them.

Here, as in ten thousand instances, God answered the petitions presented to him without delay.

1. He selected a suitable person for the office.

"Take Joshua," says he, "a man in whom is the Spirit." Yes, such are the magistrates and ministers whom God appoints; he selects those in whom are suitable qualifications for the post assigned them, or, at least, people whom he himself will fit for their office. A talent for government is implied in this expression, but it implies also real piety; which is absolutely requisite for a due discharge either of the magisterial or ministerial office. None can act for God, who do not act from him, that is, by grace received from him; and consequently, none can make the best use of their authority, who are not taught by the Spirit to use it for the furtherance of religion, and for the glory of God.

O that such people were universally selected to manage the concerns both of church and state! We might hope for a far richer blessing on the nation at large, and far infinitely greater good to the Church of Christ, if such people, and such only, were invested with the sword of magistracy, or the pastoral staff. At all events, both magistrates and ministers may learn from hence, what qualification they should chiefly seek, for a profitable discharge of their respective offices.

2. He prescribed the mode of his ordination to it.

"Set him before Eleazar, and before all the congregation," said the Lord, "and lay your hand upon him, and give him a charge in their sight, and put some of your honor upon him;" that is, invest him now, before your death, with a part of your own authority; that all, seeing whom I have chosen, may acknowledge him as their governor, and render a willing obedience to his commands.

This mode of ordaining Joshua was calculated to answer every end that could be wished. It effectually prevented all competition, and strengthened his hands for the arduous employment that was assigned him; and we may well suppose that Joshua would be deeply impressed with these ceremonies, and long retain a remembrance of the charge given to him, confirmed as it was by an additional charge from God himself, [Deuteronomy 31:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.7-8); [Deuteronomy 31:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.14-15); [Deuteronomy 31:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.23).

Nor is this mode of appointing Joshua uninstructive to us; for, a similar mode of consecrating people to divine offices has ever since obtained in the Church of God. The deacons who were first ordained by the Apostles, to superintend the temporal concerns of the Church were set apart in this way, [Acts 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 6.3); [Acts 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 6.6); and both priests and elders were afterwards consecrated with nearly the same forms, [1 Timothy 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.14); [Acts 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.23). And may we not hope that similar effects are still produced on the minds of many at their solemn consecration to the work of the ministry? We have no doubt they are; and on the days which are especially set apart for praying to God in behalf of those who are to be ordained, a still richer blessing would rest upon them; and the imposition of hands be accompanied with a more abundant communication of the Holy Spirit to their souls, Compare [Deuteronomy 34:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 34.9) with [2 Timothy 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.6).

3. He promised him all needful assistance in it.

It must of necessity be, that in the government of that people many cases would arise, wherein he would need direction from above. Moses had on such occasions enjoyed immediate access to the Deity. But another mode of communication had been fixed by God for all succeeding governors. The Urim and Thummim (which import light and perfection) were in the breastplate, which was worn by the high-priest; and by means of that breastplate, God, in some way unknown to us, revealed his will. To Joshua he particularly promised, that he would communicate to him in this way all needful information; so that, whatever difficulties might arise, he should have infallible means of ascertaining the mind of God. Doubtless that method of obtaining instruction is now at an end; but the prayer of faith will yet prevail, so that God's ministers and people shall not seek his race in vain. If they truly desire his direction, they shall be preserved from any important error, and be guided into all necessary truth, "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."

From this subject we may clearly learn,

1. The blessedness of the Christian church.

How happy were the Jews to have such an intercessor as Moses, and such a governor as Joshua! Follow Joshua in his course, from the moment of his appointment to the moment of his death; what a series of victories, until he had conquered the land, and distributed it according to the divine purpose! But if we envy the Jews their divinely-appointed head, what objects of envy must we be, who have the Lord Jesus Christ himself for our Head! He is the true Joshua, to whom "the Spirit is given without measure, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3); [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34)." He also is made "Head of the Church," and is "ascended up on high, that he may fill all things;" and through him the very weakest of his people shall be "more than conquerors." Let us then "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," and not doubt but that "he will bruise Satan under our feet shortly."

2. The duty of advancing in every possible way its best interests.

If we are magistrates or ministers, our duty is proportionably difficult, and our responsibility proportionably solemn. O that all who have been placed in such offices, felt as they ought the obligations that are upon them! Let ministers in particular, who have a far greater charge than that of magistrates committed to them, give themselves up wholly to the execution of their trust. Let them fear lest the blood of those who die in their sins, be laid to their charge. And let them so fulfill their ministry, that they may give up their account with joy, and not with grief.

#180

THE MORNING AND EVENING SACRIFICE

**[Numbers 28:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 28.3-10)**

Say to them: 'This is the offering made by fire that you are to present to the LORD: two lambs a year old without defect, as a regular burnt offering each day. Prepare one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight, together with a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives. This is the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai as a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire. The accompanying drink offering is to be a quarter of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb. Pour out the drink offering to the LORD at the sanctuary. Prepare the second lamb at twilight, along with the same kind of grain offering and drink offering that you prepare in the morning. This is an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

"'On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering."

This burnt-offering, our text informs us, "was ordained in Mount Sinai," nearly forty years before the period at which it was again enjoined [Exodus 29:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.38-41). Commentators are not agreed respecting the reason of its being again so circumstantially repeated. Some have thought that the observance of this ordinance had been entirely neglected in the wilderness; and that from hence arose the necessity of enjoining it again, in order that it might not be neglected when they should come into the land of Canaan. Nor is this opinion without some foundation; for the prophet Amos, and after him the first martyr, Stephen, complains of the most grievous neglect of duty among the Israelites in the wilderness, and of their worshiping idols in preference to the living God, "It is written in the book of the Prophets," says Stephen, "O house of Israel, have you offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yes, you took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your God Remphan, figures which you made to worship them; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon, [Amos 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.25-27); [Acts 7:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.42-43)."

But it is altogether incredible that Moses should have allowed such a public dereliction of duty as this; and, if he had, it is impossible that God should have spoken of him as a servant "faithful in all his house." We apprehend therefore that it was not of these sacrifices which depended upon Aaron and Moses, but of other sacrifices which depended more upon the people, and which they had neglected to offer on the proper occasions, that the prophet speaks; and consequently, that there was some other reason for renewing the appointment of the ordinance before us.

The true reason seems to be, that, as all who had come out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, had perished in the wilderness, and as Aaron was dead, and Moses himself had but two or three months to live, it was desirable that this new generation should have this ordinance enjoined from God himself, that they might be duly impressed with a sense of its great importance. The repetition of it moreover is of use to us, inasmuch as it shows us that some deep mystery must be contained in it, and that much valuable instruction is to be derived from it. Let us then consider,

I. The matter of which this offering consisted.

There were two very distinct offerings united:

1. The lamb.

This was to be "of the first year," and "without spot;" and it was to be slain, and then consumed by fire upon the altar, as "a sacrifice of a sweet savor unto the Lord."

Can anyone doubt what this imported? Can anyone fail to see in this a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom one Apostle speaks of as "a lamb without blemish, and without spot, [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19);" and another Apostle represents as "the Lamb," even "the Lamb who was slain, [Revelation 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8-9)," to whom all the glorified saints in Heaven ascribe the honor of their salvation, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb! [Revelation 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.10)."

It is worthy of observation, that the very first sacrifices of which any mention is made in Scripture, were lambs. It was "of the firstlings of his flock" that Abel offered; and by that offering he obtained very peculiar tokens of God's favor and acceptance, [Genesis 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4) with [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4). And there is reason to believe, that the skins, with which Adam and Eve were, by God's appointment, clothed immediately after the fall, were of lambs which they had previously offered in sacrifice, [Genesis 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.21); and in reference to this early appointment, as well as to the everlasting decrees of God, the Lord Jesus is called "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8)."

We shall not detain you in order to point out the correspondence between Christ and these spotless lambs, in the perfection of his nature, in the holiness of his life, or in the intent of his death; but, passing by these things as known and understood among you, we shall content ourselves with saying, that, in this offering, there was virtually the same proclamation made to the Jews, as was afterwards expressly made by John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29); [John 1:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.36)."

2. The meat-offering and the drink-offering.

With the lamb a portion of flour, about three quarts, was to be offered, mixed up with somewhat more than a quart of beaten oil; and while they and the lamb were burning together upon the altar, some strong generous wine, (of equal quantity with the oil,) was to be poured out as a libation; and the whole together being consumed by fire, was "of sweet savor unto the Lord."

The meaning of this is not so clear as that which relates to the lamb. It may possibly be a tribute of thanksgiving to God for all his mercies, which are comprehended under the terms, "corn, and wine, and oil;" and, in that view, the ordinance will be a compound of prayer and praise, corresponding with that injunction of Paul, "in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6)."

But we rather suppose that there is an allusion made here to feasts, of which corn and wine and oil were very distinguished parts; and that the consumption of these upon the altar was intended to convey the idea that God himself feasted with his people, and would always meet them with tokens of his love, whenever they came to him as sinners, trusting in the atonement that would in due time be offered for them.

This interpretation is clearly countenanced by the gracious promises which God made, when first he instituted this ordinance on Mount Sinai; saying, "There I will meet you, to speak there unto you; and there I will meet with the children of Israel; and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory, [Exodus 29:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.42-43)." In this view the ordinance is most instructive; in that it announces the truths proclaimed afterwards by the voice of Christ himself, "No man comes unto the Father but by me;" and, "him who comes unto me, I will never cast out! [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37); [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)."

That which distinguishes this offering from all others will be found particularly in,

II. The manner in which it was presented.

Many offerings were only occasional; but this offering was stated, and was renewed daily throughout the year. The things to which we would more particularly call your attention are,

1. The union of the different materials.

Meat-offerings and drink-offerings were indeed sometimes offered with other sacrifices; and sometimes also by themselves; but here they were constantly presented and consumed with the lamb. Now, if we regard them as expressions of gratitude to God, they show that with our acknowledgments of guilt we should invariably render unto God a tribute of praise.

If, on the other hand, we regard them as presented unto God in order that by the consumption of them on his altar he may express, as it were, his communion with us, and his acceptance of us, then they show that in our applications for mercy through the Redeemer's sacrifice, we should draw near to God with a confidence of finding favor in his sight.

Now such a union of feelings and dispositions in our hearts is most desirable. We are not so to lean to the side of humiliation as to encourage despondency, nor so to confide in God as to lose all our tenderness and contrition; but we should at all times "rejoice with trembling, [Psalm 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.11)," and tremble with rejoicing.

2. The frequency with which they were offered.

Every morning and every evening they were to be offered throughout the year; and from this circumstance they were called "a continual burnt-offering." Now there were two things in particular, which this circumstance was calculated to impress on the people's minds; the one was their continual need of a sin-atoning sacrifice; the other was, the continued efficacy of that which should in due time be offered.

Not a day passed but they were repeatedly reminded, even the whole congregation, that they were sinners before God, and must seek salvation through Him whom this offering typified; (O that we also might bear in mind that beneficial lesson!) they were reminded too that there was in this sacrifice, a sufficiency for the sins of the whole world. Not the greatest sinner in all Israel was excepted, if he did but really with penitential sorrow seek for pardon in this way; nor, as long as the world shall stand, shall any one plead the merits of the Redeemer's sacrifice in vain. The shadows were repeated, because they were shadows; but Christ who is the substance, has made a complete atonement for the sins of the whole world, and "by one offering of himself has perfected forever them that are sanctified! [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14)."

3. The increase of them on the Sabbath-day.

This is particularly noticed in the text; the lambs, and the meat and drink-offerings, were doubled on that day. What a reverence for the Sabbath was this calculated to inspire! It showed to all, that though that day is a day of rest from worldly business, it ought to be a day of peculiar exertion in the things of God. Then should all the faculties of the soul be summoned to the service, or, I should rather say, to the enjoyment, of God. We should keep a holy feast unto him, and seek a more abundant measure of communion with him. In the closet, in the family, in the public assembly—we should be endeavoring to advance his glory; in a word, we should labor to spend the whole day, as it were, in "fellowship with him, and with his Son, Jesus Christ." Not that we need to be all the day in acts of devotion; it is the habit, which we should particularly attend to; and we may vary our services, so as to render them all more easy and delightful.

Shall it be thought that under the Gospel this strictness is not necessary? We answer, that, though the ceremonial part of the Sabbath is superseded, the moral part remains; and, on that day, as well as every other day, our sacrifices, instead of being diminished, should be increased. It is of the times of the Gospel that Ezekiel speaks, though in terms taken from the law; and the attentive reader will see that more is required of us than of the Jews; and that both our services and enjoyments should be augmented in proportion to our superior advantages, [Ezekiel 46:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 46.14) on common days; and [Ezekiel 46:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 46.4-5) on the Sabbath-day. Let not us be sparing of our services, and God will not be sparing of his communications, [Isaiah 64:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.5).

#181

DESTRUCTION OF THE MIDIANITES

**[Numbers 31:48-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.48-50)**

"Then the officers who were over the units of the army--the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds--went to Moses and said to him, "Your servants have counted the soldiers under our command, and not one is missing. So we have brought as an offering to the LORD the gold articles each of us acquired--armlets, bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces--to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD."

Numberless are the occasions on which we are led to admire the condescension of God towards his chosen servants; and one of considerable importance occurs in the chapter before us. He had doomed Moses to die in the wilderness without ever setting his foot upon the promised land; and the time was nearly come for the execution of the sentence upon him. But God graciously determined to give him a pledge of those blessings which were shortly to be poured out on the surviving generation. He therefore directed Moses to "avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites, before he should be gathered unto his people." Moses gives immediate orders to carry into effect the divine command; but he remarkably alters the language which Jehovah had used.

"The LORD said to Moses, "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites, [Numbers 31:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.1-2)."

"So Moses said to the people, "Arm some of your men to go to war against the Midianites and to carry out the LORD's vengeance on them, [Numbers 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.3)."

The Lord marked his tender concern for Israel's good; but Moses showed a paramount concern for the glory of his God. Thus it is that the condescension and kindness of God should ever be received; and while God seeks the best interests of his people, we should seek his glory above every other consideration; to that every interest of ours should be subordinated.

The order being issued, a thousand from every tribe went forth to battle; (for, when God was with them, it was alike easy to subdue their enemies with many or with few,) and Phinehas, who had displayed his zeal for God in the matter of Zimri and Cozbi, was sent with them to animate their exertions. We have no particular account of the engagement; but the consequences of it are minutely detailed, and may profitably be distinctly considered. We notice:

I. Their victory over Midian.

This was most complete. All the five kings who came out against them were slain; and all their forces destroyed. That all Midian did not come to the battle, appears from this, that in two hundred years afterwards they were again a powerful nation; but all who engaged in this conflict were destroyed, their cities also were taken, and their fortresses demolished. "Balaam also," who, though foiled in his former endeavors, had returned to them, "was slain among them with the sword."

Now this victory is instructive, whether we regard it in a historical view, or typical view.

As a historical fact, it teaches us, that no power can withstand the arm of the Lord; that, when aided by him, we are infallibly sure of victory; and that all who determinately set themselves against him shall perish! They may boast of their knowledge, and may wish to "die the death of the righteous;" but they shall surely be numbered with the enemies of God at last!

As a type, it shows us what shall ultimately be the fate of all our spiritual enemies. Our strength may appear as nothing in comparison with theirs; but it shall prevail, and our exertions be crowned with perfect victory.

II. Their slaughter of the captives.

"Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, [Numbers 31:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.17)."

On the return of the Israelites from battle, Moses went forth to meet them; but finding that they had not slain the women with the men, but had taken them captives, together with the male children—he was much displeased; and ordered them to destroy all, except the females who were virgins.

Our natural compassion for the weak and helpless makes us shudder at such an order as this, and to wonder how the soldiers could be induced to carry it into execution. But we must remember that God has a right over his creatures, to take them away at any *time* and in any *manner* that he sees fit. Whether he sweeps them away by a pestilence, or an earthquake, or cuts them off by the sword—he is no more to be accused of harshness towards them, than if he takes them away by the more common means of disease and old age.

It must be remembered too, that the women in particular had forfeited their lives by tempting the Israelites to whoredom and idolatry. Already had they occasioned the destruction of twenty-four thousand Israelites; and, if allowed to live, might have successfully renewed their former practices. It was necessary therefore in that view also to cut them off, both mothers and daughters indiscriminately; all having, either by action or connivance, been accessory to Israel's ruin.

As for the male children, they, though not actually involved in their parents' iniquities—were justly, as in almost all cases they must be, involved in their parents' punishment.

With respect to the Israelites themselves, they were no more to be blamed, than any people are who act as executioners under the orders of the civil magistrate. No one condemns the jury who by their verdict subject their fellow-creatures to the penalty of death; nor the judge who pronounces sentence; nor the jailer who confines the criminal; nor the officers who attend the execution; nor the man that employs the instrument of death.

No one condemns the angel who destroyed the Egyptian first-born, nor him who in one night slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army. Nor can any one justly condemn the Israelites, who executed the divine command in the slaughter of their captives.

The case was peculiar, and not applicable to modern warfare; nor was it intended as an example to us.

But, as a lesson, it is of great importance; since it shows us that peculiar judgments await those who tempt others to sin; and that, though they may escape for a time, the most signal vengeance shall fall on them at last!

It teaches us also (for this, as well as the foregoing circumstance, admits of a typical application) that we must destroy all our spiritual enemies without exception; not those only that seem more immediately to threaten our destruction, but those also, which, though apparently weak and insignificant, may warp us from our duty, or in time become strong and formidable.

III. Their dedication of the spoils.

Immense were the spoils taken on this occasion; and the distribution of them which God appointed, seemed to afford universal satisfaction. Half was given to the congregation at large, and half was reserved for the warriors who took them. From each was a tribute taken for God; from the half belonging to the congregation, a fiftieth part; and from that belonging to the warriors, a five hundredth part. This shows us, that God must have a portion of all that his providence has allotted to us; whether we earn it ourselves, or receive it as the fruit of others' labor, God must be acknowledged in it, and be glorified with it.

But, on mustering the troops, a most wonderful fact was ascertained. Notwithstanding only twelve thousand went to the war, and the enemy whom they attacked were so numerous, and their success had been so great, not one single man was missing from their ranks! This filled them with utter astonishment, and with the most lively gratitude; and all with one accord desired to make their acknowledgments to God, by dedicating to him a part, if not the whole, of the gold and jewels which they had taken, every man for himself. Accordingly, the whole of the spoil having been purified either by fire or water, and the soldiers themselves also having been purified from the pollution which the slaughter of so many people, and the touching of the dead, had occasioned, the gold and jewels were presented unto God for the service of his sanctuary, "as an atonement for their souls."

The word "atonement" which is here used, is not to be understood as importing an expiatory sacrifice, but only (as it is afterwards explained) "a memorial." These spoils were presented, precisely as the half shekel, or "atonement-money," was appointed to be, in commemoration of a most wonderful deliverance, [Exodus 30:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.12-16).

The Israelites presented them:

First, as an acknowledgment of their desert; for they deserved death, no less than the people whom they had destroyed.

Next, as a memorial of their deliverance, which was truly astonishing.

Lastly, as a testimony of their gratitude; a sense of which they desired to retain to the end of life; and to transmit to their last posterity.

O that there were in all of us such a heart! O that we could see in such a view our obligations to God! O that we were thus forward to express our sense of them in every possible way!

The preservation of our lives is not indeed so manifest, as in their case; but it is not at all less the work of God. Think of the diseases and accidents to which we have been exposed, and the havoc made by them on those around us; and you shall see that we, no less than the Israelites, are indebted for our lives to the good providence of our God!

Apply the same thought to our souls; and then say whether we have not as abundant calls for gratitude, as they!

How then shall we testify our gratitude to God? I answer, Whatever he has given to us for a prey? Let us present that to him for a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Has he given us time, and health, and money, and influence; and, above all, has he infused a heavenly life into our souls? Let us devote it all to him, and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his."

The Israelites thought their jewels would be ill employed as ornaments for their wives or daughters, when they might be of use for the service and honor of God; thus should we also estimate whatever we possess; not by the gratification it will afford to our pride and vanity, but by the good it will enable us to do to our fellow-creatures, and the service in which it may be employed for our heavenly Benefactor. This only would I observe in relation to it, that we must first give up ourselves to God, and then our property, [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5). Without our hearts no sacrifice whatever will be accepted by him; but if we "give ourselves to him as living sacrifices, we shall perform a holy, a reasonable, and an acceptable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1);" and every victory we gain, together with every blessing we enjoy, whether public and national, or private and personal—demands it at our hands.

#182

MOSES REPROVES THE REUBENITES

**[Numbers 32:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.6-7)**

"Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites: Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here? Why do you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the LORD has given them?"

Actions are good or evil according to the motives from which they proceed; but, as motives are known only to God, it must often happen that our conduct is either viewed in too favorable a light, or subjected to unmerited censure. Our inability to delve into the hearts of men should certainly incline us at all times to lean rather to the side of charity, and to hope and believe all things of a favorable nature, as far as circumstances will admit. This consideration however is not to operate so far as to blind our eyes to what is manifestly evil, or to keep us from reproving those who act amiss.

Magistrates in particular must proceed with firmness in suppressing wickedness of every kind, and by timely interference must stop the contagion of bad example. Thus did Moses, when the Reubenites and Gadites presented a request to him, which he deemed injurious to all the other tribes. They asked to have the land on the east side of Jordan for their portion, instead of any part of the land of Canaan; and Moses, conceiving their request to proceed from improper and unjustifiable motives, expostulated with them, and reproved them with great severity. Let us consider,

I. The grounds of Moses' apprehensions.

There was ample reason for the fears Moses entertained respecting them.

Their request seemed to be dictated by selfishness, worldliness, and unbelief. As soon as Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan were subdued, and their fertile territories were seized, these two tribes requested to have the exclusive possession of their land, under a pretense that it was pre-eminently suited to them, on account of the number of their flocks and herds. As for their brethren belonging to the other ten tribes, let them go and fight their way among the Canaanites, and get possession of whatever they could; but the land which was already subdued, and which was of the richest quality, they desired to have allotted to themselves without any further trouble.

This land was not within the precincts of Canaan; moreover, it would be far removed from the ordinances of religion and from the house of God; but they did not seem to regard either of these considerations in comparison with an ample, easy, and immediate settlement.

The inhabitants of the promised land were exceeding numerous and warlike; and could never be dispossessed without many bloody contests. Perhaps, after all, the victory over them might be dearly purchased, or possibly might never be attained; hence also might arise the willingness of the suitors to forego their share in what was uncertain, if they might be permitted to possess what was already gained.

Such was the construction which Moses put upon the conduct of these two tribes, and such was the ground of those reproofs which he administered.

And is there not ground for similar fears whenever a similar conduct prevails?

If a minister at this day sees his hearers selfish, mindful of their own comforts, but inattentive to the wants and miseries of others, has he not reason to fear concerning them? When it is eminently characteristic of the true Christian to "mind, not his own things, but the things of others, [Philippians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4)," and there is a manifest failure in this respect among his people, ought he not to be "jealous over them with a godly jealousy," and to warn them of their self-deceit?

Again, if he observes any professors of religion to have become worldly; if he finds them so intent on their present interests, as to be comparatively indifferent about the ordinances of religion, and the ultimate possession of the heavenly land; if he sees them studious of their present ease, and averse to spiritual conflicts—then must he not of necessity "stand in doubt of" such people? Does not love itself require him to "change his voice towards them," and to adopt the language of admonition and reproof?

Once more, if he sees them yielding to unbelief, and resting satisfied with a present portion, through desponding apprehensions respecting the attainment of a better inheritance, does it befit him to be silent? Ought he not to exert himself in every way to repress such a spirit, and to stimulate his people to a more befitting conduct? Must he wait for open and notorious transgressions before he opens his lips in expostulations and reproofs? Surely not; the example of Moses in the text, and of Paul on various occasions, [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2); [Galatians 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19-20), shows what are the emotions which every such instance should produce, and what methods every faithful minister should adopt to counteract such evils.

While we justify Moses on reviewing the grounds of his apprehensions, we shall find reason to congratulate him on,

II. The **effects**of it.

From himself it produced a faithful remonstrance.

It is but too common to express our fears and jealousies to others, and to conceal them from the person who is the subject of them. But Moses abhorred any such concealment; he felt the importance of suggesting all his fears to those who were most interested in being made acquainted with them; and he accordingly addressed himself to the people themselves.

He set before them the pernicious tendency of their example, which was calculated to discourage all the children of Israel; he also reminded them of the similar conduct of their fathers, which had involved them all in one common ruin; and assured them, that they would bring a similar destruction on the present generation, if they persisted in such unreasonable desires, verses 6-15.

Thus he acted like a true friend, and a faithful servant of the Lord. It was thus that Paul also acted towards Peter, when by a temporizing and timid policy he was endangering the liberty of the Christian Church. Thus also are we to act agreeably to that precept, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; but you shall surely rebuke your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him, [Leviticus 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.17)."

From them it called forth a satisfactory explanation.

They did not, on the one hand, either acknowledge, or deny, the fault imputed to them; nor on the other hand, did they take the slightest offence at it. But for the satisfaction of Moses they voluntarily engaged to accompany their brethren in arms, and even to go before them to the battle; and to continue with them until the whole land should be subdued, and every tribe should be in possession of its destined inheritance. This was fair and equitable; and Moses readily acquiesced in the proposal. He warned them however, that, if they should ever recede from their purpose, and violate their engagement, "their sin should surely find them out," and be visited upon them.

Thus were matters settled to the satisfaction of all parties; the apprehension of Moses evinced his concern for their welfare; and, if it did not give birth to the proposal which was made, it certainly confirmed the people in their determination to execute it with boldness and fidelity.

A similar instance of apprehension towards these very tribes occurred, when they were returning to their families after the conquest of Canaan, [Joshua 22:11-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 22.11-33). On that occasion indeed they were evidently blameless, notwithstanding the appearances were, as in the present case, very much against them. But the outcome in both was happy; and we learn from both to admonish with candor, and to receive admonitions with humble gratitude; being more intent on satisfying the minds of those who are offended, than on lowering our accusers by any recriminations.

This subject will naturally furnish us with some important hints:

1. Maintain on all occasions an apprehension over yourselves.

The heart is justly said to be "deceitful above all things;" and "Satan can easily transform himself into an angel of light." Even the Apostles themselves on some occasions "knew not what spirit they were of;" they supposed themselves actuated by pure and holy zeal, when they were influenced by nothing but pride and revenge. It is highly probable that these two tribes took credit to themselves for far more unselfishness than they possessed; and that Moses saw more of their real disposition, than they themselves were aware of. This appears from the solemn charge which Moses gave them, even after he had acceded to their proposal.

We are sure that this is frequently the case among ourselves; under the idea of a prudential regard for our families and our property, we are very apt to indulge a worldly and selfish spirit; and to be unconscious of evils which are but too visible to others. Let us remember this. We see it in others; let us guard against it in ourselves.

2. Be ready to assign the reasons of your conduct to others.

It may easily happen that our conduct may appear to others in a more unfavorable light than it ought; and if they knew our real views, they would form a different judgment respecting it. Now then we should not be angry with them because they express their doubts respecting any particular action; but should be ready to satisfy their minds, precisely as we would, if they inquired into the grounds of our faith, [1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.15).

The Apostle Peter, when called to an account by all the other Apostles for "going to uncircumcised Gentiles and eating with them," thought it no degradation to assign his reasons to them, but was glad of an opportunity of removing their misapprehensions, [Acts 11:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.2-4). Though they seemed to have been somewhat hasty in condemning him, he was not angry with them; he knew the purity of their motives, and felt a pleasure in declaring to them the designs of God towards the Gentile world.

Happy would it be for us, if there were in all of us such a mind as this. But, alas! the quick sensibility which is manifested by us when any fault is pointed out; our extreme backwardness to acknowledge it, and our proneness to condemn our admonishers rather than ourselves, render the duly of admonishing one another extremely difficult. Let us however cultivate a better spirit, and "esteem it a kindness, if the righteous smite and reprove us." Let us receive their admonitions "as an excellent oil, which shall not break our head, [Psalm 141:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 141.5)," but rather heal the wounds which our own misconduct may have occasioned.

3. Endeavor so to walk, that your actions may carry their own evidence along with them.

In some circumstances our actions must of necessity be open to misconstruction. Paul in circumcising Timothy and not Titus, and in "becoming all things to all men," must appear to many to be guilty of inconsistency. But his general spirit would bear such ample testimony to the integrity of his mind, that all candid people must at least withhold their censures, even when they could not discern the exact propriety of his conduct. Where there was real danger of his laying a stumbling-block before others, he invariably leaned to the safer side, and would deny himself in things that were most innocent, rather than by indulgence ensnare the consciences of others, [1 Corinthians 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.13).

Thus should we endeavor to act. We should "abstain from all appearance of evil." We should be careful that our "good may not be spoken evil of, [Romans 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.16)." In a word, we should "be circumspect in all things;" and "so make our light to shine before men, that all who behold it may be constrained to glorify our Father who is in Heaven."

#183

THE CERTAINTY THAT SIN WILL FIND US OUT

**[Numbers 32:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.23)**

"But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out!"

The fear of punishment, if not the best, is certainly the most common preservative from sin. Under the Mosaic dispensation it was the principal motive with which the divine commands were enforced. Nor did Paul, though so well acquainted with the liberal spirit of the Gospel, think it wrong to "persuade men by the terrors of the Lord." The words before us therefore may properly be addressed to us.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad had solicited permission to have the land of Jazer and of Gilead for their portion, instead of any inheritance in the land of Canaan. Upon their promising to fight in conjunction with the other tribes until the whole of Canaan should be subdued, Moses acceded to their proposal; but warned them that, if they receded from their engagement, they should assuredly meet with a due recompense from God!

We may take occasion from them to consider:

I. In what manner **we** have sinned against the Lord.

It would be endless to attempt an enumeration of all the sins we have committed. We shall confine ourselves to that view of them which the context suggests.

The sin against which Moses cautioned the two tribes was, unfaithfulness to their engagements, and a preferring of their present ease to the executing of the work which God had assigned to them.

As Christians we promised to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil; but how have we kept the promises which we have made?

Have we not maintained that friendship with the world which is enmity with God? [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4).

Have we not rather sought to please than to mortify our carnal appetites? [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3).

Has not the God of this world led us captive at his will? [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2); [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26).

But the sin referred to in the text, will scarcely bear any comparison with ours.

The Israelites were to maintain a warfare with men; we, with the devil, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12).

The Israelites were to fight for an earthly portion; we, a heavenly portion, [1 Corinthians 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.25).

The Israelites might have urged that their aid was unnecessary, when God was engaged; and that, after all, the prize was an inadequate reward for such fatigue and danger.

Can we hope to conquer without exerting our own powers? Do we suppose that God will subdue our enemies without our concurrence? Or can we say that the prize held forth to us is not worth the contest? If our engagements are more solemn, then our work is more noble, and our reward is more glorious than theirs, our sin in disregarding all must be proportionably greater; yet who among us must not confess that he has forgotten all his baptismal vows? Behold then, we may say to all, "You have sinned against the Lord!"

Nor are we to suppose that our sin will always pass unnoticed.

II. What assurance we have that our sin shall surely find us out.

Sin may be said to find us out when it brings down divine judgments upon us.

Conscience, stupefied or seared, often forgets to execute its office. Nor does conscience speak, until God, by his providence or grace, awakens it. Sometimes years elapse before conscience reproves our iniquities, [Genesis 42:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.21-22). Sometimes conscience testifies to our face as soon as our sin is committed, [Matthew 26:74-75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.74-75); [Matthew 27:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.3-4). Whenever conscience thus condemns us, our sins may be said to find us out.

But the expression in the text imports rather the visitation of God for sin. There is a punishment annexed to every violation of God's law, [Ezekiel 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.4); and sin then finds us out effectually when it brings that punishment upon us.

That sin will find us out, we have the fullest possible assurance.

"Be sure your sin will find you out!" The attributes of God's nature absolutely preclude all hope of sinning with impunity.

If God is omnipresent, then he must see.

If God is omniscient, then he must remember.

If God is holy, then he must hate sin.

If God is just, then he must punish the violations of his law.

If God is possessed of veracity and power, then he must execute the judgments he has denounced.

The declarations of his Word abundantly confirm this solemn truth, [Isaiah 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.11); [Romans 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.9); [Psalm 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.8); [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21). Sin leaves a track which can never be effaced; and justice, however slow-paced, will surely overtake it! [Proverbs 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.21); [Psalm 140:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 140.11). However scoffers may exult in their security, their ruin is fast approaching, [2 Peter 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.3); 2 Peter 3:4; [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9) and [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20).

The remarkable instances of sin being detected and punished in this world afford a strong additional testimony. David and Gehazi, though so studious to conceal their guilt, had their iniquity marked in the punishment inflicted for it, [2 Samuel 12:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.9-12); [2 Kings 5:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.26-27). When, according to human calculations, it was above two million to one that Achan would escape, the lot fell on him by an infallible direction, [Joshua 7:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.14-18). How much more then shall the most hidden things be brought to light hereafter!

Be sure your sin will find you out! The appointment of a day of final retribution puts the matter beyond a possibility of doubt. For what end can there be such a period fixed, but that the actions of men may be judged? And for what end can they be judged, but that every man may receive according to his deeds, [Ecclesiastes 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.14). We may then emphatically say to every sinner, "Be sure your sin will find you out!"

Inferences:

1. How earnest should we be in searching out our own sins!

We think little of evils which have been committed by us long ago, and imagine that they are effaced from God's memory as well as from our own. But every action, word, and thought, is noted in the book of his remembrance. He sees the transactions of former years as if they are now happening before his face. All our iniquities are viewed by him in one accumulated mass; nor does he abhor them less than in the very instant they were committed. Let us not then pass them over, or palliate them, as mere youthful follies.

Let us remember how exactly the Lord's threatenings were executed on the Israelites in the wilderness, [Numbers 32:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.10-13); and endeavor to avert his judgments while space for repentance is allowed to us. Let us mourn over our innumerable violations of our baptismal covenant. Let us lament our solicitude about a present portion, our aversion to fight the Lord's battles, and our indifference about the heavenly Canaan. We must repent of these things, or lie under the guilt of them forever! [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.21); [Luke 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.3).

2. How thankful should we be that a way of escape is provided for us!

It is not sin lamented, but sin unrepented of—which will find us out. There is a city of refuge provided for those who will flee to it, [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18). The man, Christ Jesus, is a hiding-place from the impending storm, [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2). If we flee to him, we may be sure that sin shall not find us out. Every attribute of the Deity is pledged to save a believing penitent, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9). We are confirmed in this hope by the most positive declarations of Scripture, [Isaiah 44:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.22); [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19); [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12). We have most authentic and astonishing instances of sin forgiven, [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13); [Luke 7:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47); [Luke 23:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.43); and the day of judgment is appointed no less for the complete justification of believers than for the condemnation of unbelievers, [2 Thessalonians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.9-10).

Let this blessed assurance then dwell richly on our minds.

Let it encourage us to take refuge under the Savior's wings, [Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37).

Let a holy confidence inspire those who have committed their souls to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12).

And let all rejoice and glory in him as able to save them to the uttermost, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

#184

THE CITIES OF REFUGE

**[Numbers 35:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 35.24-28)**

"the assembly must judge between him and the avenger of blood according to these regulations. The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send him back to the city of refuge to which he fled. He must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil. "'But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which he has fled and the avenger of blood finds him outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder. The accused must stay in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; only after the death of the high priest may he return to his own property."

[This was an Assize Sermon, preached at Cambridge, July, 1803.]

The impartial administration of justice is one of the richest blessings that result from civilization and good government. It counteracts the evil which might otherwise arise from inequality of rank and fortune, and, without leveling the distinctions which are necessary for the well-being of society, prevents the abuse of them. It keeps every member of the community in his proper place and station; it protects the rich from the rapacity of the envious, and the poor from the oppression of the proud; and, while it imposes on all a beneficial restraint, it gives to all personal security and mutual confidence.

Supposing therefore that the inspired volume had made no provision for the administration of justice; it would have been expedient to establish such an order of things as should maintain the rights of men inviolate, or inflict fitting punishment on the aggressors.

But God has graciously admitted this subject into the code which he has given us; he has put honor upon those who are appointed to preside in judgment; he has declared them to be his own representatives and viceregents upon earth; he has required the utmost deference to be paid them, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake; and has on some occasions ratified their decisions by extraordinary dispensations of his providence In the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

The protecting of the innocent, and the punishing of the guilty, were objects of especial care in the government which he himself established upon earth. This appears, as from a variety of other ordinances, so particularly from the appointment of cities of refuge, where people, who had accidentally or willfully taken away the life of a fellow creature, might flee for safety until the matter should be examined, and the judgment of the congregation declared respecting it.

This enactment, which is to be the subject of the present discourse, may be considered in a two-fold view; namely, as a civil ordinance, and as a typical institution.

I. First, let us consider the appointment of cities of refuge as **a civil ordinance**. For the sake of clarity we will begin with explaining the nature and intent of the ordinance, and then make such remarks upon it as our peculiar circumstances require.

The ordinance was simply this.

There were to be six cities separated at convenient distances, three on either side of the Jordan River, that any people who had occasioned the death of a fellow-creature might flee to one or other of them for safety, until the circumstances of the case should be investigated, and his guilt or innocence be ascertained. The person next of kin to him who was killed, was permitted to avenge the blood of his relation in case he overtook the slayer before he reached the place of refuge; but, when the slayer had got within the gates of the city, he was safe. Nevertheless the magistrates were to carry him back to the town or village where the transaction had taken place; and to institute an inquiry into his conduct. Then, if it appeared that he had struck the deceased person in wrath or malice, (whether with any kind of weapon, or without one,) he was adjudged to be a murderer, and was delivered up to justice; and the near relative of the murdered person was to be his executioner. If, on the contrary, it was found that he had been unwittingly and unintentionally accessory to the person's death, he was restored to the city where he had fled, and was protected there from any further apprehensions of the avenger's wrath.

Nevertheless he was, as it were, a prisoner at large in that city; he was on no account to go out of it; if the avenger should at any time find him outside the borders of the city, he was at liberty to kill him. This imprisonment continued during the life of the high-priest; but at his death it ceased; and the slayer was at liberty to return to his family and friends. This part of the ordinance was probably intended to put honor upon the high-priest, whose death was to be considered as a public calamity, in the lamenting of which all private resentments were to be swallowed up. Such was the ordinance itself. We now come to the intention of it.

The intention of the ordinance.

The shedding of human blood has ever been regarded by God with the utmost abhorrence. The first murderer indeed was spared in consequence of a divine mandate; but not from mercy, but rather, that he might be to the newly-created world a living monument of God's wrath and indignation.

The edict given to Noah says expressly, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." But, as there must of course be different degrees of guilt, according to the circumstances under which any person might be killed, God appointed this method of securing protection to the innocent, and punishment to the guilty. The accomplishing of these two objects was, I say, the direct end which God proposed. Provision was thus made that unselfish and experienced judges should have the cause brought before them, and determine it according to evidence.

If the man were guilty, and declared to be so on the evidence of two witnesses, he must die; whatever were his rank in life, he must die; no commutation of punishment could possibly be admitted.

If the man were innocent, or were not convicted by the testimony of two witnesses, (for no man was to be put to death on the testimony of one witness only,) the whole congregation was bound to secure him from the effects of animosity and vindictive wrath.

Yet even in the protection thus afforded to the man-slayer, there were many circumstances which were intended to mark God's abhorrence of murder; for though no blame attached to the man who had unwittingly slain his neighbor—yet he must leave all that was dear to him, and flee in danger of his life to the city of refuge, and continue there a prisoner, perhaps as long as he lived, and certainly to the death of the high-priest; nor could his confinement there be dispensed with; there was no more commutation of sentence allowed for him, than for the murderer himself.

The injunctions of God relative to this deserve particular notice, "You shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death; but he shall be surely put to death. And you shall take no satisfaction for him who is fled to the city of his refuge; that he should come again and dwell in the land, until the death of the priest. So you shall not pollute the land wherein you are; for blood defiles the land, and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him who shed it."

In the remarks that we shall have occasion to make on this ordinance, we must of necessity be more particular than we could wish; but in all that we may say upon this most interesting subject, we beg to be understood, not as presuming to incriminate any individual, but as declaring in general terms what we believe to be agreeable to the mind of God, and what we are bound in conscience to declare with all faithfulness.

That there is an ardent wish in all our legislators, and in all who superintend the execution of the laws, to maintain the strictest equity, none can doubt; a conviction of it is rooted in the mind of every Briton; and the bitterest enemies of our country are compelled to acknowledge it. But in some respects there is in our laws an awful departure from the laws of God; I should rather say, a direct opposition to them.

Adultery, by the law of God, was punished with death, with the death of both the offenders. But by our laws the penalties attach only, or principally, when the crime is committed by the wife, and then only on her paramour. That the penalties have on some occasions been heavy, we confess; but never once too heavy. Yet it happens that the very penalty itself may in some cases contribute to the evil which it is intended to repress; to repress I say, rather than to punish; for, if public report may be credited, the penalty recently adjudged was expressly said to be, not a punishment inflicted on the offender, but a compensation to the injured party. In this view the crime is never punished as a crime, when no less a punishment than death was by God's law to be awarded to it. I allude to the murders that are committed in duels, and which have greatly, and increasingly defiled our land. It has been said, and with too much reason, that our laws are harsh. They doubtless are so in many instances; but on the subject of duelling, whether from the laws themselves, or from the influence of those who administer them, or from the connivance of those who are sworn to give a verdict according to them, they are criminally lax. On this account, as well as for the cruelties of the slave trade, God has a controversy with us. I know that political expediency is urged in support of both these evils; but what have we to do with expediency in express opposition to the commands of God?

Let me recall to your minds that declaration of God already cited, that "blood defiles the land, and that the blood that is shed therein cannot be cleansed but by the blood of him who shed it;" and let me turn your attention to another passage, which I would to God that every senator might hear, yes that it might reach the ears of majesty itself, forasmuch as it would reflect no inconsiderable light on the circumstances in which we are involved.

You will find it written in [2 Kings 24:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 24.2-4). "The Lord sent against him (the king of Judah) bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it …Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed, (for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood,) which the Lord would not pardon."

The Jews probably ascribed the invasion of their country to the avarice or anger of the Babylonish monarch; and we also may trace our present dangers to the insatiable ambition of a tyrant; but in our case, as well as theirs, it is certain, that "at the commandment of the Lord all this has come upon us;" and the same reason also may be assigned, "Our land is defiled with blood," with the blood of thousands of our fellow-creatures in Africa, and with the blood of murderous duelists in our own land; with "blood (I say) which the Lord will not pardon."

Moreover, these iniquities must be considered as sanctioned by the legislature, because they who alone have the power, adopt no measures to cleanse the land from these horrible defilements. God therefore has taken the matter into his own hands, and has stirred up once more our inveterate enemies to avenge his quarrel. The time is come when he is about to "make inquisition for blood," and when he will require at our hands both the innocent blood that we have shed, and the guilty blood which we have forborne to shed. O that we might take warning before it be too late; and put away the evils which are likely to involve us in utter ruin!

Thus it appears that the ordinance before us is by no means uninstructive, or irrelevant to the present occasion, when God's representatives in judgment are about to investigate causes, and to execute the laws. And we hope that in delivering our opinions on such momentous concerns we shall not be thought to have exceeded our province, or to have transgressed the rules which modesty, combined with faithfulness, would prescribe.

But we are to consider the appointment of these cities of refuge in another view also; namely,

II. As a **typical institution**.

The whole of the Mosaic economy was "a shadow of good things to come;" and the typical import of it is illustrated at large in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Of course it cannot be expected that every particular part of it should be opened to us with the same precision. What was most essential to the understanding of Christianity, was explained to us fully, and the parallel drawn by an infallible hand. What was less necessary, was merely referred to, without any express delineation of its import; its signification being clearly to be gathered from the light reflected on other parts, and from the analogy of faith.

There is not much said respecting the typical import of the cities of refuge; yet there are plain and manifest allusions to it. The prophet says, "Turn to your stronghold, you prisoners of hope;" in which words he marks the precise state of those who had fled to the cities, as "prisoners of hope." Paul speaks of Christians as "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them;" wherein he alludes not only to the cities themselves, but to the care taken to keep the roads leading to them in good repair, [Deuteronomy 19:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 19.3), and by direction-posts to point it out to those, who, if retarded by obstacles, or detained by inquiries, might lose their lives.

Again, alluding to the danger of those who should be found out of the borders of the city, he expresses his earnest desire to "be found in Christ." But in explaining images of this kind there is need of much caution and sobriety, lest, while we endeavor to illustrate Scripture, we give occasion to the adversary to regard it as fanciful and absurd. We are however in no danger of exceeding the limits of sober interpretation, if we say that the cities of refuge were intended to teach us three things:

That we are all sinners and liable unto death.

That there is one only way for our escape.

That those who flee to the appointed refuge are safe forever.

That we are all sinners and liable unto death, is plain to every one that acknowledges the authority of Scripture. We all are sinners; as sinners, we are condemned by the holy law of God; which says, "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." We are therefore in the situation of the man-slayer, pursued by him whose right it is to avenge himself on us for our transgressions. Whether our transgressions have been more or less heinous, his right is the same, and our danger is the same, if we are overtaken by his avenging arm. We may urge many pleas in extenuation of our guilt; but they will be of no avail. We may not have been so bad as others; but we "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God:", "every mouth therefore must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." The very calling of Christ by the name, Savior, is a plain confession, that in ourselves we are lost; for "he came to save only those who are lost."

Further proof of this being unnecessary, we proceed to observe next,

That there is but one way for our escape.

There were many cities in Canaan; but none afforded protection to the man-slayer, except those which had been separated for that express purpose. We too may think that there are many refuges for us; but all, except one, will be found "refuges of lies, which will be swept away with the broom of destruction."

Repentances, reformations, alms-deeds, are all good and proper in their place; but none of them, nor all together, can ward off the sword of divine vengeance, or afford security to our souls. Christ is the only refuge! His blood alone can expiate our guilt, "his name is the tower to which we are to run for safety;" "neither is there any other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved."

The man-slayer might perhaps escape the vigilance of the avenger, or, if overtaken, might successfully withstand him. But who can elude the search of Almighty God, or resist his power? The hope is vain. We must flee to Christ, or perish forever!

The urgency of the case is methinks a sufficient reason for our fleeing to Christ with all expedition. But if we need any further stimulus, let us reflect on the next hint suggested by the text; namely,

That those who flee to the appointed refuge are safe forever.

The man-slayer might stand within the gates of the city, and defy the threats of his adversary; for the whole city was pledged for his security. And may not the sinner, who has taken refuge in Christ, behold without alarm the threatenings of the law, secured as he is by the promise and oath of Jehovah? From the city of refuge indeed those who had committed willful murder were brought forth for execution. But was ever one cast out who came to Christ? Was ever one taken from that sanctuary in order that he might suffer the sentence of the law? It is possible that through the remissness of the magistrates the rights of those privileged cities might be violated; but who shall violate the engagements of Jehovah? Who shall break in to destroy a sinner lodged in the bosom of his Lord? God himself assures us that "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

There is however a striking and beneficial intimation given us, respecting the necessity not only of fleeing to Christ, but of abiding in him. If the man-slayer for one moment ventured beyond the bounds of the city, he lost his privilege, and became exposed to the wrath of the avenger. Thus, if after we have escaped, as we think, from the vengeance of our God, we grow insensible of our guilt and danger, and do not carefully, by renewed applications to the Savior, abide in him—we expose ourselves to the most imminent peril. For, as "we cannot escape if we neglect so great salvation," so neither can we, "if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth; there will remain nothing for us then but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume us." Our situation will even be worse than ever; and "our latter end be worse than the beginning; for it would have been better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us."

Permit me then to address you all as in the situation before described, for none of us will presume to deny that we are sinners, or that, as sinners, we are liable to divine displeasure. Let me entreat you all to flee from the wrath to come. Let these principles be universally acknowledged among us, and deeply rooted in our hearts:

That there is no refuge but in Christ!

That all self-righteous methods of obtaining mercy will prove fallacious.

That every one must feel his guilt and danger, and, like the man-slayer when pursued by the avenger, flee as for his life, renouncing all things whatever that may impede his flight and endanger his soul. Pleasures, interests, friends—must all give way to this great concern; and all regard for them must be swallowed up in this, the one thing needful. To obtain a saving interest in Christ must be our great, our only care. We must "count all things but loss that we may win Christ and be found in him."

The city of refuge was open day and night, and to a heathen sojourner as well as to the native Jew. In the same manner also is Christ accessible to us at all times, and his mercy shall be extended to all who flee unto him.

The cities of refuge were so situated, that any one at the remotest corner of the land might reach one of them in less than half a day. Just so, is not Jesus also "near to all that call upon him?" Yes, all, whether in this land, or in the most distant quarter of the globe, may come to him in one single hour, or, if I may so speak, in one single moment; for the soul that sincerely relies on him for pardon and acceptance, is enclosed by him as in an impregnable fortress, and shall be "saved by him with an everlasting salvation."

Yet it is not sufficient to flee to him once; we must be daily and hourly fleeing to him in the habit of our minds; in other words, we must "abide in him," by the continual exercise of faith, even to the last hour of our lives; then shall the death of our great High-Priest be available for our discharge, and we shall be restored to the complete and everlasting enjoyment of our friends, our liberty, and our inheritance.

Hitherto we have enforced the subject from topics suited to all people in all ages of the world. But we cannot conclude without adding a few considerations, which arise out of existing circumstances, and are peculiarly worthy of our attention.

That our enemies are Jehovah's sword, and that he is come forth against us as an avenger, cannot but be confessed; but whether it be for our chastisement only, or for our utter destruction, none can tell. One thing however is sure; that the best possible method of pacifying divine anger, and averting the impending judgments, is to flee unto the Savior, and to seek mercy through him.

If once we were stirred up, as a nation, to take refuge in him, He who spared repenting Nineveh, would spare us, and either avert the gathering storm, or deliver us from its dreadful ravages. This is the direction uniformly given us by God himself. Thus he says by the prophet Zephaniah, "Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation, before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the LORD's wrath comes upon you. Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger! [Zephaniah 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 2.1-3)." Again he says by Isaiah, "Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast; for, behold, the Lord comes out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the land for their iniquity." Could we but be prevailed upon to follow this advice, we doubt not but that it would be more effectual for our preservation than all the navies that can be built, or all the armies that can be mustered; for if God were for us, then none could successfully fight against us. If we were even already vanquished, yes, and led into captivity, still we "should take those captive whose captives we were, and should rule over our oppressors." Let me not however be understood as disregarding the proper means of self-defense; for God saves by means; and to expect his interposition without using our utmost efforts in our own behalf, would be presumption.

Though therefore we would exhort all in the first place to flee for refuge to the hope set before them, we would also exhort them to stand forth manfully against the enemy; to regard neither time, nor labor, nor property, no, nor life itself—so that they may but help forward to the uttermost their country's cause. And though the occupation of a warrior is the last perhaps that a man of piety would choose—yet on the present occasion conscience requires, rather than forbids, that all of us should unite with heart and hand to repel the foe, and to sacrifice our lives, if need be, in defense of our religion and liberties, our property and friends, our king and country.

Still however we must recur to our former observation; and urge in the first place the necessity of turning to our stronghold. Would to God that none of us might delay, or loiter, or slacken our pace, or yield to weariness, or regard anything that we leave behind; but that all might flee, as Lot out of Sodom, to our adorable Savior! Then, whether we live or die, we must be safe. The enemy may destroy our bodies, but our great adversary can never hurt our souls. Our immortal part will be placed beyond the reach of harm; and when empires fall, yes, and the whole earth shall be dissolved by fire, we shall dwell in mansions that are inaccessible to evil, and enjoy a bliss that shall never end!

Deuteronomy

#185

THE PROSPERITY OF ZION DESIRED

**DEUTERONOMY 1:11**

"May the LORD, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised!"

To decline any measure of exertion in behalf of people committed to our care, may appear to argue a lack of love to them. But there are certain bounds beyond which a man cannot go; his physical strength will fail; and his attempts to persevere beyond his capacity of performance will defeat the very object he has in view, and prove an injury to the people whose welfare he is laboring to consult.

The care of all the people of Israel, two million in number, had devolved on Moses; and he endeavored, as their chief magistrate, to dispense justice to them all, by hearing and determining every subject of litigation that was brought before him. This occupied him from morning to night, and was obviously impairing his bodily health; the labor was too great for him; and he would soon have sunk under it. By the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, he appointed people, chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to hear all the causes which were of inferior consequence, and reserved to himself the determination of those only which were of a more difficult nature, and which required a more especial reference to God himself.

Moses was now arrived at the borders of Jordan, and at the last month of his life; and was directed of God to record, and leave behind him in writing, a brief memorial of the principal events which had taken place, and the principal laws which had been promulgated during their sojourning in the wilderness; so that the generation which had arisen in the wilderness might, by a special recapitulation of those events, have them the more deeply impressed on their minds, and be stirred up by the remembrance of them to serve their God with more fidelity than their fathers had done.

The appointment of these inferior judges was one of the first acts which took place in the wilderness; and, as it originated from Jethro, his father-in-law, and not from God—Moses was fearful that it might be open to an unfavorable construction, and that he might appear, if not to have neglected his duty towards the people, at least to have been defective in love towards them; and therefore, in relating the fact, he tells them how anxiously he had at the very time manifested his zeal in their service; since, while issuing his order for the appointment of these men, instead of grudging that they were so numerous as to render the minute attention which he had hitherto paid to their concerns impracticable, he had expressed the most ardent desire for their further increase, saying, "May the LORD, the God of your fathers, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised!"

This benevolent wish of his, will lead me to consider the prosperity of God's Israel:

I. Let us consider the prosperity of spiritual Israel as a matter of **promise**.

To the promises of God relating to this subject Moses refers, "May the Lord bless you, as he has promised you!"

Now God has promised innumerable blessings to those who are of Israel **according to the flesh**.

He had assured Abraham that his seed should be numerous "as the stars of Heaven, and countless as the sands upon the sea-shore, [Genesis 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.5)." They had already multiplied greatly; (they were about thirty thousand times as many as they had been two hundred and fifty years before,) and they should yet multiply to a far greater extent, as they did in succeeding ages; and as they shall do in ages yet to come. For though at present they are brought low and are very few in number, God has expressly declared, by his prophet, that "he will multiply them above their fathers, [Jeremiah 33:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 33.22); [Deuteronomy 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.5)."

His blessings, too, shall be richly poured out upon them, not only as they were in Canaan, in the days of David and Solomon, but in a measure that can scarcely be conceived. Even in a temporal view, I apprehend, the magnificent descriptions of the prophets will be realized, [Amos 9:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.11-15); [Zechariah 8:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.3-8); but in a spiritual view I am perfectly sure of it; for they shall be restored to their God, and be as great monuments of God's love and mercy in the world, as ever they have been of his wrath and indignation, [Zechariah 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.13); [Zechariah 8:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.18-23). Yes, the time is now fast approaching, when "from them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained, [Jeremiah 30:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.19)." "This is what the LORD says: Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, 'O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.' [Jeremiah 31:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.7)."

God promised innumerable blessings to **his spiritual Israel** also.

That these are included in the wish of Moses, there can be no doubt; for, in the promise which be more immediately refers to, where it is said, "In blessing I will bless you, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore;" it is added, "And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed! [Genesis 22:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.17-18)."

Here, beyond all doubt, is reference to the whole Gentile world, who shall in due season be converted to the Lord, and together with Israel become "one fold under one Shepherd." That these were included in the promise made to Abraham, Paul expressly declares, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In you shall all nations be blessed. So, then, they which be of faith" (whether Jews or Gentiles, the same are the children of Abraham, and) "are blessed with faithful Abraham [Galatians 3:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.7-9)." He further declares, that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith, [Galatians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13-14)." Here, then, we have a fuller insight into the wish of Moses, as expressed in the text; a wish in which every pious person under Heaven must concur.

II. Let us consider the prosperity of spiritual Israel as an object of **desire**.

"O that the Lord God of our fathers would multiply his people a thousand-fold, and bless them, as he has promised them!" If any of you need a stimulus to concur in this wish, reflect on,

1. The benefit that will accrue to **every converted soul**.

Were we to contemplate a soul actually taken out of Hell, and translated to a throne of glory in Heaven—we would say, indeed, that such a one had reason to rejoice. Yet, what is it less than this that is done for every child of God? Are we not doomed to perdition? Is there any child of man that is not "by nature a child of wrath? [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3)." Consequently, if delivered from condemnation, "is he not a brand plucked out of the fire? [Zechariah 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 3.2)." Is he not, at the very time that he is "turned from darkness to light, turned also from the power of Satan unto God? [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)." Does he not actually "pass from death unto life [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14)." and is he not "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son? [Colossians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.13)."

Reflect then on this, as done for only one soul; and there is reason, abundant reason, for every person in the universe to pant for it. But consider it as extended to thousands, and millions, yes, millions of millions, and who should not pant and pray for that? See what a commotion is produced in Heaven even by the conversion of one soul; for "there is joy among the angels, in the very presence of God, over one sinner who repents;" and what must we be, who feel so indifferent about the conversion and salvation of others? Truly, we have need to blush and be confounded before God, for the coldness with which we contemplate his promised blessings.

2. The honor that will redound to **God**.

Behold our fallen race! Who is there among them that bears any measure of resemblance to the image in which man was first created? Who regards God? Who does not practically "say to God: Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your ways [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14)."

But let a soul be apprehended by divine grace, and converted to faith in Christ, and what a different aspect does he then bear! Truly, the whole works of creation do not so brightly exhibit the glory of God, as does this new-created being. Brilliant as are the rays of the noonday sun, they do not display even the natural perfections, and still less the moral perfections, of the Deity, as he; who, from the image of "his father the devil," is "transformed into the image of God himself, in righteousness and true holiness."

Now, too, he begins to live unto his God, and by every possible means to exalt his glory in the world, acknowledging him in all things, serving him in all things, glorifying him in all things.

Is there a man that is in any respect sensible of his obligations to God, and not desirous that such converts should be multiplied? Did David "shed rivers of tears for those who kept not God's law;" and shall not we weep and pray that such people may be converted to God, and made monuments of his saving grace. But conceive of this whole world that is in rebellion against God, converted thus, and God's will done on earth as it is done in Heaven; and shall this be to us no object of desire? Truly, we should take no rest to ourselves, nor give any rest to God, until he accomplish this blessed work, [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7), and until "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of Christ! [Revelation 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.15)."

3. The happiness that will arise to **the world**.

Every soul that is converted to God becomes "a light" to those around him; and as "salt," to keep, as it were, from utter putrefaction, the neighborhood in which he dwells. In proportion, then, as these are multiplied, the very world itself assumes a different aspect; instead of the brier, there grows up the fir-tree, and "instead of the thorn, there grows up the myrtle-tree;" until, at last, "the whole wilderness shall blossom as the rose," and this "desert become as the garden of the Lord!" I need not say more.

The wish of Moses is, methinks, the wish of every one among you; and you are all saying with David, "Blessed be God's glorious name forever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! [Psalm 72:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.19)."

You will ask, then, What shall we do to accelerate this glorious event?

God works by means. He did so in the apostolic age; and he will do so still; and if we have any love either for God or man, we should use all the means within our power for the increase of the Church and the salvation of the world. Yet may we learn a very important lesson from the conduct of Moses, in the appointment of people to labor with him. He had sustained the burden, himself alone, and doubtless thought that he was rendering an acceptable service both to God and man. But his father-in-law said to him, and said with truth, "The thing that you do is not good. You will surely wear away, both you, and the people that are with you; for this thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to perform it yourself alone. Hearken now unto my voice; I will give you counsel, and God shall be with you." And then he proceeds to advise, that he should provide, out of all the people, a number of pious and able men to co-operate with him in the work wherein he was engaged, [Exodus 18:17-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 18.17-23). Moses did well in following the advice; for if he had not, his indiscreet zeal would have soon worn him out, and deprived the whole nation of the benefit of his labors for forty years.

It were well if pious ministers would attend to this hint. There is scarcely a man who has any zeal for God or love for souls, who does not so multiply his labors, as to reduce his strength in a few months or years; when true wisdom would teach him so to regulate his exertions, that he may hope to continue them unimpaired to nearly the end of life.

I do not mean to dampen the zeal of ministers, but only to direct it. It is impossible to be too zealous for the Lord; but it is possible enough, and too common also, to exercise zeal in so indiscreet a way, as greatly to injure the Church which we profess to serve.

Let the zeal of our people be called forth; let them be invited to labor with us, to visit the sick, to instruct the rising generation, and to engage in everything which may benefit our fellow-creatures and exalt the honor of our God. With all the aid that can be afforded us, there will be work enough for us to do; and we should endeavor to perform our duties with spirituality and zeal, rather than to abound in mere bodily exercise, which, after all, will profit but little for the salvation of souls.

Are there then, among you, any that know the value of your own souls? I call on you to help your minister in all those parts of his office which you can with propriety perform. And I trust, that if we will all exert ourselves according to our several abilities, the work of God will rapidly advance among us, and our "Jerusalem soon become a praise in the earth."

When all, both male and female, concurred in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, every one working in front of his own door, the whole was completed in the incredibly short space of two-and-fifty days, [Nehemiah 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.12); [Nehemiah 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.20); [Nehemiah 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.6); [Nehemiah 6:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.15-16). And what effects would we see, if all were unanimous and earnest in advancing, each according to his ability, the work of God among us? Methinks, our numbers would be greatly multiplied, and "showers of blessings" would be poured out among us!

#186

VICTORY ASSURED TO THE TRUE ISRAEL

**[Deuteronomy 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 1.21)**

"See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

The journeyings of the Israelites in the wilderness afford an inexhaustible fund of instruction to us. The history of their deliverance from Egypt, their trials and supports, and their final entrance into the land of Canaan—so exactly corresponds with the experience of believers in their journey heaven-ward, that we are never at a loss for an illustration of spiritual truths, from that which actually took place among God's ancient people.

The Israelites, after one year spent in the wilderness, were now arrived on the very confines of Canaan; and the exhortation which I have now read to you, was part of the address of Moses to them, encouraging them to go up and take possession of the land. And, assuming (what I need not now state to prove) the justness of the parallel between their state and ours, the words before us contain,

I. The command given to us in reference to the promised land.

There is for us, as there was for Israel, "a rest" prepared, [Hebrews 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.8-9). This passage sufficiently proves the parallel that is here assumed.

1. We are here bidden to take possession of the promised land by **right**, as the gift of God.

Canaan was given to Abraham and his seed by God himself; and the grant was confirmed with an oath, that the possession of it should infallibly be secured to them, verse 8. God had a right to bestow it upon whoever he would; and they to whom he should assign it had a perfect right to occupy it. The former possessors were no more than tenants at will; and, if God saw fit to dispossess them, and to let it out to other gardeners, no injury was done to them, either on the part of the Great Proprietor, or on the part of those whom he appointed to succeed to the inheritance. This I say, in order to satisfy the minds of those who, through ignorance of the tenure on which the land was held, feel a repugnance to the transfer, and to the mode in which the transfer of the land was effected.

In relation, however, to the land which we are called to possess, no such feeling can exist. Heaven is the free gift of God to Abraham's spiritual seed, as Canaan was to Abraham's natural descendants. It is given to them in Christ Jesus; yes, it was given to them even before the worlds were made! [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2) and [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). And, as a person receiving a grant of land from an earthly monarch would go up without hesitation to take possession of it, so should every person who believes in Christ regard the heavenly land, and go up, not to make it his own, but to take possession of it as his own. No thought of purchasing it must for one moment enter into his mind. If he is united unto Christ by faith, that is a sufficient title; and from that moment he may claim it as his own.

This command then do we give, in the name of Almighty God, to every one of you who believes in Christ, "Go up and possess the land," which the Sovereign of the universe, of his own love and mercy, has given to you!

2. We are here bidden to take possession of the promised land by **conflict**, as the fruit of victory.

Though the land was given them—yet were they to gain it by the sword. And we also have enemies without number to encounter. The world, the flesh, and the devil—all obstruct our way; and must be vanquished, before we can sit down in the full enjoyment of the promised inheritance. Nor let it be thought that Heaven is the less a gift on this account; for though we fight, it is not our own sword that gets us the victory. It was "God himself who drove out the inhabitants" of the earthly Canaan; and it is through God alone that our weapons produce any effect in subduing our enemies before us, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5).

How compatible the two are, will appear from what our blessed Lord has said, "Labor not for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give unto you, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27)." You must fight; and you must conquer; but, after all, you must say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise! [Psalm 115:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 115.1)."

Together with this command, we are taught,

II. The way in which we should address ourselves to the performance of it.

The command of God to us is positive, as that to them also was; and,

1. Our obedience to God should be **prompt**.

I am persuaded they would have done well, if they had never thought of sending spies to search out the land, and to tell them against what cities they should direct their first efforts. It was a carnal expedient, as the event proved. True it is, that "Moses was well pleased" with the proposal, verse 23; but he would not have been well pleased, if he had clearly seen from whence it issued, and what would be the result of it. He conceived it to be expressive only of a determination to go up, the very instant they should be directed where to go. And, supposing that there was no mixture of unbelief in it, it might be laudable enough. But what need had they of men to "search out the land," and to direct their efforts? Had not Almighty God himself, for the space of a whole year, "gone before them to search out places from day to day where they should fix their tents? verse 33." Had he done this "by a pillar of fire by night, and by a cloud by day," and was he not both able and willing to show them "by which way to go up" to the land, and what cities to attack? I say again, it was a carnal expedient, as the outcome proved; and it was the source of all the calamities that they endured for the space of forty years. Had they said to Moses, 'Pray to God for us, to direct us; and we are ready to go;' they would have done well; but, by trusting to an arm of flesh, they fell.

In like manner, we should obey the divine mandate without delay. We should "not confer with flesh and blood, [Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.16);" we should not be consulting how we may avoid the trials which God has taught us to expect; but should look simply to the Captain of our salvation, and follow implicitly his commands; regarding no word in comparison with his, nor ever dreaming of a more convenient season than the present. What He calls us to do, we should "do" instantly, and "with all our might."

2. Our confidence in God should be **entire**.

They were bidden "not to fear, or be discouraged." So neither should we "fear" any dangers that may threaten us, or "be discouraged" under any trials we may be called to sustain. As for "Anakim," or cities "walled up to Heaven," what are they to us? "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world! [1 John 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.4)" If Jehovah be on our side, what have we to fear? We may say of all our enemies, as Joshua did of those he was called to encounter, "They are bread for us! [Numbers 14:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.8-9);" and shall not only be devoured as easily as a morsel of bread, but they, and all that they have, shall be our very support, invigorating our souls by the energies they call forth, and augmenting the happiness which they labor to destroy. Whatever may occur, we should never stagger at the promise through unbelief; but "be strong in faith, giving glory to God, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)." We should go forward in the spirit of the holy Apostle, "If God is for us, then who can be against us! [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)."

Hear then, believers, and follow my advice.

1. Survey the land!

See whether it be not the glory of all lands, "a land flowing with milk and honey." Come up to Pisgah, and look down upon it; or rather, I would say, Come up to Zion, and behold its length and breadth. See already, and taste the fruits of it. Take into your hands "the grapes of Eshcol," and tell me whether the whole world besides affords such fruit.

Methinks, some of you at least have already partaken of them; yes, I doubt not, but that in "the light of God's countenance lifted up upon you," and in "his love shed abroad in your hearts"—you have already found a pledge and a foretaste of your heavenly inheritance.

But still, I say: Survey the land. "Not one of its inhabitants ever says, I am sick, [Isaiah 33:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.24)." "No sorrow is there, no sighing, no pain, no death! [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4)." "Nor is there any night there; it needs neither the sun nor moon to lighten it; for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is the light thereof! [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)."

Tell me, then, is it not worth the conflict? Is anything too much to do, or too severe to suffer, in order to obtain it, [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18). Only keep that glorious object in view, and you will never sheathe your sword, until you have gained the victory.

2. Perform your duty.

Gird on your swords. Go forward against the enemy. Make no account of any obstacles. Think neither of the strength or number of your enemies. Say not, "Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives rescued from the fierce? But this is what the LORD says: "Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save! [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.24-25)."

Neither be discouraged from a sense of your own weakness; for "God will perfect his own strength in your weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10)." Go on simply depending on your God. Rest on that word of his, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed; for I am your God; I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10)." With confidence do I address you thus; for the Lord Jesus Christ himself has said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom! [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)." Only "fight the good fight of faith;" and you shall be "more than conquerors, through Him who loved you!"

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GOD'S CONTINUED MERCIES TO US

**[Deuteronomy 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 2.7)**

"The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything."

Whoever would enter fully into the doctrine of divine providence, should study the history of the Israelites in the wilderness. We at this day are ready to imagine that, however God may superintend the affairs of the universe sufficiently to keep them in order, and to subserve his own purposes—he yet leaves smaller matters to a kind of chance; and that to expect his interposition in our own behalf, especially in things of daily occurrence, would be the height of mere presumption. In a word, we draw lines of distinction between a general and a particular providence; and feel ourselves at liberty to acknowledge the one, while we deny the other.

But in the Scriptures there will not, I apprehend, be found any ground for such a distinction. We cannot conceive any thing of less importance than a sparrow falling to the ground, or a hair of our head perishing; yet these things are expressly declared to be within the bounds of God's peculiar care. The truth is that God is the same as ever he was; and that his attention to the affairs of men is still the same; the only difference is, that for special ends he made his interpositions visible in former days; whereas, now he would have us to "walk by faith, and not by sight."

Of his people in the wilderness, he was the visible Leader, Protector, Nourisher; and so constant had been his attention to their every need, that, at the close of their pilgrimage, Moses could appeal to the whole nation, "These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything."

That we may see that God's care has not been exclusively confined to them, I will show:

I. What mercies have been given to us during the whole period of our sojourning in this wilderness.

Surprising, indeed, was God's attention to his ancient people.

They were in a wilderness where there was literally nothing for their sustenance. Neither food nor water could be found there; but of both did God afford them a daily and miraculous supply; causing bread to descend from Heaven for them, and the waters of the rock to follow them.

But from where would they obtain clothing? None could be fabricated; none be found. But God superseded the need of any fresh supply, by causing that "their clothes, for the whole space of forty years, should never wear out;" and that, notwithstanding all their traveling. "During the forty years that I led you through the desert, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet! [Deuteronomy 29:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.5)."

Nor would he allow their strength to fail; for, "as their clothing waxed not old upon them, so neither did their feet swell for forty years, [Deuteronomy 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.4)."

With these physical blessings, God imparted to them no less richly for their souls. He gave them his Word; he continued to them his ministers, "he sent to them, also, his Holy Spirit to instruct them, [Nehemiah 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.20)."

Now in all this we may see what God, in his mercy, has done for us also, during the whole of our sojourning in this wilderness world:

1. In relation to our **temporal** concerns.

We also, has God supplied with all the necessities of life; but because, in providing these things, the agency of man is required, we overlook His hand; whereas, in fact, he is as much the author and giver of these blessings to us, as he was of the mercies given to Israel. What can we do to secure fruitful seasons? Who among us could make so much as a blade of grass to grow? Who could prevent the fruits of the earth from being devoured by locusts and caterpillars, or from being destroyed by blasting and mildew? Who has kept from our borders the desolating scourge of war? Who has preserved us from the more terrific calamities of civil war? To whom are we indebted, that we have not been reduced to the lowest ebb of misery by some destructive conflagration? Men, it is true, are actively employed in providing for themselves; but what are men? they are nothing but agents, (unconscious agents, I had almost said,) accomplishing the will of another; for, while they are universally seeking their own personal advantage, they are, in reality, God's instruments, employed by him for the benefit of the world.

Thousands of people are employed, daily and hourly, to supply our needs. Little do we think of this. Were we placed for any length of time in a country uninhabited except by ourselves and our own family, we should soon feel how deeply we are indebted to God for innumerable comforts, which, through his good providence, we enjoy; and which, through a stimulus imparted by him, other people are engaged in procuring for us. What their motives may be, is no concern of ours; it is sufficient for us to know, that, as God directed and overruled the ambition of Sennacherib to correct and chasten his people Israel, [Isaiah 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-7)—so he directs and overrules the selfish dispositions of mankind to administer to the needs of each other, and to provide for the comfort of the whole world. And the poorest person among us has thousands of people at this very time engaged for him, to provide him with the comforts and conveniences of life.

2. In relation to the concerns of our **souls**.

Has not God preserved to us also, his Word and ordinances; dispensed, too, by the same ministry for forty years. (In the year 1822, the Author had ministered at Trinity Church the precise time that Moses and Aaron had to Israel.) And may we not say, also, that God has, during the whole of that period, "sent his Spirit to instruct you?" Yes, God has borne testimony to the word of his grace, and caused it to "come to you not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5)." I would not willingly speak of anything relating to myself; that is the last subject that should ever be brought before you; but, having fulfilled the term that Moses and Aaron did before me; and being able to call to witness that, during the whole of that time, I have lived for you, and labored for you, and "declared unto you faithfully the whole counsel of God;" I cannot but remind you of God's dealings with you in that particular, and make my appeal to you in the words of my text, "These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing! The example of Paul, in his address to the Elders of Ephesus ([Acts 20:17-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.17-27); [Acts 20:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.31),) must be the Author's apology for the foregoing observations; which, after forty years of labor in the same church, may well be allowed."

Whatever the value of these mercies are, it will be greatly heightened by considering,

II. Under what circumstances they have been continued to us.

If we look at Israel, they will serve as a mirror to reflect our image to the very life.

1. In viewing Israel, we may see how great **our** provocations to God have been.

Grievously neglectful of their duties were the Israelites, during the whole of their sojourning in the wilderness. Though commanded to circumcise their children, they never administered that rite in all that time, [Joshua 5:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.5-7). Never but once had they held a Passover; and that was in the very first year after they had come out of Egypt, [Numbers 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 9.5). And during the whole forty years they offered no sacrifice to God; but, on the contrary, paid their devotions to senseless gods, and graven images, [Acts 7:41-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.41-43). Such was their conduct in the wilderness.

And what has been our conduct?

Have not our most solemn duties been neglected, or performed only in such a way as to show that our heart was not in them?

Have we attained the true circumcision, even "the circumcision of the heart, which is not of the flesh, but of the Spirit; whose praise is not of men, but of God, [Romans 2:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.29)."

Have we fed upon the Paschal Lamb, even on "Christ our Passover, who has been sacrificed for us, [1 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7)." Have "we presented ourselves as living sacrifices to God, which has been our reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

Have we not rather "set up idols in our hearts, [Ezekiel 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.3)," even every heathenish abomination, and in ten thousand instances "loved and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore! [Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.25)."

And do we "find these things by secret search, [Jeremiah 2:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.34)."

No! your whole lives proclaim it.

Must we go back to the Apostles' days to find that "covetousness which is idolatry," or the people "whose god is their belly," and who have no delight in anything but the gratification of their sensual appetites? Let us look back through the whole time of our sojourning in this wilderness world, and we shall find our whole lives to have been one continued series of provocations, as if we had determined to "weary out our God, [Isaiah 43:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.24)," and "grieve his very Spirit with our whorish heart, [Ezekiel 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 6.9)." Yes, "this has been our manner from our youth, [Jeremiah 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 22.21)." God "has known this to be our walking through this great wilderness;" and our consciences also attest that these accusations are true!

2. In viewing Israel, we may see how entirely **we** have been under the influence of unbelief.

Notwithstanding all that God did for Israel—yet they would "never believe his Word, [Psalm 78:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.22); [Psalm 78:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.32); [Psalm 106:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.24)." And it was this very thing which most of all provoked him to "swear that they would never enter into his rest, [Hebrews 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.18)."

And what has been our state in this respect? We have had God's promises and threatenings set before us with all fidelity; but neither the one nor the other have been regarded; they have all appeared to us but as idle tales; and have had no more influence upon us, than if they had been unworthy of the smallest belief. Every earthly vanity has been able to excite a hope or fear—but God's Word has been altogether despised.

Say, brethren, whether this be not true? Say whether the terrors of Hell have been sufficient to keep you from sin, or whether the glories of Heaven sufficient to stimulate you to a surrender of yourselves to God? With the exception of a few instances, wherein divine grace has wrought successfully upon this or that particular individual, the whole mass of us have lived as "without God in the world," preferring our own will before his, and the gratification of ourselves before the honor of our God!

Such have been the circumstances under which our God has continued to load us with his benefits! "We have lacked nothing" that was conducive to our comfort; but God has lacked everything that should promote his glory!

See then, here.

1. What reason we have to admire the patience of our God.

He complains, "Behold, I am weighted down beneath you as a wagon is weighted down when filled with sheaves, [Amos 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 2.13);" yet has he borne with us even to the present hour, "many a time turning his anger away, and not stirring up all his wrath," to punish us, as we deserved! [Psalm 78:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.38). Can you look back upon no season, brethren, when God might well have cut you off; and have "got honor to himself" in executing upon you the most signal vengeance! [Exodus 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.17). I call upon you, then, to 'glorify his name; and to acknowledge from your inmost souls, that "it is of his mercies that you have not been consumed long ago, even because his compassions never fail! [Lamentations 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.22)."

2. What need we have to humble ourselves before him.

God's patience will come to an end. "His Spirit will not always strive with man, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3)." He waits to be gracious unto us; but it is to the sincere penitent alone that he will impart the full blessings of salvation. His determination is, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy! [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)." Contend, then, with God no longer; but let "his goodness and patience and forbearance lead you to repentance! [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4)."

3. What need do mere professors of religion, in particular, have to fear and tremble.

The whole people of Israel had been brought out of Egypt, and been both blessed and honored by God as his peculiar people; and yet they perished in the wilderness. And this is recorded as an admonition to us, [1 Corinthians 10:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-12). Jude, also, particularly labors to impress this warning on our minds, Jude verse 5. Let it sink then, into all our hearts, [Hebrews 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.12); [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1); for the very bounty of our God, in the bestowment of temporal and spiritual blessings upon us, will only aggravate our condemnation, if we do not make a suitable improvement of them.

We may have "lacked nothing for forty years," and yet "lack a drop of water" to cool our tormented tongues to all eternity! I beg you, brethren, see to it, that your "hearts be right with God;" and that the blessings bestowed on you in this life, be the means of preparing you for richer blessings in the world to come.

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MOSES VIEWS CANAAN FROM MOUNT PISGAH

**[Deuteronomy 3:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 3.23-28)**

At that time I pleaded with the LORD: "O Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan—that fine hill country and Lebanon." But because of you the LORD was angry with me and would not listen to me. "That is enough," the LORD said. "Do not speak to me anymore about this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah and look west and north and south and east. Look at the land with your own eyes, since you are not going to cross this Jordan. But commission Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across and will cause them to inherit the land that you will see."

The character of Moses, in whatever point of view it is considered, is worthy of admiration:  
his zeal and industry,  
his patience and meekness,  
his fidelity and love,  
were never surpassed by any man!

As an intercessor for the Lord's people, he stands unrivaled. Many were the occasions whereon he prevailed on God to spare that rebellious nation that had been committed to his charge. But behold, this eminent saint, who had so often succeeded in his applications for others, was now refused when praying for himself. And, though it might appear humiliating, and might lower him in the estimation of all future generations, he gives a faithful account of the whole matter, recording both the prayer that he offered, and the answer he received.

The points to which we would call your attention are:

I. God's rejection of the prayer of Moses.

Nothing could be more proper than this prayer of Moses.

He requested that he might be permitted to "go over Jordan, and see the promised land." It was with a view to the enjoyment of this land that he had labored incessantly for forty years. He had held up the possession of it as the great inducement to the whole nation to come forth from Egypt, and to endure all the hardships of journeying in the wilderness, and the perils of protracted warfare against the inhabitants of the land. He knew that Canaan was "the glory of all lands." And now that the period for the full possession of it had arrived; yes, and God had given them a pledge of it in the subjugation of the kingdoms on the east of Jordan, who can wonder that Moses should be anxious to participate the promised happiness?

The manner in which he sought it was most becoming. He did not complain of the sentence of exclusion that had been passed upon him; but only prayed that it might be reversed. Often had he urged similar petitions for others with success; and therefore he had reason to hope, that he might not plead in vain for himself. He did not certainly know that God's decree with respect to him differed from the threatenings that had been denounced against others; there might be a secret reserve of mercy in the one case as well as in the other; and therefore he was emboldened to offer his requests, but with a meekness and modesty peculiarly suited to the occasion.

But God saw fit to reject his petition.

The refusal which God gave him on this occasion was most peremptory. When he had rejected his prayer for the offending nation, be said, "Let me alone!" and in that very expression intimated the irresistible efficacy of prayer. But on this occasion he forbade him to "speak to him any more of that matter;" yes, he "swore to Moses, that he should not go over Jordan, [Deuteronomy 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.21)."

In this refusal there was a solemn manifestation of the divine displeasure. It was intended as a punishment both for his sin, and for the people's sin; for God was "angry with him for their sakes," as well as for Moses' sake. To him the punishment was great, as being a painful privation, a heavy disappointment; to the people also it was a severe rebuke, inasmuch as they were deprived of:  
a loving spiritual father,  
a powerful intercessor,  
an experienced governor,  
and under whom they had succeeded hitherto beyond their most optimistic expectations.

We forbear to notice the typical intent of this dispensation, because we have mentioned it in a former part of this history, see discourse on [Numbers 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.12).

It is in a practical aspect only that we now consider it; and therefore we confine ourselves to such observations as arise from it in that view.

This refusal however, though absolute, was not unmixed with kindness; as will appear from considering:

II. The mercy with which this judgment was tempered.

As God in later ages withheld from Paul, and even from his only dear Son, the blessings which they asked, but gave them what was more expedient under their circumstances, [2 Corinthians 12:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-9); [Luke 22:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.42-43) with [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7); so now, while he denied to Moses an entrance into Canaan, God granted to him:

1. A sight of the whole land.

He commanded Moses to go up on Mount Pisgah to view the land; and from that eminence he showed him the whole extent of the country from east to west, and from north to south. The sight, we apprehend, was miraculous; because, however great the elevation of the mountain might be, we do not conceive that the places which he saw could be within the visible horizon, [Deuteronomy 34:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 34.1-4). However this might be, we have no doubt but that the sight must have been most gratifying to his mind, because it would be regarded as a pledge of God's fidelity, and a taste at least of those blessings which Israel was about to enjoy in all their fullness.

But we are persuaded that Moses, notwithstanding he spoke so little about the heavenly world, knew the typical nature of the promised land, and beheld in Canaan a figurative representation of that better kingdom, to which he was about to be translated. "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible! [Hebrews 11:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-27)."

2. An assurance that his place would be successfully filled by Joshua.

To him was committed the office of instructing, encouraging, and strengthening Joshua for the arduous work which lay before him. And what could be a richer comfort to an aged minister, than to see that God had already raised up one to occupy his post, and to carry on the work which he had begun? Methinks, the preparing of Joshua's mind for his high office was a task in which Moses would take peculiar delight; and the certainty of Israel's ultimate success would cheer him under the pains of his own personal disappointment.

The practical observations arising out of this history, will bring the subject home to our own business and bosoms.

We learn from it,

1. To guard against sin.

We might profitably dwell on this thought, if we considered only the exclusion of Moses from the promised land for one single transgression. But as other occasions must arise whereon such an observation may be grounded, we would call your attention rather to the injury which both ministers and people may sustain by means of each other's transgressions. Repeatedly does Moses say, "God was angry with me for your sakes;" from whence we are assured, that their sins were punished in him. And we know also that his sin was punished in them; they suffered no less by the loss of him, than he did by the loss of Canaan.

Such a participation in each other's crimes and punishments is common in the world; children are affected by their parents' faults; and parents by the faults of their children.

In the ministerial relation, this happens as frequently as in any. If a minister seeks his own glory instead of God's, or is remiss in the duties of the closet—then his people will suffer as well as he; the ordinances from whence they should derive nutriment will be to them "as dry breasts or a miscarrying womb."

If the people slight the ministry of a faithful man—then what wonder is it if God removes the lampstand from those who will not avail themselves of the light?

If, on the other hand, they idolize their minister, and put him, as it were, in the place of God—then what wonder is it if God, who is a jealous God, leaves him to fall, that they may see the folly of their idolatry; or take him from them, that they may learn where alone their dependence should be?

Let the death of Moses, and the bereavement of the Israelites, be a warning to us all, that we do not provoke God by our rebellions to withhold from us the blessings we desire, or to inflict upon us the punishments we deserve.

2. To submit with humility to God's afflictive dispensations.

When once Moses was informed of the decided purpose of God, he forbore to ask for any alteration of it; nor did he utter one murmuring or discontented word concerning it. God had bidden him to be satisfied with the mercies which he was about to receive; and he was satisfied with them.

Now it may be that God has denied us many things which we could have wished to possess, or taken from us things which we have possessed. But if he has given us grace, and mercy, and peace through our Lord Jesus Christ—then what reason can we have to complain?

We have prayed to him perhaps under our trials, and they have not been removed; or we have deprecated them, and they have still been inflicted. But God has said to us, "Let it suffice you" that I have made you a partaker of my grace; "let it suffice you" that I have given you prospects of the promised land; "let it suffice you" that you have a portion in a better world.

And shall not these things be sufficient for us, though we be destitute of everything else? Shall any of the concerns of time or sense be of much importance in our eyes, when we are so highly privileged, so greatly enriched?

Ah! check the first risings of a murmuring thought, all you who are ready to complain of your afflictions! Think whether you would exchange one Pisgah view of Heaven for all that this earth can give; and, if you would not, then think, how richly Heaven itself will compensate for all your light and momentary afflictions. Instead of indulging any anxiety about the things of this world, let the prayer of David be the continual language both of your hearts and lips, [Psalm 106:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.4-5).

3. To serve God with increasing activity to the end of life.

The last month of Moses' continuance on earth was as fully occupied with the work of God as any month of his life. Though he knew that he must die within a few days, he did not intermit his labors in the least, but rather addressed himself to them with increasing energy and fidelity. This was the effect of very abundant grace; and it was an example but rarely copied.

How many towards the close of life, when they know, not from revelation indeed, but from their own feelings, that they must shortly die, become:  
cold in their affections,  
slothful in their habits,  
contrary in their tempers,  
and remiss in their duties!

Instead of taking occasion from the shortness of their time, to labor with increased diligence, how many yield to their infirmities, and make their weakness an excuse for willful indolence!

May the Lord grant, that no such declensions may take place in any of us; but that rather "our last days may he our best days;" and that our Lord, finding us both watchful and active, may applaud us as good and faithful servants, prepared and fitted for his heavenly kingdom!

#189

JOSHUA A TYPE OF CHRIST

**[Deuteronomy 3:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 3.27-28)**

"Go up to the top of Pisgah and look west and north and south and east. Look at the land with your own eyes, since you are not going to cross this Jordan. But commission Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across and will cause them to inherit the land that you will see."

In reading the records of God's dealings with the Jews, we are sometimes tempted to bring him to the bar of human reason, and to arraign his character as severe. Such hasty judgment, however, would be impious in the extreme; since we are wholly incompetent to decide upon matters which are so far beyond our understanding. There may be, and doubtless are, ten thousand legitimate reasons to justify his conduct, where our slender capacities cannot find any. Such light has been cast upon his procedure, in many instances, by the Gospel, as may fully evince the necessity of shutting our mouths, and of giving him credit for perfect equity, even where his dispensations most oppose our natural feelings.

We may instance this in the exclusion of Moses from the promised land. He had brought the people out of Egypt, and, with most unparalleled meekness, had endured their perverseness forty years in the wilderness. Yet, when he had led them to the very borders of Canaan, he was not allowed to go in with them; but, on account of one single offence, Moses was obliged to devolve on Joshua his office, his authority, his honors; yes, he was forbidden even to pray for an admission into that good land, verse 23-27. As dark as this dispensation must have appeared at the time, we are enabled to discern a propriety and excellency in it. It was altogether of a typical nature; for while Moses represented the law; Joshua, his successor, was a very eminent type of Christ.

The text naturally leads us to show this; and we shall,

I. Trace the resemblance which exists between Joshua and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Joshua resembles Christ in his **name**.

The name of Joshua was intended to designate his work and office. His name originally was Hoshea, but was altered by Moses to Joshua, [Numbers 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.16). This, doubtless, was of God's appointment, that he might be thereby rendered a more remarkable type of Jesus. This name imported, that he should be a divine Savior. Jah, which was prefixed to his name, is the name of God; and though, in the strictest and fullest sense, it could not properly belong to him; yet, as he was to be such a distinguished representative of Jesus, it was very properly given to him.

The name of Jesus still more fitly characterized the work that was to be performed by him. This name is precisely the same with Joshua in the Greek language; and repeatedly do we, in the New Testament, translate it, "Jesus," when it might have been translated, "Joshua, [Acts 7:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.45); [Hebrews 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.8)." It was given to our Lord by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21); and the express reason of it was assigned, namely, that "he should save his people from their sins." To him it is applicable in the fullest extent, because he is "God manifest in the flesh," "Emmanuel, God with us;" and because he is the author, not of a typical and temporary, but of a real and eternal salvation to all his followers! [Hebrews 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.9).

This striking coincidence, with respect to the name, may prepare us for fuller discoveries of a resemblance,

2. Joshua resembles Christ in his **office**.

Joshua was appointed to lead the Israelites into the promised land. Moses was not permitted to do this. He was destined to represent the law, which was admirably calculated to lead men through the wilderness, but could never bring them into the land of Canaan; one offence against it destroyed all hope of salvation by it [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); it made no provision for mercy; its terms were simply, Do this and live! [Romans 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.5). For an example of its inexorable rigor, Moses himself was, for one unadvised word, excluded from the land of promise.

The office of saving men must belong to another; and, for this reason, it was transferred to Joshua, who had been both appointed to it, and thoroughly qualified by God for the discharge of it, [Deuteronomy 34:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 34.9).

Jesus also was commissioned to bring his followers into the Canaan that is above. He, probably in reference to Joshua, is called the Captain of our salvation, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10); and he appeared to Joshua himself in this very character, proclaiming himself to be the Captain of the Lord's army, [Joshua 5:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.13-15). "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," the Lord Jesus Christ came to effect, [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3). He has been divinely qualified for the work; and, like Joshua, was "encouraged to it, and strengthened in it," by an assurance of God's continual presence and support, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1); [Isaiah 42:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.4); [Isaiah 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.6). Jesus leads his people on from grace to grace, from strength to strength, from victory to victory, [Psalm 84:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.7); [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18); [Revelation 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.2). Nor will he ever desist from his work, until he shall have subdued his enemies, and established his people in their promised inheritance!

Happily for us the resemblance may be likewise traced,

3. Joshua resembles Christ in his **success**.

Nothing could oppose any effectual bar to Joshua's progress. Though Jordan had overflowed its banks, its waters were divided to open a path on dry land for him, [Joshua 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 3.17). The impregnable walls of Jericho, merely at the sound of rams' horns, were made to fall, [Joshua 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.20). Confederate kings fled before him, [Joshua 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.16). City after city, kingdom after kingdom, were subjected to his all-conquering army; and almost the whole accursed race of Canaanites were extirpated, and destroyed, [Joshua 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 12.7). The promised land was divided by him among his followers, [Joshua 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 11.23); [Joshua 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 18.10); and he appealed to them with his dying breath, that not so much as one, of all the promises that God had given them, had ever failed, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14).

And shall less be said respecting our adorable Emmanuel? He "triumphed over all the principalities and powers" of Hell; and causes his followers to trample on the necks of their mightiest foes, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20) with [Joshua 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.24). He leads them safely through the swellings of Jordan, when they come to the border of the promised land, [Isaiah 43:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2); and having given them the victory, he divides among them the heavenly inheritance, [Matthew 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34). Thus will all of them be put into possession of "that rest, which remains for the people of God, [Hebrews 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.1); [Hebrews 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.9); [Hebrews 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.11)," in the hope and expectation of which they endured the labors of travel, and the fatigues of war.

Having traced the resemblance between Joshua and Christ, I will,

II. Take occasion to suggest from it some **beneficial advice**.

1. To those who **desire** to possess the promised land.

I am grieved to say that many desire that good land—yet never attain unto it.

First, because they do not seek it with sufficient earnestness.

Secondly, because they do not seek it in God's appointed way.

Respecting the former of these our blessed Lord says, "Agonize to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in, and not be able, [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24)."

And of the latter, the Apostle Paul, speaking of the great mass of the Jewish people, says, that, though they "followed after the law of righteousness, they did not attain to the law of righteousness; because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-33)." He bore them record that they had a zeal of God; but it was not according to knowledge; for, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they would not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believed. "But they, instead of believing in him for salvation, stumbled at him as a stumbling-stone and a rock of offence;" and thus they perished, while the Gentiles by believing in him were saved! [Romans 10:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.2-4).

Now, my brethren, I cannot too earnestly impress upon your minds the necessity of abandoning altogether the law of Moses as a ground of hope before God, and of trusting entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation! If Moses himself was not allowed to lead his followers into the earthly Canaan, or even to go in there himself—then much less can he lead you into the heavenly Canaan. As a guide through the wilderness, Moses is excellent; but as a Savior, he will be of no use. Joshua alone can give you the possession of the promised land; that is, Jesus alone can effect your complete salvation!

If you read the epistles of Paul to the Romans and Galatians, you will find the main scope of both is to establish and enforce this truth. Bear in remembrance then that you must "die to the law," and seek salvation by Christ alone; for "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."

2. To those who are **fighting** for the possession of the promised land.

Though Canaan was promised to the Israelites—yet they must fight for it. And you must also fight for the promised inheritance of Heaven. Remember however, that you are not to fight in your own strength. You must "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," if you would gain the victory over your spiritual enemies. And this is your great encouragement; for through Him the weakest shall be strong; yes, shall prove "more than conqueror" over all his enemies."

What took place in the contest of Israel with the Midianites shall be accomplished in God's Israel throughout all the world. Against the numerous hosts of Midian only twelve thousand armed Israelites (a thousand from each tribe) were sent to fight; and when the whole Midianite army was destroyed, it was found, on investigation, that not a single Israelite was slain! [Numbers 31:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.49).

So shall it prove with you, my brethren, in your spiritual warfare. Only fight manfully in the Savior's strength; and what he said to his heavenly Father in reference to his disciples while he was yet upon earth, he will repeat before the whole assembled universe in the day of judgment, "Of those whom you have given me, not one is lost! [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12)." True, there are Anakim of gigantic stature to contend with, and cities walled up to Heaven to besiege; but "greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world;" and all your enemies, with Satan at their head, "shall be bruised under your feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)." "You shall devour them! [Numbers 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.9)," and not one shall ever be able to stand before you.

3. To those who yet retain their **hostility** to the Lord Jesus.

You have seen what was the outcome of the contest between Joshua, and all the kingdoms of Canaan. No less than thirty-one kings fell before him, [Joshua 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 12.24). And Le sure that you also must perish, if you continue to fight against our adorable Lord and Savior. I would earnestly recommend to you the example of the Gibeonites. They felt assured that they could not withstand Joshua; and therefore, pretending to belong to a nation remote from Canaan, they came, and entreated him to make a league with them. There needs no such collusion on your part. You may come to Jesus, and he will enter into covenant with you to spare you, [Joshua 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 9.15). And, if your submission to him provokes the hostility of the world against you, he will come to your support, and will save you by a great deliverance! [Joshua 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.4); and will make you eternal monuments of his power and grace.

Let me also recommend to you the example of Rahab. She cast herself and all her family on the mercy of Joshua; and bound the cord with which she had let down the spies from the walls of Jericho, about her window, as the sign of her affiance in the pledge that had been given her. For this faith of hers, and for her works consequent upon it, was she commended both by Paul, and James, [Joshua 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.22); [Joshua 6:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.25) with [Hebrews 11:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.31) and [James 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.25).

If you also with similar faith cast yourselves upon the Lord Jesus, and, like her, evince also by your conduct the sincerity of your faith, you "shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation," and have a portion accorded to you among the Israel of God forever and ever!

#190

MOSES' SOLEMN CHARGE TO ISRAEL

**[Deuteronomy 4:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.7-9)**

"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

Practical religion, however approved in theory, is not always admired when exhibited to our view. Not but that it has a beauty in it which commends itself to those who have a spiritual discernment; but it forms too strong a contrast with the ways of the world to gain its favor; the men of this world "love darkness rather than light;" and therefore agree to reprobate as visionary and gloomy, whatever opposes their evil habits. Nevertheless "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding;" and, wherever any people are enabled to maintain a uniform and consistent conduct, there their very enemies must honor them in their hearts, and confess them to be "a wise and understanding people." This at least was the opinion of Moses, who from that very consideration urged the Jews to contemplate their high privileges, and to walk worthy of them, verses 5, 6 with the text. To advance the same blessed end in you, we shall state:

I. The peculiar privileges of the Jewish nation.

They were certainly advanced above all the nations upon earth; as in other respects, so particularly:

1. In their nearness to God.

Moses had enjoyed such access to God as no man had ever done before; and "conversed with him face to face, even as a man converses with his friend, [Exodus 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.11)." That generation to whom he ministered, had seen on many occasions the efficacy of his intercessions, and therefore could appreciate the force of that observation in the text, "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?"

Nor was this privilege to be confined to Moses; the high-priest was furnished with an ephod and a breastplate, by means of which he was to inquire of God in every difficulty, and to obtain answers from him. This was used from time to time, even until the Jews were carried captive to Babylon; and the great privilege of having such means of communion with God may be sufficiently seen in the advantage which David repeatedly derived from it, to learn the intentions of his enemies, and to gain direction respecting his own conduct. See [1 Samuel 23:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.9-12); [1 Samuel 30:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.7-8).

The heathen indeed had their oracles which they consulted; but from which they could derive no certain information. The ambiguity of the answers given by them, left room for opposite constructions, and proved that no dependence whatever could be placed upon them. Those heathen oracles were a compound of lying priestcraft, and diabolic influence; and were no more to be compared with the oracle of God, than the light of a deceitful vapor with that of the meridian sun.

2. In the excellence of the dispensation under which they lived.

"The statutes and judgments" which Moses had delivered to them were altogether "righteous" and good.

The judicial law, which was given for the regulation of their civil polity, was founded in perfect equity, and conducive in every point to the happiness of the community.

The moral law was a transcript of the mind and will of God; it was in every respect "holy, and just, and good," and, if followed in every part, would assimilate the people to God himself.

The ceremonial law also, notwithstanding it was burdensome in many respects, afforded peace and comfort to all who were bowed down with a sense of sin, and desirous of finding acceptance with an offended God.

As for the heathen world, they had none of these advantages; they had no such light for the government of their states, no such instruction for the regulation of their conduct, no such consolations under the convictions of guilt or the dread of punishment. They had no better guide than their own weak unassisted reason; and though by means of that they were able to frame laws for the public good, they never could devise a system whereby the soul should be restored to holiness or peace. In these respects the Jews were elevated above all the world. The excellence and authority of their laws were undisputed; and every one was made happy by his observance of them.

But still the Jews themselves had little to boast of in comparison of,

II. The superior privileges which we enjoy.

Our access to God is much nearer than theirs.

They had, it is true, in some respects the advantage. No person now can hope for such special directions as were imparted by the Urim and Thummim. But it must be remembered that this mode of ascertaining the mind of God was of necessity confined to few; it was not possible for every person to go to the high-priest, and to obtain his mediation with the Deity on every subject that might require light; this liberty could be used by few, and only on occasions of great public importance.

But our access to God is unlimited; every person, at all times, in every place, on every occasion, may come to God, without the intervention of a fellow-creature. In this respect every child of God is on a par with the high-priest himself, or rather, is elevated to a state far above him, in proportion as a spiritual approach is nearer than that which is bodily, and an immediate access is nearer than that which is through the medium of an ephod and a breastplate.

Indeed the liberty given to us is unbounded! "In everything we may make our requests known unto God;" and we may "ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." Though therefore the Jews were privileged beyond the Gentiles, whose gods of wood and stone could not attend to their supplications—yet we are no less privileged above them, and can adopt a language unknown to them, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Our dispensation too is more excellent than theirs.

We need not to disparage the Jewish dispensation in any respect, in order to raise in our estimation that under which we live. We may give to that all the honor it deserves, and yet not be afraid that ours will suffer anything in the comparison. Their dispensation, as excellent as it was, was only a shadow, of which our dispensation is the substance. Whatever good their dispensation had, is retained and perfected in ours; whatever it had that was weak and burdensome, is done away. The peace which that afforded to the guilty conscience was temporary; the very means of forgiveness were only so many fresh remembrances of unforgiven sin! But the peace obtained by us "surpasses all understanding;" and the joy we taste is "unspeakable and full of glory."

The blood of bulls and of goats afforded a very weak ground for hope, in comparison with the blood of God's only-begotten Son that "cleanses from all sin," and "perfects forever them that are sanctified."

Again, the law of the ten commandments denounced a curse for one single violation of them, however small; and afforded no assistance to those who desired to fulfill it. But the precepts of the Gospel, though as holy and as perfect as the Law itself, are accompanied with promises of grace and offers of mercy to all who endeavor to obey them. God undertakes to write them on our hearts, so as to make a compliance with them both easy and delightful.

In a word, the Jewish law was a yoke of bondage, productive only of slavish fears, and ineffectual efforts. Whereas our Christian law, the law of faith, begets a filial spirit, and transforms us "into the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness." Compare the two dispensations, and we shall see in a moment our superior advantages; for while they were only slaves under the lash, we have the happiness of being "sons and heirs!"

If such be our distinguished privileges, it befits us to consider,

III. Our duty in reference to our superior privileges.

This was a point which Moses was extremely anxious to impress on the mind of every individual, "Only take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently." In like manner would we urge you in relation to the privileges you enjoy:

1. To keep up the remembrance of them in your own hearts.

It is scarcely necessary to observe how apt we are to forget the mercies which God has given unto us. The mere facts indeed may easily be retained in our heads; but a due sense of the kindness expressed in them, and of the obligations conferred by them, is not easily preserved upon the soul. The smallest trifle is sufficient to draw us from heavenly contemplations, and to engage those affections, which should be exclusively fixed on God. Hence Moses bade the people "take heed, lest the things which they had seen should depart from their heart! See also [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1)."

What then must we do? We must avoid the things which would weaken our sense of God's mercies to us; and abound in those exercises which will keep alive the sense of them upon our hearts. Worldly cares, worldly pleasures, and worldly company, should all be regarded by us with a godly fear and jealousy, lest they "choke the seed" which is springing up in our hearts, and prevent us from "bringing forth fruit unto perfection."

On the other hand, our meditation on the Christian's privileges should be frequent; we should muse on them, until the fire kindles in our hearts, and we are constrained to speak of them with our tongues. It is thus that we must trim the lamps of our sanctuary; it is thus that we must be keeping up the fire on the altar of our hearts. In a word, if we will improve our privileges—then we shall have them augmented and confirmed. If, on the other hand, we slumber over them—then we shall give advantage to our enemy to despoil us of them, [Matthew 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.12).

2. To transmit the memory of them to posterity.

The Jews were made the depositories of divine knowledge for the good of the Christian Church; and it is in the same light that we are to consider the Scriptures which are committed to us; they are not for our personal benefit merely, but for the use of the Church in all future ages. Hence then we are bound to "teach them to our sons, and our sons' sons."

It is greatly to be lamented indeed that so little attention is paid to the sacred oracles in the public seminaries of learning. Something of a form indeed may be observed; a form, from which the very people who enforce it neither expect nor desire any practical effect. But if one half the pains were taken to make us understand and feel the exalted privileges of Christianity, as are bestowed on elucidating the beauties of classic writers, or exploring the depths of science and philosophy—then we should see religion and morals in a very different state among us.

It was for the instructing of their children in righteousness that the solemn transactions that took place at Mount Horeb were required to be more particularly impressed on all succeeding generations, verse 10; and if the law from Mount Sinai was to be so carefully communicated to the children of Jews—then ought not "the law that came forth from Mount Zion, [Isaiah 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.3)," even "the law of faith," to be proclaimed to our children?

If they were to remember Horeb, shall not we remember Bethlehem, where the Son of God was born into the world; and Calvary, where he shed his blood; and Olivet, from whence he ascended up to Heaven, and led captive all the powers of darkness? Yes surely, these great transactions should be dwelt upon, not as mere historical facts, but as truths whereon are founded all the hopes and expectations of sinful man; and we cannot but regard it as a blessing to the Christian world, that days are set apart for the special remembrance of those great events; so that not one of them may be overlooked, but that all in succession may be presented to the view of every Christian in the land. Let us then habituate ourselves to dwell upon them as the most delightful of all subjects, [Deuteronomy 11:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18-20), and "account both our time and money well spent in promoting the knowledge of them in the world."

#191

EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY, part 1

**[Deuteronomy 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.28-29)**

The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me: "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"

[This and the following sermons on the same subject were preached before the University of Cambridge.]

The historical parts of the Old Testament are more worthy of our attention than men generally imagine. A multitude of facts recorded in them are replete with spiritual instruction, being intended by God to serve as emblems of those deep mysteries which were afterwards to be revealed.

For instance, what is related of our first parent, his creation, his marriage, his sabbatic rest—was emblematic of that new creation which God will produce in us, and of that union with Christ whereby it shall be effected, and of the glorious rest to which it shall introduce us, as well in this world as in the world to come.

In like manner the promises made to Adam, to Abraham, and to David, whatever reference they might have to the particular circumstances of those illustrious individuals, had a further and more important accomplishment in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the second Adam, the Promised Seed, the King of Israel.

The whole of the Mosaic dispensation was altogether figurative, as we see from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which the figures themselves are illustrated and explained. But there are some facts which appear too trifling to afford any instruction of this kind. We might expect indeed that so remarkable a fact as the promulgation of the Law from Mount Sinai should have in it something mysterious; but that the fears of the people on that occasion, and the request dictated by those fears, should be intended by God to convey any particular instruction—we would not have readily supposed; yet by these did God intend to shadow forth the whole mystery of Redemption!

We are sure that there was somewhat remarkable in the people's speech, by the commendation which God himself bestowed upon it; still however, unless we have turned our minds particularly to the subject, we shall scarcely conceive how much is contained in it.

The point for our consideration is: The request which the Israelites made in consequence of the terror with which the display of the Divine Majesty had inspired them. The explanation and improvement of that point is all that properly belongs to the passage before us. But we have a further view in taking this text; we propose, after considering it in its true and proper sense, to take it in an improper and accommodated sense; and, after making some observations upon it in reference to the request which the Israelites then offered, to notice it in reference to the requests which we from time to time make unto God in the Liturgy of our Established Church.

The former view of the text is that which we propose for our present consideration; the latter will be reserved for future discussion.

The Israelites made a pledge request to God; and God expressed his approbation of it in the words which we have just recited, "Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always!"

From hence we are naturally led to set before you The opinions and dispositions which God approves.

The opinions, "Everything they said was good."

The dispositions, "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always!"

I. The **opinions** which God approves.

"Everything they said was good."

Here it will be necessary to analyze, as it were, or at least to get a clear and distinct apprehension of, the speech which God commends. It is recorded in the preceding context from

[Deuteronomy 5:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.23-28). "When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey." The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good."

Now in this speech are contained the following things:

An acknowledgment that they could not stand before the Divine Majesty.

A desire that God would appoint someone to mediate between him and them.

And lastly, an engagement to regard every word that should be delivered to them through a Mediator, with the same obediential reverence, as they would if it were spoken to them by God himself.

These are the opinions, on which the commendation in our text was unreservedly bestowed.

The first thing then to be noticed is: Their acknowledgment that they could not stand before the Divine Majesty.

Many things had now occurred to produce an extraordinary degree of terror upon their minds. There was a blackness and darkness in the sky, such as they never before beheld. This darkness was rendered more visible by the whole adjacent mountain blazing with fire, and by vivid lightnings flashing all around in quick succession. The roaring peals of thunder added a solemn solemnity to the scene. The trumpet sounding with a long and increasingly tremendous blast, accompanied as it was by the mountain shaking to its center—appalled the trembling multitude. And Jehovah's voice, uttering with inconceivable majesty his authoritative commands, caused even Moses himself to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake! Compare [Exodus 19:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.16-19) with [Hebrews 12:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-21)." In consequence of this terrific scene, we are told that the people "left and stood afar off, [Exodus 20:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.18-19)," lest the fire should consume them, or the voice of God strike them dead upon the spot, [Exodus 20:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.21).

Now though this was in them a mere slavish fear, and the request founded upon it had respect only to their temporal safety—yet the sentiment itself was good, and worthy of universal adoption.

God being hidden from our senses, so that we neither see nor hear him, we are ready to think lightly of him, and even to rush into his more immediate presence without any holy awe upon our minds; but when he speaks to us in thunder or by an earthquake, the most hardened rebel is made to feel that "with God is solemn majesty," and that "he is to be had in reverence by all that are round about him."

This is a lesson which God has abundantly taught us by his dealings with the Jews. Among the men of Bethshemesh, a great multitude were slain for their irreverent curiosity in looking into the ark as Uzzah also afterwards was for his well-meant but erroneous zeal in presuming to touch it. The reason of such acts of severity is told to us in the history of Nadab and Abihu, who were struck dead for offering strange fire on the altar of their God; they are designed to teach us, "that God will be sanctified in all who come near unto him, and before all the people he will be glorified [Leviticus 10:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.1-3)."

The second thing to be noticed is: Their desire to have some person appointed who should act as a Mediator between God and them. They probably had respect only to the present occasion; but God interpreted their words as general, and as importing a request that he would send them a permanent Mediator, who should transact all their business, as it were, with God, making known to him their needs, and communicating from him the knowledge of his will.

That God did construe their words in this extended sense, we are informed by Moses in a subsequent chapter of this book. In [Deuteronomy 18:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.15) and following verses, this explanation of the matter is given, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account!"

Who this Prophet was, we are at no loss to declare; for the Apostle Peter, endeavoring to convince the Jews from their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, and that Moses himself had required them to believe in him, cites these very words as referring to Christ, and calls upon them to regard him as that very Mediator, whom God had sent in answer to the petitions which had been offered by their forefathers at Mount Horeb, [Acts 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.22-23).

Here it should be remembered that we are speaking, not from conjecture, but from infallible authority; and that the construction we are putting on the text is not a fanciful interpretation of our own, but God's own exposition of his own words.

Behold then the sentiment expressed in our text, and the commendation given to it by God himself. It is a sentiment, which is the very sum and substance of the whole Gospel. It is a sentiment, which whoever embraces truly, and acts upon it faithfully, can never perish, but shall have eternal life.

The preceding sentiment that we are incapable of standing before a holy God, is good, as introductory to this; but this is the crown of all; this consciousness that we cannot come to God, and that God will not come to us, but through Christ! This acquiescence in him as the divinely appointed Mediator; this acceptance of him as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life;" this sentiment, I say, God did, and will, approve, wherever it may be found. The Lord grant that we may all embrace this sentiment as we ought; and that, having tasted its sweetness and felt its efficacy, we may attain by means of it all the blessings which a due reception of it will ensure!

The third thing to be noticed is, Their engagement to yield unqualified obedience to everything that should be spoken to them by the Mediator. This, if viewed only as a general promise of obedience, was good, and highly acceptable to God; since the obedience of his creatures is the very end of all his dispensations towards them. It is to bring them to obedience, that he alarms them by the denunciations of his wrath, and encourages them by the promises of his Gospel. When once they are brought to love his law, and obey his commandments, all the designs of his love and mercy are accomplished; and nothing remains but that they attain that measure of sanctification, that shall fit them for the glory which he has prepared for them.

But there is far more in this part of our subject than appears at first sight. We will endeavor to enter into it somewhat more minutely, in order to explain what we conceive to be contained in it.

The moral law was never given with a view to men's obtaining salvation by their obedience to it; for it was not possible that they who had transgressed it in any one particular, should afterwards be justified by it. Paul says, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness should have been by the law, [Galatians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.21)." But the law could not give life to fallen man; and therefore that way of obtaining righteousness is forever closed.

With what view then was the law given? I answer:  
to show the existence of sin,  
to show the lost state of man by reason of sin,  
and to shut him up to that way of obtaining mercy, which God has revealed in his Gospel.

I need not multiply passages in proof of this; two will suffice to establish it beyond a doubt: "As many as are under the law, are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Again, "The law is our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith! [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); [Galatians 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.24)."

But when the law has answered this end, then it has a further use, namely, to make known to us the way in which we should walk. In the first instance we are to flee from it as a covenant, and to seek for mercy through the Mediator; but when we have obtained mercy through the Mediator, then we are to receive the law at his hands as a rule of life, and to render a willing obedience to it.

Now all this was shadowed forth in the history before us. God gave Israel his law immediately from his own mouth; and, so given, it terrified them beyond measure, and caused them to desire a Mediator. At the same time they did not express any wish to be liberated from obedience to it; on the contrary, they engaged that whatever God should speak to them by the Mediator, they would listen to it readily, and obey it unreservedly. This was right; and God both approved of it in them, and will approve of it in every man.

We are afraid of perplexing the subject, if we dwell any longer on this branch of it because it would divert your attention from the main body of the discourse. We will therefore content ourselves with citing one passage, wherein the whole is set forth in the precise point of view in which we have endeavored to place it.

We have shown that the transactions at Mount Sinai were intended to shadow forth the nature of the two dispensations, (that of the law and that of the gospel,) in a contrasted view; that the terrific nature of the one made the Israelites desirous to obtain an interest in the other; and that the appointment of Moses to be their Mediator, and to communicate to them the further knowledge of his will with a view to their future obedience, was altogether illustrative of the gospel; which, while it teaches us to flee to Christ from the curses of the broken law, requires us afterwards to obey that law. In a word, we have shown, that though, as Paul expresses it, we are "without law" (considered as a Covenant) we are nevertheless "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ (1 Corinthians (9:21)." And all this is set forth in the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the following words: "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, ([Hebrews 12:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-24))."

I would only observe, in order to prevent any misconception of my meaning, that I do not suppose the Israelites to have had a distinct view of these things, such as we have at present; but that they spoke like Caiaphas the high-priest, when he said, "It was expedient for one man to die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish, ([John 11:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.49))." They did not understand the full import of their own words; but God overruled their present feelings so that they spoke what was proper to shadow forth the mysteries of his gospel; and he then interpreted their words according to the full and comprehensive sense in which he intended they should be understood.

We could gladly have added somewhat more in confirmation of the opinions which have been set before you, and particularly as founded on the passage we are considering; but your time forbids it; and therefore we pass on to notice,

II. The **dispositions** which God approves.

"Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always!"

These must be noticed with a direct reference to the opinions already considered; for God, having said, "They have well said all that they have spoken," adds, "O that there were such a heart in them!"

It is but too common for those desires which arise in the mind under some peculiarly alarming circumstances, to prove only transient, and to yield in a very little time to the rooted inclination of the heart. This, it is to be feared, was the case with Israel at that time; and God himself intimated, that the seed which thus hastily sprang up, would soon perish for lack of a sufficient root. But the information which we derive from hence is wholly independent of them; whether they cultivated these dispositions or not, we see what dispositions God approves. It is his wish to find in all of us:

A reverential fear of God.

A love to Jesus as our Mediator.

A sincere delight in his commands.

First, he desires to find in us, **a reverential fear of God**.

That ease, that indifference, that security, which men in general indulge, is most displeasing to him. Behold, how he addresses men of this description by the Prophet Jeremiah, "Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear: Should you not fear me?" declares the LORD. "Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it. But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the LORD our God!

[Jeremiah 5:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.21-24)."

Hear too what he says by the Prophet Zephaniah, "I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled on their lees! [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)."

It is thought by many, that if they commit no flagrant enormity, they have no cause to fear; but even a heathen, when brought to a right mind, saw the folly and impiety of such a conceit, and issued a decree to all the subjects of his realm, that they would all "tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, who is the living God, and steadfast forever, [Daniel 6:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.26)." Such a state of mind is dreaded, from an idea that it must of necessity be destructive of all happiness.

This however is not true; on the contrary, the more of holy fear we have in our hearts, the happier we shall be. If indeed our fear is only of a slavish kind, it will make us unhappy; but, in proportion as it partakes of filial regard, and has respect to God as a Father, it will become a source of unspeakable peace and joy. The testimony of Solomon is, "Happy is the man that fears always, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14)."

Nor should we shun even the slavish fear, since it is generally the prelude to that which is truly filial; the spirit of bondage is intended to lead us to a spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry: Abba, Father! [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15).

Another ground on which men endeavor to put away the fear of God is, that it argues weakness of understanding and baseness of spirit; but we are told on infallible authority, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do his commandments; his praise endures forever! [Psalm 111:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.10)."

Permit me then to recommend to you this holy disposition. Learn to "fear that glorious and fearful name, the Lord your God! [Deuteronomy 28:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.58)." Stand in awe of his Divine Majesty; and dread his displeasure more than death itself.

How you shall appear before him in the day of judgment. Settle it in your minds, whether you will think as lightly of him when you are standing at his tribunal, with all his solemn majesty displayed before your eyes, as you are accustomed to do now that he is hidden from your sight. Examine carefully whether you are prepared to meet him, and to receive your final doom at his hands.

I well know that such thoughts are not welcome to the carnal mind; but I know also that they are beneficial, yes, and indispensably necessary too for every man. I would therefore adopt the language of the angel who flew in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, even to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people; and like him I would say with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come! [Revelation 14:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.6-7)." It is come already in the divine purpose; and it will speedily come to every individual among us, and will fix us in an eternity of bliss or woe.

The next disposition which God would have us cultivate, is **a love to Jesus as our Mediator**. In proportion as we fear God, we shall love the Lord Jesus Christ, who has condescended to mediate between God and us. Were it only that he, like Moses, had revealed to us the will of God in a less terrific way, we ought to love him. But he has done infinitely more for us than Moses could possibly do; he has not only stood between God and us, but has placed himself in our stead, and borne the wrath of God for us. He has not only silenced the thunders of Mount Sinai, but "has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being himself made a curse for us! [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)." In a word, "He has made reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross;" so that we may now come to God as our Father and our Friend; and may expect at his hands all the blessings of grace and glory! "Through him we have access to God," even to his throne of grace; and by faith in him we may even now receive the remission of our sins, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Shall we not then love him? Shall we not honor him? Shall we not employ him in his high office as our Advocate and Mediator? Shall we not glory in him, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart?" It was said by the Prophet Isaiah, "They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.'" All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult! [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25)." O that this prophecy may be fulfilled in us; and that there may henceforth "be in every individual among us such a heart!"

Lastly, God would behold in us **a sincere delight in his commandments**. This will be the fruit, and must be the evidence, of our love to Christ, "If you love me," says our Lord, "keep my commandments, [John 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.15);" and again, "He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21)." Indeed without this, all our opinions or professions are of no avail, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God! [1 Corinthians 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.19)."

When people hear of our being "delivered from the law," and "dead to the law," they feel a jealousy upon the subject of morality, and begin to fear that we open to men the flood-gates of licentiousness. But their fears are both unnecessary and unscriptural; for the very circumstance of our being delivered from the law as a covenant of works, is that which most forcibly constrains us to take it as a rule of life.

Hear how Paul speaks on this subject, "I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God, [Galatians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.19);" and again, "My brethren, you have become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God, [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4)."

You perceive then that the liberty to which we are brought by Jesus Christ, has the most friendly aspect imaginable upon the practice of good works; yes, rather, that it absolutely secures the performance of them. While therefore we would urge with all possible earnestness a simple affiance in Christ as your Mediator, we would also entreat you to receive the commandments at his hands, and to observe them with your whole hearts.

Take our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, for instance; study with care and diligence the full import of every precept in it. Do not endeavor to bring down those precepts to your practice, or to the practice of the world around you; but rather strive to elevate your practice to the standard which he has given you.

In like manner, take all the precepts contained in the epistles, and all the holy dispositions which were exercised by the Apostles; and endeavor to emulate the examples of the most distinguished saints. You are cautioned not to be righteous over-much; but remember, that you have at least equal need of caution to be righteous enough. If only you walk in the steps of our Lord and his Apostles, you need not be afraid of excess. It is an erroneous kind of righteousness, against which Solomon would guard you, and not against an excessive degree of true holiness; for in true holiness there can be no excess. In this we may vie with each other, and strive with all our might.

Paul says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain (or, as the word imports, to excel in) good works." By these we shall evince the sincerity of our love to Christ; and by these we shall be judged in the last day.

I would therefore recommend to every one to ask himself:

What is there which I have left undone?

What is there which I have done defectively?

What is there which I have done amiss?

What is there that I may do more earnestly for the honor of God, for the good of mankind, and for the benefit of my own soul?

O that such a pious zeal pervaded this whole assembly; and "that there were in all of us such a heart!"

To those among us in whom any good measure of this grace is found, we would say in the language of Paul, "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you would abound more and more! [1 Thessalonians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.1)."

[Editor's note: In the next three sections Simeon deals with the liturgy of the Anglican church, such as their prayer book, the Infant Baptismal service, the Burial service, the Service for Ordination of Priests, etc. Though there is some good content in these sections, I would consider much of it to be mere worthless church rubrics, and some of it to be false doctrine.

Please note that these sections are very long. I would suggest that readers simply skip these three sections, and pick up at #195 below.]

#192

EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY, part 2

**[Deuteronomy 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.28-29)**

The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me: "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"

Wherever the Word of God admits of a literal interpretation, its primary sense ought to be clearly stated, before any spiritual or mystical application is made of it. But when its literal meaning is ascertained, we must proceed to investigate its hidden import, which is frequently the more important. This has been done in relation to the passage before us; which primarily expresses an approbation of the request made by the Jews, that God would speak to them by the mediation of Moses, and not any longer by the terrific thunders of Mount Sinai; but covertly it conveyed an intimation, that we should all seek deliverance from the curse of the Law through the mediation of that great Prophet, whom God raised up like unto Moses, even his Son Jesus Christ!

The further use which we propose to make of this passage, is only in a way of accommodation; which however is abundantly sanctioned by the example of the Apostles; who frequently adopt the language of the Old Testament to convey their own ideas, even when it has no necessary connection with their subject.

Of course, the Liturgy of our Church was never in the contemplation of the sacred historian; yet, as in that we constantly address ourselves to God, and as it is a composition of unrivaled excellence, and needs only the exercise of our devout affections to render it a most acceptable service before God, we may well apply to it the commendation in our text, "Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"

As in the course of the month two other occasions of prosecuting our subject will occur, we shall arrange our observations on the Liturgy, so as to vindicate its use, display its excellence, and commend to your attention one particular part, which we conceive to be eminently deserving notice in this place.

In the present discourse we shall confine ourselves to the vindication of the Anglican Liturgy:  
first, Generally, as a service proper to be used;  
then, Particularly, in reference to some objections which are urged against it.

Perhaps there never was any human composition more caviled at, or less deserving such treatment, than our Liturgy. Nothing has been deemed too harsh to say of it. In order therefore to a general vindication of it, we propose to show that the use of it is:  
lawful in itself,  
expedient for us,  
and acceptable to God.

It is lawful in itself.

The use of a form of prayer cannot be in itself wrong; for, if it had been, God would not have prescribed the use of forms to the Jewish nation. But God did prescribe them on several occasions.

The words which the priest was to utter in blessing the people of Israel, are thus specified, "Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, saying, in this way you shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, [Numbers 6:23-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.23-26)."

In like manner, when a man that had been slain was found, inquisition was to be made for his blood; and the elders of the city that was nearest to the body, were to make a solemn affirmation before God, that they knew not who the murderer was, and at the same time in a set form of prayer to deprecate the divine displeasure, [Deuteronomy 21:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.7-8).

At the offering of the first-fruits, both at the beginning and end of the service, there were forms of very considerable length, which every offerer was to utter before the Lord, [Deuteronomy 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.3); [Deuteronomy 26:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.5-10); [Deuteronomy 26:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.13-15).

When David brought up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to the tent which he had pitched for it in Jerusalem, he composed a form of prayer and thanksgiving for the occasion, selected out of four different Psalms. Compare [1 Chronicles 16:7-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 16.7-36) with [Psalm 105:1-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.1-15); [Psalm 96:1-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 96.1-13); [Psalm 136:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 136.1); [Psalm 106:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.47-48). And he put it into the hand of Asaph and his brethren for the use of the whole congregation. In all following ages, the Psalms were used as forms of devotion; Hezekiah appointed them for that purpose when he restored the worship of God, which had been suspended and superseded in the days of Ahaz, [2 Chronicles 29:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.30); as did Ezra also at the laying of the foundation of the second temple, [Ezra 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 3.10-11). Nay, the hymn which our blessed Lord sang with his disciples immediately after he had instituted his supper as the memorial of his death, [Matthew 26:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.30), was either taken from the Psalms, from 113th to 118th inclusive, or else was a particular form composed for that occasion. All this sufficiently shows that forms of devotion are not evil in themselves.

But some think, that though they were not evil under the Jewish dispensation, which consisted altogether of rites and carnal ordinances, they are evil under the more spiritual dispensation of the Gospel. This however cannot be; because our blessed Lord taught his disciples a form of prayer, and not only told them to pray after that manner, as one Evangelist mentions, but to use the very words, as another Evangelist declares. Indeed the word ï ôùò, by which Matthew expresses it, is not of necessity to be confined to manner, [Matthew 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.9); it might be taken as referring to the very words. But, granting that he speaks of the manner only, and prescribes it as a model; yet Luke certainly requires us to use it as a form, "Jesus said unto them, When you pray, say, Our Father in Heaven, [Luke 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.2)."

Accordingly we find, from the testimonies of some of the earliest and most eminent Fathers of the Church Tertullian, Cyprian, Cyril, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Gregory—that it was constantly regarded and used in the Church as a form from the very times of the Apostles. As for the objection, that we do not read in the New Testament that it was so used, it is of no weight at all; for we are not told that the Apostles ever baptized people in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; but can we therefore doubt whether they did use this form of baptism? Assuredly not; and therefore the circumstance of such a use of the Lord's Prayer not being recorded, especially in so short a history as that of the Apostles, is no argument at all that it was not so used.

Nor was this the only form used in the apostolic age. Lucian, speaking of the first Christians, says, "They spend whole nights in singing of Psalms;" and Pliny, in his famous Letter to Trajan, which was written not much above ten years after the death of John the Evangelist, says of them, "It is their manner to sing by turns a hymn to Christ as God." This latter, it should seem, was not a Psalm of David, but a hymn composed for the purpose; and it proves indisputably, that even in the apostolic age, forms of devotion were in use.

If we come down to the times subsequent to the Apostles, we shall find Liturgies composed for the service of the different Churches. The Liturgies of Peter, Mark, and James, though they were corrupted in later ages, are certainly of high antiquity; that of James was of great authority in the Church, in the days of Cyril, who, in his younger years, at the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century, wrote a Commentary upon it. And it were easy to trace the use of them from that time even to the present day.

Shall it be said, then, that the use of a pre-composed form of prayer is not lawful? Would God have given so many forms under the Jewish dispensation, and would our blessed Lord have given a form for the use of his Church and people, if it had not been lawful to use a form? But it is worthy of observation, that those who most loudly decry the use of forms, do themselves use forms, whenever they unite in public worship. What are hymns, but forms of prayer and praise? Ad if it is lawful to worship God in forms of verse, is it not equally so in forms of prose? We may say therefore, our adversaries themselves being judges, that the use of a form of prayer is lawful.

As for those passages of Scripture which are supposed to hold forth an expectation that under the Gospel we should have ability to pray without a form; for instance, that "God would give us a spirit of grace and of supplication," and that "the Spirit should help our infirmities, and teach us what to pray for as we ought;" they do not warrant us to expect, that we shall be enabled to speak by inspiration, as the Apostles did, but that our hearts should be disposed for prayer, and be enabled to enjoy near and intimate communion with God in that holy exercise; but they may be fulfilled to us as much in the use of a pre-composed form, as in any extemporaneous effusions of our own; and it is certain, that people may be very fluent in the expressions of prayer without the smallest spiritual influence upon their minds; and that they may, on the other hand, be very fervent in prayer, though the expressions be already provided to their hand; and consequently, the promised assistance of the Spirit is perfectly consistent with the use of prayers that have been pre-composed.

But the lawfulness of forms of prayer is in this day pretty generally conceded. Many however still question their expediency. We proceed therefore to show next, that the use of the Liturgy is expedient for us.

Here let it not be supposed that I am about to condemn those who differ from us in judgment or in practice. If any think themselves more edified by extempore prayer, we rejoice that their souls are benefitted, though it be not precisely in our way; but still we cannot be insensible to the advantages which we enjoy; and much less can we concede to any, that the use of a prescribed form of prayer is the smallest disadvantage.

We say, then, that the Liturgy was of great use at the time it was made. At the commencement of the Reformation, the most lamentable ignorance prevailed throughout the land; and even those who from their office ought to have been well instructed in the Holy Scriptures, themselves needed to be taught what were the first principles of the oracles of God. If then the pious and venerable Reformers of our Church had not provided a suitable form of prayer, the people would still in many thousands of parishes have remained in utter darkness; but by the diffusion of this sacred light throughout the land, every part of the kingdom became in a good measure irradiated with scriptural knowledge, and with saving truth. The few who were enlightened, might indeed have scattered some partial rays around them; but their light would have been only as a meteor, that passes away and leaves no permanent effect. Moreover, if their zeal and knowledge and piety had been allowed to die with them, we would have in vain sought for compositions of equal excellence from any set of governors, from that day to the present hour; but by conveying to posterity the impress of their own piety in stated forms of prayer, they have in them transmitted a measure of their own spirit, which, like Elijah's mantle, has descended on multitudes who have succeeded them in their high office.

It is not possible to form a correct estimate of the benefit which we at this day derive from having such a standard of piety in our hands; but we do not speak too strongly if we say, that the most enlightened among us, of whatever denomination they may be, owe much to the existence of our Liturgy; which has been, as it were, the pillar and ground of the truth in this kingdom, and has served as fuel to perpetuate the flame, which the Lord himself, at the time of the Reformation, kindled upon our altars.

But we must go further, and say, that the use of the Liturgy is equally expedient still. Of course, we must not be understood as speaking of private prayer in the closet; where, though a young and inexperienced person may get help from written forms, it is desirable that every one should learn to express his own needs in his own language; because no written prayer can enter so minutely into his wants and feelings as he himself may do; but, in public, we maintain that the use of such a form as ours is still as expedient as ever.

To lead the devotions of a congregation in extempore prayer is a work for which but few are qualified. An extensive knowledge of the Scriptures must be combined with fervent piety, in order to fit a person for such an undertaking; and I greatly mistake, if there be found a humble person in the world, who, after engaging often in that arduous work, does not wish at times that he had a suitable form prepared for him.

That the constant repetition of the same form does not so forcibly arrest the attention as new opinions and expressions would do, must be confessed; but, on the other hand, the use of a well-composed form secures us against the dry, dull, tedious repetitions which are but too frequently the fruits of extemporaneous devotions. Only let any person be in a devout frame, and he will be far more likely to have his soul elevated to Heaven by the Liturgy of the Established Church, than he will by the generality of prayers which he would hear in other places of worship; and, if anyone complains that he cannot enter into the spirit of them, let him only examine his frame of mind when engaged in extemporaneous prayers, whether in public, or in his own family; and he will find, that his formality is not confined to the service of the Church, but is the sad fruit and consequence of his own weakness and corruption.

Here it may not be amiss to rectify the notions which are frequently entertained of spiritual edification. Many, if their imaginations are pleased, and their spirits elevated, are ready to think, that they have been greatly edified; and this error is at the root of that preference which they give to extempore prayer, and the indifference which they manifest towards the prayers of the Established Church.

But real edification consists in humility of mind, and in being led to a more holy and consistent walk with God; and one atom of such a spirit is more valuable than all the animal fervor that ever was excited. It is with solid truths, and not with fluent words, that we are to be impressed; and if we can desire from our hearts the things which we pray for in our public forms, we need never regret, that our imagination was not gratified, or our animal spirits raised, by the delusive charms of novelty.

In what we have spoken on this subject, it must be remembered that we have spoken only in a way of vindication; the true, the exalted, and the proper ground for a member and minister of the Established Church, we have left for the present untouched, lest we should encroach upon that which we hope to occupy on a future occasion. But it remains for us yet further to remark, that the use of our Liturgy is acceptable to God.

The words of our text are sufficient to show us that God does not look at fine words and fluent expressions, but at the heart. The Israelites had "well said all that they had spoken;" but while God acknowledged that, he added, "O that there were such a heart in them!" If there are humility and contrition in our supplications, it will make no difference with God, whether they be extemporaneous or pre-composed. Can anyone doubt whether, it we were to address our heavenly Father in the words which Christ himself has taught us, we should be accepted by him, provided we uttered the different petitions from our hearts? As little doubt then is there that in the use of the Liturgy also we shall be accepted, if only we draw near to God with our hearts as well as with our lips. The prayer of faith, whether with or without a form, shall never go forth in vain. And there are thousands at this day who can attest from their own experience, that they have often found God as present with them in the use of the public services of our Church, as ever they have in their secret chambers.

Thus we have endeavored to vindicate the use of our Liturgy generally.

We now come to vindicate it in reference to some particular objections that have been urged against it.

The objections may be comprised under two heads:

1. That there are exceptionable expressions in the Liturgy.

To notice all the expressions which captious men have caviled at, would be a waste of time. But there are one or two, which, with tender minds, have considerable weight, and have not only prevented many worthy men from entering into the Church, but do at this hour press upon the consciences of many, who in all other things approve and admire the public formularies of our Church. A great portion of this present assembly are educating with a view to the ministry in the Established Church; and, if I may be able in any little measure to satisfy their minds, or to remove a stumbling-block out of their way, I shall think that I have made a good use of the opportunity which is thus afforded me.

A more essential service I can scarcely render unto any of my younger brethren, or indeed to the Establishment itself, than by meeting fairly the difficulties which occur to their minds, and which are too often successfully urged by the enemies of our Church, to the embarrassing of conscientious minds, and to the drawing away of many, who might have labored comfortably and successfully in this part of our Lord's vineyard.

There is one circumstance in the formation of our Liturgy, which is not sufficiently adverted to. The people who composed it were men of a truly apostolic spirit; unfettered by party prejudices, they endeavored to speak in all things precisely as the Scriptures speak; they did not indulge in speculations and metaphysical reasonings; nor did they presume to be wise above what is written; they labored to speak the truth, the whole truth, in love; and they cultivated in the highest degree that candor, that simplicity, and that charity, which so eminently characterize all the apostolic writings.

Permit me to call your attention particularly to this point, because it will satisfactorily account for those expressions which seem most objectionable; and will show precisely in what view we may most conscientiously repeat the language they have used.

In our Burial Service, we thank God for delivering our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world, and express a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, together with a hope also that our departed brother rests in Christ. Of course, it often happens, that we are called to use these expressions over people who, there is reason to fear, have died in their sins; and then the question is: How can we with propriety use them? I answer, that, even according to the letter of the words, the use of them may be justified; because we speak not of his, but of the, resurrection to eternal life; and because, where we do not absolutely know that God has not pardoned a person, we may entertain some measure of hope that he has.

But, taking the expressions more according to the spirit of them, they precisely accord with what we continually read in the epistles of Paul. In the First Epistle to the Corinthian Church, he says of them, "I thank my God always on your behalf, that in everything you are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that you come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yet, does he instantly begin to condemn the same people, for their divisions and contentions; and afterwards tells them, "that they were carnal, and walked, not as saints, but as men," that is, as unconverted and ungodly men, [1 Corinthians 1:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.4-7); [1 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.3).

In like manner, in his Epistle to the Philippians, after saying, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," he adds, "Even as it is fit for me to think this of you all, [Philippians 1:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.3-7)." Yet does he afterwards caution these very people against strife, and vain-glory, and self-love; and tell them, that he will send Timothy to them shortly, in order to make inquiries into their state, and to give him information respecting them; and he even mentions two by name, Euodias and Syntyche, whose notorious disagreements he was desirous to heal.

A multitude of other passages might be cited to the same effect; to show that the Apostles, in a spirit of candor and of love, spoke in terms of commendation respecting all, when in strictness of speech they should have made some particular exceptions.

And, if we at this day were called to use the same language under the very same circumstances, it is probable that many would feel scruples respecting it, and especially, in thanking God for things, which, if pressed to the utmost meaning of the words, might not be strictly true.

But surely, if the Apostles in a spirit of love and charity used such language, we may safely and properly do the same; and knowing in what manner, and with what views, they spoke, we need not hesitate to deliver ourselves with the same spirit, and in the same latitude, as they.

To guard against a misapprehension of his meaning, the author wishes these words to be distinctly noticed; because they contain the whole drift of his argument. He does not mean to say, that the Apostles ascribed salvation to the opus operatum, the outward act of baptism; or, that they intended to assert distinctly the salvation of every individual who had been baptized; but only that, in reference to these subjects, they did use a language very similar to that in our Liturgy, and that therefore our Reformers were justified, as we also are, in using the same.

In the Baptismal Service, we thank God for having regenerated the baptized infant by his Holy Spirit. Now from hence it appears that, in the opinion of our Reformers, regeneration and remission of sins did accompany baptism. But in what sense did they hold this sentiment? Did they maintain that there was no need for the seed then sown in the heart of the baptized person to grow up, and to bring forth fruit; or that he could be saved in any other way than by a progressive renovation of his soul after the divine image? Had they asserted or countenanced any such doctrine as that, it would have been impossible for any enlightened person to concur with them.

But nothing can be conceived more repugnant to their opinions than such an idea as this; so far from harboring such a thought, they have, and that too in this very prayer, taught us to look unto God for that total change both of heart and life, which, long since their days, has begun to be expressed by the term Regeneration.

After thanking God for regenerating the infant by his Holy Spirit, we are taught to pray, "that he, being dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness, may crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin;" and then declaring that total change to be the necessary means of his obtaining salvation, we add, "So that finally, with the residue of your holy Church, he may be an inheritor of your everlasting kingdom." Is there, I would ask, any person that can require more than this? or does God in his Word require more?

There are two things to be noticed in reference to this subject; the term, Regeneration, and the thing. The term occurs but twice in the Scriptures; in one place it refers to baptism, and is distinguished from the renewing of the Holy Spirit; which however is represented as attendant on it; and in the other place it has a totally distinct meaning unconnected with the subject. Now the term they use, as the Scripture uses it; and the thing they require, as strongly as any person can require it. They do not give us any reason to imagine that an adult person can be saved without experiencing all that modern divines have included in the term Regeneration; on the contrary, they do, both there and throughout the whole Liturgy, insist upon the necessity of a radical change both of heart and life. Here, then, the only question is, not, whether a baptized person can be saved by that ordinance without sanctification; but, whether God does always accompany the sign with the thing signified?

Here is certainly room for difference of opinion; but it cannot be positively decided in the negative; because we cannot know, or even judge, respecting it, in any instance whatever, except by the fruits that follow; and therefore in all fairness it may be considered only as a doubtful point; and, if we appeal, as we ought to do, to the Holy Scriptures, they certainly do in a very remarkable way accord with the expressions in our Liturgy. Paul says, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit;" and this he says of all the visible members of Christ's body [1 Corinthians 12:13-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.13-27).

Again, speaking of the whole nation of Israel, infants as well as adults, he says, "They were all baptized unto Moses, in the cloud, and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that Spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ, [1 Corinthians 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-4)." Yet behold, in the very next verse he tells us, that "with many of them God was displeased, and overthrew them in the wilderness."

In another place he speaks yet more strongly still, "As many of you," says he, "as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ, [Galatians 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.27)." Here we see what is meant by the expression "baptized into Christ;" it is precisely the same expression as that before mentioned, of the Israelites being "baptized unto Moses;" (the preposition å ò is used in both places;) it includes all that had been initiated into his religion by the rite of baptism; and of them universally does the Apostle say, "They have put on Christ." Now I ask, Have not the people who scruple the use of that prayer in the Baptismal Service, equal reason to scruple the use of these different expressions?

Again, Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39);" and in another place, "Baptism does now save us, [1 Peter 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.21)." And speaking elsewhere of baptized people who were unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, he says, "He has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins, [2 Peter 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.9)." Does not this very strongly countenance the idea which our Reformers entertained, That the remission of our sins, as well as the regeneration of our souls, is an attendant on the baptismal rite? Perhaps it will be said, that the inspired writers spoke of people who had been baptized at an adult age. But, if they did so in some places, they certainly did not in others; and, where they did not, they must be understood as comprehending all, whether infants or adults; and therefore the language of our Liturgy, which is not a whit stronger than theirs, may be both subscribed and used without any just occasion of offence.

Let me then speak the truth before God. Though I am no Arminian, I do think that the refinements of Calvin have done great harm in the Church; they have driven multitudes from the plain and popular way of speaking used by the inspired writers, and have made them unreasonably and unscripturally squeamish in their modes of expression; and I conceive that, the less addicted any person is to systematic accuracy, the more he will accord with the inspired writers, and the more he will approve of the views of our Reformers. I do not mean however to say, that a slight alteration in two or three instances would not be an improvement; since it would take off a burden from many minds, and supersede the necessity of labored explanations; but I do mean to say, that there is no such objection to these expressions as to deter any conscientious person from giving his sincere assent and consent to the Liturgy altogether, or from using the particular expressions which we have been endeavoring to explain.

2. The other objection is, That the use of a Liturgy necessarily generates formality.

We have before acknowledged that the repetition of a form is less likely to arrest the attention, than that which is novel; but we by no means concede that it necessarily generates formality; on the contrary, we affirm that if any person comes to the service of the Church with a truly spiritual mind, he will find in our Liturgy what is calculated to call forth the devoutest exercises of his mind, far more than in any of the extemporaneous prayers which he would hear in other places.

We forbear to enter into a fuller elucidation of this point at present, because we should detain you too long; and we shall have a better opportunity of doing it in our next discourse. But we would here entreat you all so far to bear this objection in your minds, as to cut off all occasion for it as much as possible, and, by the devout manner of your attendance on the services of the Church, to show, that though you worship God with a form, you also worship him in spirit and in truth.

Dissenters themselves know that the repetition of favorite hymns does not generate formality; and they may from thence learn, that the repetition of our excellent Liturgy is not really open to that objection. But they will judge from what they see among us; if they see that the prayers are read among us without any devotion, and that those who hear them are inattentive and irreverent during the service, they will not impute these evils to the true and proper cause, but to the Liturgy itself; and it is a fact, that they do from this very circumstance derive great advantage for the weakening of men's attachment to the Established Church, and for the augmenting of their own societies.

Surely then it befits us, who are annually sending forth so many ministers into every quarter of the land, to pay particular attention to this point. I am well aware, that where such multitudes of young men are, it is not possible so to control the inconsiderateness of youth, as to suppress all levity, or to maintain that complete order that might be wished; but I know also, that the ingenuousness of youth is open to conviction upon a subject like this, and that even the strictest discipline upon a point so interwoven with the honor of the Establishment and the eternal interests of their own souls, would, in a little time, meet with a more cordial concurrence than is generally imagined; it would commend itself to their consciences, and call forth, not only their present approbation, but their lasting gratitude. If those who are in authority among us would lay this matter to heart, and devise means for the carrying it into full effect, more would be done for the upholding of the Establishment, than by ten thousand discourses in vindication of it; and truly, if but the smallest progress should be made in it, I would think that I had "not labored in vain, or run in vain."

But let us not so think of the Establishment as to forget our own souls; for, after all, the great question for the consideration of us all is, Whether we ourselves are accepted in the use of these prayers? And here, it is not outward reverence and decorum that will suffice; the heart must be engaged, as well as the lips. It will be to little purpose that God should say, respecting us, "They have well said all that they have spoken," unless he sees his own wish also accomplished, "O that there were in them such a heart!" Indeed our prayers will be no more than a solemn mockery, if there be not a correspondence between the words of our lips and the feeling of our own souls; and his answer to us will be, like that to the Jews of old, "You hypocrites, in vain do you worship me." Let all of us then bring our devotions to this test, and look well to it, that, with "the form, we have also the power of godliness." We are too apt to rush into the divine presence without any consciousness of the importance of the work in which we are going to be engaged, or any fear of His majesty, whom we are going to address. If we would prevent formality in the house of God, we should endeavor to carry there a devout spirit along with us, and guard against the very first incursion of vain thoughts and foolish imaginations. Let us then labor to attain such a sense of our own necessities, and of God's unbounded goodness, as shall produce a fixedness of mind, whenever we draw near to God in prayer; and for this end, let us ask of God the gift of his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities; and let us never think that we have used the Liturgy to any good purpose, unless it brings into our bosoms an inward witness of its utility, and a reasonable evidence of our acceptance with God in the use of it.

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EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY, part 3

**[Deuteronomy 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.28-29)**

The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me: "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"

In our preceding discourses on this text, we first entered distinctly and fully into its true import, and then applied it, in an accommodated sense, to the Liturgy of our Established Church. The utility of a Liturgy being doubted by many, we endeavored to vindicate the use of it, as lawful in itself, expedient for us, and acceptable to God. But it is not a mere vindication only which such a composition merits at our hands; the labor bestowed upon it has been exceeding great; our first Reformers omitted nothing that could conduce to the improvement of it; they consulted the most pious and learned of foreign divines, and submitted it to them for their correction; and, since their time, there have been frequent revisions of it, in order that every expression which could be made a subject of cavil, might be amended; by which means, it has been brought to such a state of perfection, as no human composition of equal size and variety can pretend to.

To display its excellence, is the task, which, agreeably to the plan before proposed, is now assigned us; and we enter upon it with pleasure; in the hope, that those who have never yet studied the Liturgy, will learn to appreciate its value; and that all of us may be led to a more thankful and profitable use of it in future.

To judge of the Liturgy aright, we should contemplate:

Its spirituality and purity.

Its fullness and suitableness.

Its moderation and candor.

I. Its spirituality and purity

It is well known that the services of the Church of Rome, from whose communion we separated, were full of superstition and error; they taught the people to rest in carnal ordinances, without either stimulating them to real piety, or establishing them on the foundation which God has laid. They contained, it is true, much that was good; but they were at the same time so filled with ceremonies of man's invention, and with doctrines repugnant to the Gospel, that they tended only to deceive and ruin all who adhered to them!

In direct opposition to those services, we affirm, that the whole scope and tendency of our Liturgy is to raise our minds to a holy and heavenly state, and to build us up upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the only foundation of a sinner's hope.

Let us look at the stated services of our Church; let us call to mind all that we have heard or uttered, from the Introductory Sentences which were to prepare our minds, to the Dismissal Prayer which closes the whole; there is nothing for show, but all for edification and spiritual improvement.

Is humility the foundation of true piety? What deep humiliation is expressed in the General Confession, and throughout the Litany; as also in supplicating forgiveness, after every one of the Commandments, for our innumerable violations of them all!

Is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the way appointed for our reconciliation with God? we ask for every blessing solely in his name and for his sake; and with the holy vehemence of importunity, we urge with him the consideration of all that he has done and suffered for us, as our plea for mercy; and, at the Lord's supper, we mark so fully our affiance in his atoning blood, that it is impossible for anyone to use those prayers aright, without seeing and feeling that "there is no other name under Heaven but his, whereby we can be saved."

The same we may observe respecting the Occasional Services of our Church. From our very birth even to the grave, our Church omits nothing that can tend to the edification of its members. At our first introduction into the Church, with what solemnity are we dedicated to God in our Baptismal Service! What pledges does our Church require of our Sponsors, that we shall be brought up in the true faith and fear of God; and how earnestly does she lead us to pray for a progressive, total, and permanent renovation of our souls! No sooner are we capable of receiving instruction, than she provides for us, and expressly requires that we be well instructed in a Catechism, so short that it burdens the memory of none, and so comprehensive that it contains all that is necessary for our information at that early period of our life.

When once we are taught, by that, to know the nature and extent of our baptismal vows, the Church calls upon us to renew in our own person the vows that were formerly made for us in our name; and, in a service specially prepared for that purpose, leads us to consecrate ourselves to God; thus endeavoring to confirm us in our holy resolutions, and to establish us in the faith of Christ.

Not content with having thus initiated, instructed, and confirmed her members in the religion of Christ, the Church embraces every occasion of instilling into our minds the knowledge and love of his ways. If we change our condition in life, we are required to come to the altar of our God, and there devote ourselves afresh to him, and implore his blessing, from which alone all true happiness proceeds.

Are mercies and deliverances given to any, especially that great mercy of preservation from the pangs and perils of childbirth? the Church appoints a public acknowledgment to be made to Almighty God in the presence of the whole congregation, and provides a suitable service for that end. In like manner, for every public mercy, or in time of any public calamity, particular prayers and thanksgivings are provided for our use. In a time of sickness there is also very particular provision made for our instruction and consolation; and even after death, when she can no more benefit the deceased, the Church labors to promote the benefit of her surviving members, by a service the most solemn and impressive that ever was formed. Thus attentive is she to supply in every thing, as far as human endeavors can avail, our spiritual wants; being decent in her forms, but not superstitious; and strong in her expressions, but not erroneous. In short, it is not possible to read the Liturgy with candor, and not to see that the welfare of our souls is the one object of the whole; and that the compilers of it had nothing in view, but that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in God, we should glorify his holy name.

II. The excellencies of our Liturgy will yet further appear, while we notice, next, its fullness and suitableness.

Astonishing is the wisdom with which the Liturgy is adapted to the edification of every member of the Church. There is no case that is overlooked, no sin that is not deplored, no want that is not specified, no blessing that is not asked; yet, while every particular is entered into so far that every individual person may find his own case adverted to, and his own wishes expressed, the whole is so carefully worded, that no person is led to express more than he ought to feel, or to deliver opinions in which he may not join with his whole heart. Indeed there is a minuteness in the petitions that is rarely found even in men's private devotions; and those very particularities are founded in the deepest knowledge of the human heart, and the completest view of men's spiritual necessities; for instance, We pray to God to deliver us, not only in all time of our tribulation, but in all time of our wealth also; because we are quite as much in danger of being drawn from God by prosperity, as by adversity; and need his aid as much in the one as in the other.

In the intercessory part of our devotions also, our sympathy is called forth in behalf of all orders and degrees of men, under every name and every character that can be conceived. We pray to him, to strengthen such as do stand, to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall, and finally, to beat down Satan under our feet. We entreat him also to support, help, and comfort all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation. We further supplicate him in behalf of all that travel, whether by land or by water, all women laboring of child, all sick people, and young children, and particularly entreat him to have pity upon all prisoners and captives. Still further, we plead with him to defend and provide for the fatherless children, and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed; and, lest any should have been omitted, we beg him "to have mercy upon all men," generally, and more particularly, "to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts." In what other prayers, whether extemporaneous or written, shall we ever find such diffusive benevolence as this?

In a word, there is no possible situation in which we can be placed, but the prayers are precisely suited to us; nor can we be in any frame of mind, wherein they will not express our feelings as strongly and forcibly, as any person could express them even in his secret chamber. Take a broken-hearted penitent; where can he ever find words, wherein to supplicate the mercy of his God, more congenial with his feelings than in the Litany, where he renews his application to each Person of the Sacred Trinity for mercy, under the character of a miserable sinner? Hear him when kneeling before the altar of his God, "Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against your Divine Majesty, provoking most justly your wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father! For your Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" I may venture to say that no finite wisdom could suggest words more suited to the feelings or necessities of a penitent, than these.

Take, next, a person full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; and if he were the devoutest of all the human race, he could never find words, wherein to give scope to all the exercises of his mind, more suitable than in the Te Deum, "We praise you, O God; we acknowledge you to be the Lord. All the earth does worship you, the Father everlasting. To you all Angels cry aloud, the Heavens, and all the Powers therein; To you Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of your Glory." Hear him also at the table of the Lord, "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto you, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God; Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of Heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious Name; evermore praising you, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Heaven and earth are full of your glory; Glory be to you, O Lord most High."

Even where there are no particular exercises of the mind, the Liturgy is calculated to produce the greatest possible good; for the gravity and sobriety of the whole service are fitted to impress the most careless sinner; while the various portions of Scripture that are read out of the Old and New Testament, not only for the Lessons of the day, but from the Psalms also, and from the Epistles and Gospels, are well adapted to arrest the attention of the thoughtless, and to convey instruction to the most ignorant. Indeed I consider it as one of the highest excellencies of our Liturgy, that it is calculated to make us wise, intelligent, and sober Christians; it marks a golden mean; it affects and inspires a meek, humble, modest, sober piety, equally remote from the unmeaning coldness of a formalist, the self-importance of a systematic dogmatist, and the unhallowed fervor of a wild enthusiast. A tender seriousness, a meek devotion, and a humble joy, are the qualities which it was intended, and is calculated, to produce in all her members.

III. It remains that we yet further trace the excellence of our Liturgy, in its moderation and candor.

The whole Christian world has from time to time been agitated with controversies of different kinds; and human passions have grievously debased the characters and actions even of good men in every age. But it should seem that the compilers of our Liturgy were inspired with a wisdom and moderation peculiar to themselves. They kept back no truth whatever, through fear of giving offence; yet were careful so to state every truth, as to leave those inexcusable who should recede from the Church on account of any opinions which she maintained. In this, they imitated the inspired penmen; who do not dwell on doctrines after the manner of human systems, but introduce them incidentally, as it were, as occasion suggests, and bring them forward always in connection with practical duties. The various perfections of God are all stated in different parts; but all in such a way, as, without affording any occasion for dispute, tends effectually to encourage us in our addresses to him. The Godhead of Christ is constantly asserted, and different prayers are expressly addressed to him; but nothing is said in a way of contentious disputation. The influences of the Holy Spirit, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, are stated; and "the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is sought, in order that we may perfectly love God, and worthily magnify his holy Name;" but all is conveyed in a way of humble devotion, without reflections upon others, or even a word that can lead the thoughts to controversy of any kind. Even the deepest doctrines of our holy religion are occasionally brought forth in a practical view (in which view alone they ought to be regarded;) that, while we contemplate them as truths, we may experience their sanctifying efficacy on our hearts. The truth, the whole truth, is brought forward, without fear; but it is brought forward also without offence; all is temperate; all is candid; all is practical; all is peaceful; and every word is spoken in love. This is an excellency that deserves particular notice, because it is so contrary to what is found in the worship of those whose addresses to the Most High God depend on the immediate views and feelings of an individual person, which may be, and frequently are, tinctured in a lamentable degree by party views and unhallowed passions. And we shall do well to bear in mind this excellency, in order that we may imitate it; and that we may show to all, that the moderation which so eminently characterizes the Offices of our Church. is no less visible in all her members.

Sorry should I be, when speaking on this amiable virtue, to transgress it even in the smallest degree; but I appeal to all who hear me, whether there be not a lack of this virtue in the temper of the present times; and whether if our Reformers themselves were to rise again and live among us, their pious opinions and holy lives would not be, with many, an occasion of offence? I need not repeat the terms which are used to stigmatize those who labor to walk in their paths; nor will I speak of the jealousies which are entertained against those, who live only to inculcate what our Reformers taught. You need not be told that even the moderate opinions of our Reformers are at this day condemned by many as dangerous errors; and the very exertions, whereby alone the knowledge of them can be communicated unto men, are imputed to vanity, and loaded with blame. But, though I thus speak, I must acknowledge, to the glory of God, that in no place have moderation and candor shone more conspicuous, than in this distinguished seat of literature and science; and I pray God, that the exercise of these virtues may be richly recompensed from the Lord into every bosom, and be followed with all the other graces that accompany salvation.

From this view of our subject it will be naturally asked, Do I then consider the Liturgy as altogether perfect? I answer, No; it is a human composition; and there is nothing human that can claim so high a title as that of absolute perfection. There are certainly some few expressions which might be altered for the better, and which in all probability would have been altered at the Conference which was appointed for the last revision of it, if the unreasonable scrupulosity of some, and the unbending pertinacity of others, had not defeated the object of that assembly. I have before mentioned two, which, though capable of being vindicated, might admit of some improvement. And, as I have been speaking strongly of the moderation and candor of the Liturgy, I will here bring forward the only exception to it that I am aware of; and that is found in the Athanasian Creed. The damnatory clauses contained in that Creed, do certainly breathe a very different spirit from that which pervades every other part of our Liturgy. As to the doctrine of the Creed, it is perfectly sound, and such as ought to be universally received. But it is matter of regret that any should be led to pronounce a sentence of damnation against their fellow-creatures, in any case where God himself has not clearly and certainly pronounced it. Yet while I say this, permit me to add, that I think this Creed does not express, nor ever was intended to express, so much as is generally supposed. The part principally objected to, is that whole statement, which is contained between the first assertion of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the other articles of our faith; and the objection is, that the damnatory clauses which would be justifiable, if confined to the general assertion respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, become unjustifiable, when extended to the whole of that which is annexed to it. But, if we suppose that this intermediate part was intended as an explanation of the doctrine in question, we still, I think, ought not to be understood as affirming respecting that explanation all that we affirm respecting the doctrine itself. If anyone will read the Athanasian Creed with attention, he will find three damnatory clauses; one at the beginning, which is confined to the general doctrine of the Trinity; another at the close of what, for argument sake, we call the explanation of that doctrine; and another at the end, relating to the other articles of the Creed, such as the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and his coming at the last day to judge the world. Now, whoever will compare the three clauses, will find a marked difference between them; those which relate to the general doctrine of the Trinity, and to the other articles of the Creed, are strong; asserting positively that the points must be believed, and that too on pain of everlasting damnation; but that which is annexed to the explanation of the doctrine, asserts only, that a man who is in earnest about his salvation ought to think thus of the Trinity. The words in the original are, Qui vult ergo salvus esse, ita de Trinitate sentiat; and this shows in what sense we are to understand the more ambiguous language of our translation, "He therefore that will be saved, (I. e. is willing or desirous to be saved,) must thus think (let him thus think) of the Trinity." Thus it appears that the things contained in the beginning and end of the Creed are spoken of as matters of faith; but this, which is inserted in the midst, as a matter of opinion only; in reference to the first and last parts the certainty of damnation is asserted; but in reference to the intermediate part, nothing is asserted, except that such are the views which we ought to entertain of the point in question. Now I would ask, was this difference the effect of chance? or rather, was it not actually intended, in order to guard against the very objection that is here adduced?

This, then, is the answer which we give, on the supposition that the part which appears so objectionable, is to be considered as an explanation of the doctrine in question. But what, if it was never intended as an explanation? What, if it contains only a proof of that doctrine, and an appeal to our reason, that that doctrine is true? Yet, if we examine the Creed, we shall find this to he the real fact. Let us in few words point out the steps of the argument.

The Creed says, "The Catholic faith is this, That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the people, nor dividing the substance;" and then it proceeds, "For there is one person of the Father," and so on; and then, after proving the distinct personality of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and their unity in the Godhead, it adds, "SO that in all things as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshiped. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity." Here are all the distinct parts of an argument. The position affirmed. the proofs adduced. the deduction made. and the conclusion drawn in reference to the importance of receiving and acknowledging that doctrine.

From hence, then, I infer, that the damnatory clauses should be understood only in reference to the doctrine affirmed, and not be extended to the parts which are adduced only in confirmation of it; and, if we believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental article of the Christian faith, we may without any breach of charity apply to that doctrine what our Lord spoke of the Gospel at large, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who believes not shall be damned."

Thus, in either view, the use of the Creed may be vindicated; for, if we consider the liable part as an explanation, the terms requiring it to be received are intentionally softened; and if we consider it as a proof, it is to the doctrines proved, and not to the proof annexed, that the damnatory clauses are fairly applicable.

Still, after all, I confess, that if the same candor and moderation that are observable in all other parts of the Liturgy had been preserved here, it would have been better. For though I do truly believe, that those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity are in a fatal error, and will find themselves so at the day of judgment, I would rather deplore the curse that awaits them, than denounce it; and rather weep over them in my secret chamber, than utter anathemas against them in the house of God.

I hope I have now met the question of our Liturgy fairly. I have not confined myself to general assertions, but have set forth the difficulties which are supposed to exist against it, and have given such a solution of them as I think is sufficient to satisfy any conscientious mind; though it is still matter of regret that any labored explanation of them should be necessary.

Now then, acknowledging that our Liturgy is not absolutely perfect, and that those who most admire it would be glad if these few blemishes were removed; have we not still abundant reason to be thankful for it? Let its excellencies be fairly weighed, and its blemishes will sink into nothing; let its excellencies be duly appreciated, and every person in the kingdom will acknowledge himself deeply indebted to those, who with so much care and piety compiled it.

But these blemishes alone are seen by multitudes; and its excellencies are altogether forgotten; yes, moreover, frequent occasion is taken from these blemishes to persuade men to renounce their communion with the Established Church, in the hopes of finding a purer worship elsewhere. With what justice such arguments are urged, will best appear by a comparison between the prayers that are offered elsewhere, and those that are offered in the Established Church. There are about eleven thousand places of worship in the Established Church, and about as many out of it. Now take the prayers that are offered on any Sabbath in all places out of the Establishment; have them all written down, and every expression sifted and scrutinized as our Liturgy has been; then compare them with the prayers that have been offered in all the churches of the kingdom; and see what comparison the extemporaneous effusions will bear with our pre-composed forms. Having done this for one Sabbath, proceed to do it for a year; and then, after a similar examination, compare them again; were this done, (and done it ought to be in order to form a correct judgment on the case,) methinks there is scarcely a man in the kingdom that would not fall down on his knees, and bless God for the Liturgy of the Established Church.

All that is wanting is, a heart suited to the Liturgy, and cast as it were into that mold. It may with truth be said of us, "They have well said all that they have spoken; O that there were in them such a heart!" Let us only suppose that on any particular occasion there were in all of us such a state of mind as the Liturgy is suited to express; what glorious worship would ours be! and how certainly would God delight to hear and bless us! We will not say that he would come down and fill the house with his visible glory, as he did in the days of Moses and of Solomon; but we will say, that he would come down and fill our souls with such a sense of his presence and love, as would transform us into his blessed image, and constitute a very Heaven upon earth. Let each of us, then, adopt the wish in our text, and say, "O that there may be in me such a heart!" Let us cultivate the moderation and candor which are there exhibited; divesting ourselves of all prejudice against religion, and receiving with impartial readiness the whole counsel of our God. More particularly, whenever we come up to the house of God, let us seek those very dispositions in the use of the Liturgy, which our Reformers exercised in the framing of it. Let us bring with us into the presence of our God that spirituality of mind that shall fit us for communion with him, and that purity of heart which is the commencement of the divine image on the soul. Let us study, whenever we join in the different parts of this Liturgy, to get our hearts suitably impressed with the work in which we are engaged; that our confessions may be humble, our petitions fervent, our thanksgivings devout, and our whole souls obedient to the word we hear. In a word, let us not be satisfied with any attainments, but labor to be holy as God himself is holy, and perfect even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect.

If now a doubt remains on the mind of any individual respecting the transcendent excellence of the Liturgy, let him only take the Litany, and go through every petition of it attentively, and at the close of every petition ask himself, What sort of a person should I be, if this petition were so answered to me, that I lived henceforth according to it? and what kind of a world would this be, if all the people that were in it experienced the same answer, and walked according to the same model? If, for instance, we were all from this hour delivered "from all blindness of heart; from pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness;" if we were delivered also "from all other deadly sin, and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil;" what happiness should we not possess? How happy would the Church be, if it should "please God to illuminate all bishops, priests, and deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of his Word, so that both by their preaching and living they set it forth and show it accordingly!" How blessed also would the whole nation be, if it pleased God to "endue the lords of the council, and all the nobility, with grace, wisdom and understanding; and to bless and keep the magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice and to maintain truth; and further to bless all his people throughout the land!" Yes, what a world would this be, if from this moment God should "give to all nations, unity, peace, and concord!" Were these prayers once answered, we should hear no more complaints of our Liturgy, nor ever wish for anything in public, better than that which is provided for us. May God hasten forward that happy day, when all the assemblies of his people throughout the land shall enter fully into the spirit of these prayers, and be answered in the desire of their hearts; receiving from him an "increase of grace, to hear meekly his Word, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit!" And to us in particular may he give, even to every individual among us, "true repentance; and forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and endue us with the grace of his Holy Spirit, that we may amend our lives according to his holy word." Amen and Amen.

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EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY, part 4

**[Deuteronomy 5:28-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.28-33)**

The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me: "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"

The further we proceed in the investigation of our Liturgy, the more we feel the difficulty of doing justice to it. Such is the spirit which it breathes throughout, that if only a small measure of its piety existed in all the different congregations in which it is used, we should be as holy and as happy a people as ever the Jews were in the most distinguished periods of their history. If this object has not been yet attained, it is not the fault of our Reformers; they have done all that men could do, to transmit to the latest posterity the blessings which they themselves had received; and there is not a member of our Church, who has not reason to bless God, every day of his life, for their labors. But they knew that it would be to little purpose to provide suitable forms of prayer for every different occasion, if they did not also secure, as far as human wisdom could secure, a succession of men, who, actuated by the same ardent piety as themselves, should perform the different offices to the greatest advantage, and carry on by their personal ministrations the blessed work which they had begun. Here therefore they bestowed the utmost care; marking with precision what were the qualifications requisite for the ministerial office, and binding, in the most solemn manner, all who should be consecrated to it, to a diligent and faithful discharge of their respective duties.

When we first spoke of the Liturgy, we proposed, after vindicating its use, and displaying its excellency, to direct your attention to one particular part, which on that account we should reserve for a distinct and fuller consideration. The part we had in view was, The Ordination Service. We are aware, indeed, that in calling your attention so particularly to that, we stand on delicate ground; but, being aware of it, we shall take the greater care that no one shall have reason to complain of lack of delicacy. It is the candor that has invariably manifested itself in this congregation, that emboldens me to bring this subject before you. Any attempt to discuss the merits of the Liturgy would indeed be incomplete, if we omitted to notice that part, which so pre-eminently displays its highest excellencies, and is peculiarly appropriate to the audience which I have the honor to address. I trust therefore I shall not be thought assuming, as though I had any pretensions to exalt myself above the least and lowest of my brethren. I well know, that, if my own deficiencies were far less than they are, it would ill become me to take any other than the lowest place; and much more, when I am conscious that they are so great and manifold. For my own humiliation, no less than that of others, I enter on the task; and I pray God, that, while I am showing what our Reformers inculcated as pertaining to the pastoral office, we may all apply the subject to ourselves, and entreat help from God, that, as "we have well said all that we have spoken, so there may be in us such a heart."

There are three things to be noticed in the Ordination Service; our professions, our promises, and our prayers; after considering which, we shall endeavor to excite, in all, that desire, which God has so tenderly, and so affectionately, expressed in our behalf.

Let me begin, then, with calling your attention to the professions which we make, when first we become candidates for the ministerial office.

So sacred was the priesthood under the Law, that no man presumed to take it upon himself, but he who was called to it by God, as Aaron was. And though the priesthood of our blessed Lord was of a totally distinct kind from that which shadows it forth, "yet did he not glorify himself to be made a High-Priest," but was so constituted by his heavenly Father, who committed to him that office "after the order of Melchizedek." Some call therefore, as from God himself, is to be experienced by all who devote themselves to the service of the sanctuary. Of this our Reformers were convinced; and hence they required the ordaining bishop to put to every candidate that should come before him, this solemn interrogation, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit to take upon you this office?" to which he answers, "I trust so."

Now I am far from intimating that this call, which every candidate for Holy Orders professes to have received, resembles that which was given to the Apostles; it is certainly not to be understood as though it were a voice or suggestion coming directly from the Holy Spirit; for though God may reveal his will in this manner, just as he did in the days of old—yet we have no reason to think that he does. The motion here spoken of is less perceptible; it does not carry its own evidence along with it; (as did that which in an instant prevailed on the Apostles to forsake their worldly business, and to follow Christ;) but it disposes the mind in a gradual and silent way to enter into the service of God; partly from a sense of obligation to him for his redeeming love, partly from a compassion for the ignorant and perishing multitudes around us, and partly from a desire to be an honored instrument in the Redeemer's hands to establish and enlarge his kingdom in the world. Less than this cannot reasonably be supposed to be comprehended in that question; and the way to answer it with a good conscience is, to examine ourselves whether we have an eye to our own ease, honor, or preferment; or, whether we have really a love to the souls of men, and a desire to promote the honor of our God? The question, in this view of it, gives no scope for enthusiasm, nor does it leave any room for doubt upon the mind of him who is to answer it; every man may tell, whether he feels so deeply the value of his own soul, as to be anxious also for the souls of others; and whether, independent of worldly considerations, he has such love to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to desire above all things to advance his glory. These feelings are not liable to be mistaken, because they are always accompanied with corresponding actions, and always productive of appropriate fruits.

Now in all cases where this profession has been made, it may be said, "They have well said all that they have spoken." For this profession is a public acknowledgment that such a call is necessary; and it serves as a barrier to exclude from the sacred office many, who would otherwise have undertaken it from worldly motives. And though it is true, that too many break through this barrier—yet it stands as a witness against them, and in very many instances an effectual witness; testifying to their consciences, that they have come to God with a lie in their right hand, and making them to tremble, lest they should be condemned at the tribunal of their God, for having, like Ananias and Sapphira, lied unto the Holy Spirit. Yes, very many, who have lightly uttered these words when they first entered into the ministry, have been led by them afterwards to examine their motives more attentively, and to humble themselves for the iniquity they have committed, and to surrender up themselves with redoubled energy to the service of their God. Though therefore we regret that any should make this profession on insufficient grounds, we rejoice that it is required of all; and we pray God, that all who have made it, may reconsider it with the attention it deserves; and that all who propose to make it, may pause, until they have maturely weighed the import of their assertion, and can call God himself to attest the truth of it.

Let us next turn our attention to the promises, by which we bind ourselves on that occasion.

In the service for the Ordination of Priests, there is an exhortation from the bishop, which every minister would do well to read at least once every year. To give a just view of this part of our Liturgy, we must briefly open to you the contents of that exhortation; the different parts of which are afterwards brought before us in the shape of questions, to every one of which a distinct and solemn answer is demanded, as in the presence of the heart-searching God. The exhortation consists of two parts; in the first of which we are enjoined to consider the importance of that high office to which we are called; and in the second, we are urged to exert ourselves to the uttermost in the discharge of it.

In reference to the former of these, it speaks thus, "Now we exhort you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have in remembrance, into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office and charge, you are called; that is to say, to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ forever."

Where in such few words can we find so striking a representation of the dignity of our office, as in this address? We are "messengers" from the Most High God, to instruct men in the knowledge of his will, and to communicate to them the glad tidings of salvation through the mediation of his Son; we are "watchmen," to warn them of their danger, while they continue without a saving interest in Christ; and we are "stewards," to superintend his household, and to deal out to every one of his servants, from day to day, whatever their respective necessities require. Now, if we occupied such an office in the house of an earthly monarch only, our dignity were great; but to be thus engaged in the service of the King of kings, is an honor far greater than the temporal government of the whole universe. Should we not, then, bear in mind what an office is devolved upon us?

From speaking thus respecting the dignity of the ministry, it proceeds to speak of the importance of the trust committed to us, "Have always therefore printed in your remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to your charge; for they are the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood." The congregation whom you must serve, is "his spouse, and his body." What a tender and affecting representation is here! The souls committed to our care are represented as "the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for which he shed his blood." What bounds would there be to our exertions, if we considered as we ought, that we are engaged in that very work, for which our Lord Jesus Christ came down from the bosom of his Father, and shed his blood upon the cross; and that to us he looks for the completion of his efforts in the salvation of a ruined world? Further still, they are represented as "the spouse and body of Christ," whose welfare ought to be infinitely dearer to us than life itself. We know what concern men would feel if the life of their own spouse, or of their own body, were in danger, though they could only hope to protract for a few years a frail and perishable existence; what, then, ought we not to feel for "the spouse and body of Christ," whose everlasting welfare is dependent on our exertions!

After thus impressing on our minds the importance of our office, the exhortation proceeds in the next place to urge us to a diligent performance of it. It reminds us, that we are answerable to God for every soul committed to our charge; that there must be no limit to our exertions, except what the capacity of our minds and the strength of our bodies have assigned. It calls upon us to use all the means in our power to qualify ourselves for the discharge of it, by withdrawing ourselves from worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly studies, worldly habits and pursuits of every kind, in order to fix the whole bent of our minds on the study of the Holy Scriptures, and of those things which will assist us in the understanding of them. It directs us to be instant in prayer to God for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, by whose gracious influences alone we shall be enabled to fulfill our duties aright. And, finally, it enjoins us so to regulate our own lives, and so to govern our respective families, that we may be patterns to all around us; and that we may be able to address our congregations in the language of Paul, "Whatever you have heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." But it will be satisfactory to you to hear the very words of the exhortation itself, "If it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, you know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Why consider with yourselves the end of your ministry towards the children of God, towards the spouse and body of Christ; and see that you never cease your labor, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lies in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness of life."

"Forasmuch then as your office is both of so great excellency, and of so great difficulty, you see with how great care and study you ought to apply yourselves, as well that you may show yourselves dutiful and thankful unto that Lord who has placed you in so high a dignity; as also to beware that neither you yourselves offend, nor be the occasion that others offend. Howbeit you cannot have a mind and will thitherto of yourselves; for that will and ability is given of God alone; therefore you ought, and have need to pray earnestly for his Holy Spirit. And seeing that you cannot by any other means compass the doing of so weighty a work, pertaining to the salvation of man, but with doctrine and exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and with a life agreeable to the same; consider how studious you ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures, and in framing the manners both of yourselves and of them that specially pertain unto you, according to the rule of the same Scriptures; and for this selfsame cause, how you ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies."

Here let us pause a moment, to reflect, what stress our Reformers laid on the Holy Scriptures, as the only sure directory for our faith and practice, and the only certain rule of all our ministrations. They have clearly given it as their sentiment, that to study the Word of God ourselves, and to open it to others, is the proper labor of a minister; a labor, that calls for all his time, and all his attention; and, by this zeal of theirs in behalf of the Inspired Volume, they were happily successful in bringing it into general use. But, if they could look down upon us at this time, and see what an unprecedented zeal has pervaded all ranks and orders of men among us for the dissemination of that truth, which they, at the expense of their own lives, transmitted to us; how would they rejoice and leap for joy! Yet, methinks, if they cast an eye upon this favored spot, and saw, that, while the Lord Jesus Christ is thus exalted in almost every other place, we are lukewarm in his cause; and while thousands all around us are emulating each other in exertions to extend his kingdom through the world, we, who are so liberal on other occasions, have not yet appeared in his favor; they would be ready to rebuke our tardiness, as David did the indifference of Judah, from whom he had reason to expect the most active support, "Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house [2 Samuel 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 19.11)." But I am persuaded, that there is nothing wanting but that a suitable proposal be made by some person of influence among us; and we shall soon approve ourselves worthy sons of those pious ancestors. I would hope there is not an individual among us, who would not gladly lend his aid, that "the word of the Lord may run and be glorified," not in this kingdom only, but, if possible, throughout all the earth.

But to return to the bishop's exhortation. "We have good hope that you have well weighed and pondered these things with yourselves long before this time; and that you have clearly determined, by God's grace, to give yourselves wholly to this office, whereunto it has pleased God to call you, so that, as much as lies in you, you will apply yourselves wholly to this one thing, and draw all your cares and studies this way; and that you will continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Savior Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Spirit; that by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, you may wax riper and stronger in your ministry, and that you may so endeavor yourselves from time to time to sanctify the lives of you and yours, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that you may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow."

After this, the bishop, calling upon the candidates, in the name of God and of his Church, to give a plain and solemn answer to the questions which he shall propose to them, puts the substance of the exhortation into several distinct questions; two of which only, for brevity sake, we will repeat, "Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?" To which we answer, "I will endeavor myself so to do, the Lord being my helper." Then he asks again, "Will you be diligent to frame and fashion your own selves and your families according to the doctrine of Christ, and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lies, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?" To which we answer, "I will apply myself thitherto, the Lord being my helper."

These are the promises which we make before God in the most solemn manner at the time of our ordination. Now I would ask, Can any human being entertain a doubt, whether, in making these promises, we have not "well said all that we have spoken?" Can any of us say, that too much has been required of us? Do we not see and feel, that, as the honor of the office is great, so is the difficulty of performing it aright, and the danger of performing it in a negligent and heartless manner? If a man undertake any office that requires indefatigable exertion, and that involves the temporal interests of men to a great extent, we expect of that man the utmost diligence and care. If, then, such be expected of the servants of men, where temporal interests only are affected, what must be expected of the servants of God, where the eternal interests of men and the everlasting honor of God, are so deeply concerned? I say again, We cannot but approve the promises we have made; and, methinks, God himself, when he heard our vows, expressed his approbation of them, saying, "They have well said all that they have spoken."

We come, lastly, to mention our prayers, which were offered to God on that occasion.

And here we have one of the most pious and affecting institutions that ever was established upon earth. The bishop, who during the preceding exhortation and questions has been seated in his chair, now rises up, and in a standing posture makes his earnest supplication to God in behalf of all the candidates, in these words, "Almighty God, who has given you this will to do all these things, grant also unto you strength and power to perform the same; that he may accomplish his work which he has begun in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." After this a request is made to the whole congregation then present, to offer up their prayers in secret to God, and to make their supplications to God for all these things. And, that they may have time to do so, it is appointed, that silence shall be kept for a space; the public services being for a while suspended, in order to give the congregation an opportunity of pouring out their souls before God in behalf of the people who are to be ordained.

What an idea does this give us of the sanctity of our office, and of the need we have of divine assistance for the performance of it! and how beautifully does it intimate to the people, the interest they have in an efficient ministry! Surely, if they felt, as they ought, their need of spiritual instruction, they would never discontinue their prayers for those who are placed over them in the Lord, but would plead in their behalf night and day.

After a sufficient time has been allowed for these private devotions, a hymn to the Holy Spirit is introduced; (the candidates all continuing in a kneeling posture;) a hymn which, in beauty of composition and spirituality of import, cannot easily be surpassed. Time will not allow me to make any observations upon it; but it would be a great injustice to our Liturgy, if I should omit to recite it; and it will be a profitable employment, if, while we recite it, we all adopt it as expressing our own desires, and add our Amen to every petition contained in it.

"Come, Holy Spirit, our souls inspire,  
And lighten with celestial fire!  
You the anointing Spirit are,  
Who do your seven-fold gifts impart;  
Your blessed unction from above  
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.

Enable with perpetual light  
The dullness of our blinded sight;  
Anoint and cheer our soiled face  
With the abundance of your grace;  
Keep far our foes, give peace at home!  
Where you are Guide, no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,  
And You, of both, to be but One;  
That through the ages all along,  
This may be our endless song.  
Praise to Your eternal merit,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!"

In this devout hymn the agency of the Holy Spirit, as the one source of light, and peace, and holiness, is fully acknowledged, and earnestly sought as the necessary means of forming pastors after God's heart; and it is well entitled to the encomium which has been already so often mentioned, "They have well said all that they have spoken."

Passing over the remaining prayers, we conclude this part of our subject with observing, that no sooner is the imposition of hands finished, and the commission given to the candidates to preach the Gospel, than the newly ordained consecrate themselves to God at his table; and seal, as it were, their vows, by partaking of the body and blood of Christ; into whose service they have been just admitted, and whom they have sworn to serve with their whole hearts.

Thus far then "all is well said;" and if our hearts be in unison with our words, truly we shall have reason to bless God to all eternity. "O that there were in us such a heart!"

Glad should I be, if your time would admit of it, to set forth at considerable length the benefits that would accrue from a conformity of heart in us to all that has been before stated; but the indulgence with which I have hitherto been favored must not be abused. I shall therefore close the subject with only two reflections, illustrative of the wish contained in the text.

First, if such a heart were in us, how happy should we be in our souls! Men may be so thoughtless, as to cast off all concern about futurity, and to say, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart." But, if once we begin to indulge any serious reflections, we cannot avoid thinking of our responsibility on account of the souls committed to our charge. Then, if we bring to mind that solemn declaration of God, that "the souls of our people shall be required at our hands," we must of necessity tremble for our state. The concerns of our own souls are of more weight than all other things in the world; and the thought of perishing under the weight of our own personal transgressions is inexpressibly awful; but the thought of perishing under the guilt of destroying hundreds and thousands of immortal souls, is so shocking, that it cannot be endured; if once admitted into the mind, it will fill us with consternation and terror; and the excuses which now appear so satisfactory to us, will vanish like smoke. We shall not then think it sufficient to have fulfilled our duties by proxy; since others can but perform their own duties; nor can any diligence of theirs ever justify our neglect; having sworn for ourselves, we must execute for ourselves; nor ever be satisfied with committing that trust to others, which at the bar of judgment we must give account of for ourselves. Nor shall we then think it sufficient to plead, that we have other engagements, which interfere with the discharge of our ministerial duties; unless we can be assured, that God will wave his claims upon us, and acknowledge the labors which we have undertaken for our temporal advantage, more important than those which respect his honor, and man's salvation. On the other hand, if we have the testimony of our own consciences, that we have endeavored faithfully to perform our ordination vows, and to execute, though with much imperfection, the work assigned us, we shall lift up our heads with joy. Matter for deep humiliation, indeed, even the most laborious ministers will find; but at the same time they will have an inward consciousness, that they have exerted themselves sincerely for God, though not so earnestly as they might; and, in the hope that the Savior, whose love they have proclaimed to others, will have mercy upon them, they cast themselves on him for the acceptance of their services, and expect, through him, the salvation of their souls. Moreover, if we have been diligent in the discharge of our high office, we shall have a good hope that we have been instrumental to the salvation or others, whom we shall have as our joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day. With these prospects before us, we shall labor patiently, waiting, like the gardener, for a distant harvest. Trials we shall have, of many kinds; and many, arising solely from our fidelity to God; but we shall bear up under them, going "through evil report and good report," until we have fought our fight, and finished our course; and then at last we shall be welcomed as faithful servants into the joyous presence of our Lord. Who would not wish for such happiness as this? Only then let our hearts experience what our lips have uttered, and that happiness is ours; only let our professions be verified, our promises fulfilled, and our prayers realized, and all will be well; God will see in us the heart which he approves, and will honor us with testimonies of his approbation to all eternity.

My second observation is, If there were in us such a heart, what blessings would result to all around us! The careless minister may spend many years in a populous parish, and yet never see one sinner converted from the error of his ways, or turned unto God in newness of life. But the faithful servant of Jehovah will have some fruit of his ministry. God will answer to him that prayer at the close of the ordination service, "Grant that Your word, spoken by their mouths, may have such success, that it may never be spoken in vain!" God indeed does not make all equally useful; but he will leave none without witness, that the word which they preach is His Word, and that it is "the power of God unto the salvation of men." Behold, wherever such a minister is fixed, what a change takes place in reference to religion! The obstinately wicked, who either hear him with prejudice or turn their backs on his ministry, may possibly be only more hardened by the means he uses for their conversion; and circumstances may arise, where those who would once have plucked out their own eyes for him, may become for a while his enemies; but still there are many that will arise and call him blessed; many will acknowledge him as their spiritual father; many will bless God for him, and show in their respective circles the happy effects of his ministry. They will love his person; they will enjoy his preaching; they will tread in his steps; and they will shine as lights in a dark world. What, then, might not he hoped for, if all who have undertaken the sacred office of the ministry, fulfilled their engagements in the way We have before described? What if all prayed the prayers, instead of reading them; and labored out of the pulpit, as well as in it; striving to bring all their people, "not only to the knowledge and love of Christ, but to such ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, as to leave no room among them, either for error in religion, or for viciousness of life?" If there were such exertions made in every parish, we should hear no more complaints about the increase of Dissenters. The people's prejudices in general are in favor of the Establishment; and the more any people have considered the excellence of the Liturgy, the more are they attached to the Established Church. Some indeed would entertain prejudices against it, even if all the twelve Apostles were members of it, and ministered in it; but, in general, it is a lack of zeal in its ministers, and not any lack of purity in its institutions, that gives such an advantage to Dissenters. Let me not be misunderstood, as though by these observations I meant to suggest anything disrespectful of the Dissenters; (for I honor all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, of whatever church they be; and I wish them, from my heart, every blessing that their souls can desire:) but, while I see such abundant means of edification in the Church of England, I cannot but regret that any occasion should be given to men to seek for that in other places, which is so richly provided for them in their own church. Only let us be faithful to our engagements, and our churches will be crowded, our sacraments thronged, our hearers edified; good institutions will be set on foot; liberality will be exercised, the poor benefitted, the ignorant enlightened, the distressed comforted; yes, and our "wilderness world will rejoice and blossom as the rose." O that we might see this happy day; which I would fondly hope, has begun to dawn! O that God would arise and "take to him his great power, and reign among us!" O that he might no longer have to express a wish, "that there were in us such a heart;" but rather have to rejoice over us as possessed of such a heart; and that he would magnify himself in us as instruments of good to a ruined world! The Apostle to the Hebrews represents all the saints of former ages as witnesses of the conduct of those who were then alive; and he urges it as an argument with them to exert themselves to the uttermost, "Having then," says he, "so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Thus let us consider the Reformers of our church as now looking down upon us, and filled with anxiety for the success of their labors; let us hear them saying, ' We did all that human foresight could do; we showed to ministers what they ought to be; we bound them by the most solemn ties to walk in the steps of Christ and his Apostles; if any shall be lukewarm in their office, we shall have to appear in judgment against them, and shall be the means of aggravating their eternal condemnation.' Let us, I say, consider them as spectators of our conduct; and endeavor to emulate their pious examples. Let us consider, likewise, that the Liturgy itself will appear against us in judgment, if we labor not to the utmost of our power to fulfill the engagements which we have voluntarily entered into; yes, God himself will say to us, "Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant." May God enable us all to lay these things to heart; that, whether we have already contracted, or are intending at a future period to contract, this fearful responsibility, we may duly consider what account we shall have to give of it in the day of judgment!

#195

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY

**[Deuteronomy 6:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 6.10-12)**

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

We cannot but notice in this passage the confidence with which Moses assured the Israelites respecting their ultimate success in reference to their occupation of the land of Canaan. They had not yet passed over Jordan; yet does he speak to them as if they were in full possession of the land; so certain was it that God would fulfill to them all the promises which he had made unto their fathers.

At the same time, we cannot but be struck with the intimation which is here given of man's proneness to ingratitude, and of the tendency of prosperity to deaden all the finer feelings of the soul. The caution which he gives them will lead me to set before you,

I. The natural ingratitude of man.

This will be found uniformly operating:

1. In relation to all his temporal concerns.

We are struck with the peculiar goodness of God to Israel, in putting them into possession of so many blessings, for which they had never labored. But, in truth, this was only an example of what God has done for man from the beginning of the world. Adam, when formed in Paradise, found every comfort prepared to his hand. And thus it is with every child that is born into the world. Everything, according to his situation in life, is provided for his accommodation; and he has the full benefit of the labors of others, to which, of course, he has never contributed in the smallest particular.

And through the whole of our lives we enjoy the same advantages; God having so ordained, that every man, in seeking his own welfare, shall contribute to the welfare of those around him. One man "builds houses;" another "fills them with good things;" another "digs wells;" another plants trees of different descriptions; and all, in following their respective occupations, provide accommodations for others, which it would have been impossible for them ever to have enjoyed, but for this ordination of God, who has made private interest the means of advancing the public welfare. The only difference between the Israelites and us, in this respect, is, that what they gained by a bloody extermination of the inhabitants—we enjoy in a sweet and peaceful participation with the lawful owners.

Now, of course, it may well be expected that we should trace all these blessings to their proper source, and be filled with thankfulness to God, as the author and giver of them all! But the evil against which the Israelites were cautioned, is realized among us to a great extent; we rest in the gift, and forget the Giver. In as far as we have anything to do in providing these things for ourselves, we run into the very same error against which they were cautioned; ascribing the attainment of them to our own skill or prowess, instead of regarding them altogether as the gift of God, [Deuteronomy 8:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.17-18). In this we do not merely resemble the beasts, but actually degrade ourselves below them; for "the ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib; while we neither know, nor consider," nor regard, our adorable Benefactor! [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.2-3) with [Jeremiah 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.32).

2. In relation even to the concerns of his soul.

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was typical of our deliverance from a far more sever bondage. But is it possible that we should ever be unmindful of that? Suppose it possible for man's ingratitude to extend to all that Israel experienced in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in Canaan; is it possible that his depravity should be so great as to render him forgetful of all the blessings of redemption? Can it be that man should forget what his incarnate God has done for him, in relinquishing all the glory of Heaven, and assuming our fallen nature, and bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, that he might deliver us from the bondage of corruption, and bring us to the everlasting possession of a heavenly inheritance? Yes; it is not only possible, but certain, that men are as unmindful of this as they are of their obligations for temporal blessings; yes, it is a fact, that many are far more thankful for their temporal mercies, than for this, which infinitely exceeds them all!

And to what shall we compare their guilt in this respect? It has been seen that their ingratitude for temporal blessings reduces them below the beasts; and I am not sure that their ingratitude for spiritual benefits does not reduce them below the fallen angels themselves; for, whatever the guilt of those unhappy spirits may be, this we know at least, that they have never poured contempt on One who had assumed their nature, and borne their iniquities, to deliver them!

This is a depravity peculiar to man; and this is a depravity that has pervaded every man. And to what an awful extent it has prevailed in all of us, let the conscience of every one among us bear witness. The character of us all is but too justly depicted in these words, "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21)."

This increases, rather than diminishes, through the abundance of his mercies; as will be seen, while we point out,

II. The general effect of prosperity upon mankind.

The proper intent of God's mercies is, to fill us with humility and thankfulness before him; but, through the corruption of our nature:

1. Prosperity inflates those with pride, whom it should humble.

This was its sad effect on Israel; who, as the prophet complains, "sacrificed to their own net, and burned incense to their own dragnet, [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.16)." And if we examine the general effect of prosperity among ourselves, we shall find, that success in business, and acquisition of honor, and elevation in society, are for the most part the fruitful parents of pride and arrogance and self-conceit.

See how the purse-proud tradesman swells by reason of his wealth, as though he had been the author of his own success. Compare [Deuteronomy 8:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.17-18) with [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17); and how all his former servility is turned into a proudness of his own dignity, and a magisterial oppression of those below him. Perhaps there exists not on earth, a stricter parallel between the Jews and us, than in the case of those who are elected Fellows in any of the Colleges of our Universities. Let the text be read in that view, and there will be found in it much profitable instruction to people so circumstanced. Yes, in truth, that saying is too often realized in every rank of the community, "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked! [Deuteronomy 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.15); [Deuteronomy 32:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.18)."

But can this ever be the effect of spiritual advancement? Of real piety it cannot; but of what assumes the shape of real piety, it may. Professors of religion, when they have acquired somewhat of a clearer knowledge of divine truth, are very apt to be puffed up with it, and to "become, in their own conceit, wiser than their teachers." Hence it is that so many set up for "teachers, while yet they understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm;" and many, because they have some faint conception of what is spiritual, pour contempt on others as altogether carnal. To all such conceited professors I would say, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" "let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall!"

2. Prosperity lulls into security, those whom it should quicken.

The effect of affluence, especially of that which has been acquired by labor, is, to diminish the industry that has obtained it, and to reduce its possessor to the state of the rich fool in the Gospel, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry! [Luke 12:16-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.16-21)."

Indeed, ease is looked upon as the reward of industry; and the prospect of ease is man's greatest incentive to diligence. But success, instead of weakening, should rather operate to augment our efforts for further success; not from a covetous desire of advancement, but from a desire to enlarge our means of doing good. Wealth, with all its attendant influence, should be regarded as a talent, not to be hidden in a napkin, but to be improved for God.

And what should be the effect of increased views of divine truth, and of augmented confidence in God? Should not these things quicken us, and every communication of grace to our souls, stimulate us to activity in the service of the Lord? I say, then, let none of you, because of your prosperity, be "settled on your lees;" but let every blessing, whether temporal or spiritual, be employed as a motive for exertion, and as a means of honoring your heavenly Benefactor.

Let me now address,

1. Those who have risen to prosperity in the world.

The example of David is that which you should follow. He, when assured by God that his kingdom should be established in his house to his last posterity, "went in, and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me hitherto? [2 Samuel 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.18)." Thus let your success operate on you. See the hand of God in it all; and acknowledge your own unworthiness; and adore that grace that has made you to differ from so many whose prospects were once equal to your own. And never forget, that prosperity is a snare which ruins thousands! [Proverbs 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.22); and that, if it makes your situation easier in this world, it obstructs your progress, even like clods of "clay upon your feet," to the world above. Compare [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6) with [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1) and [Matthew 19:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.23-24).

2. Those who, by reason of adverse circumstances, have been reduced to poverty.

How often has that which never could be effected by prosperity, been produced by adversity. In prosperity, for the most part, we forget God; but "in the time of adversity we consider." "In their affliction," said God of his people of old, "they will seek me early;" "they will pour out a prayer, when my chastening is upon them."

Have you found it thus with you? Then, however painful your afflictions may have been, they call rather for congratulation than condolence. The prosperity of the soul is that which alone is of any real value. Look to it then, that, in whatever you decay, you grow in grace; and know, that if only you keep your eyes fixed, not on things visible and temporal, but on those which are invisible and eternal, "your light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18)."

#196

A RIGHT IMPROVEMENT OF ELECTING LOVE

**[Deuteronomy 7:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6-10)**

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him."

There is in man a strange reluctance to contemplate the sovereignty of God; but, if duly improved, there is no subject more comforting to the soul, or more calculated to promote practical godliness. It is this on which Moses insists, in order to deter the Israelites from connections with the heathen, and to induce them to maintain inviolable the commandments of their God.

With similar views we would draw your attention to,

I. The privilege of God's people.

The Jews were "a special people unto the Lord their God".

They had been:  
redeemed from a most oppressive bondage,  
instructed by the voice of revelation,  
supported by bread from Heaven,  
brought into the nearest relation to the Deity,  
and honored with access to him in ordinances of divine appointment.

In these, and many other respects, they were distinguished above all other people upon earth, [Deuteronomy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.7-8); [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29).

Such is also the privilege of all true believers.

They have been:  
rescued from the tyranny of sin and Satan, [2 Timothy 2:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25-26),  
taught by the word and Spirit of God, [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45),  
furnished with daily supplies of grace, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16),  
made sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, [2 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.18),  
and admitted into the most intimate communion with their God, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3).

Nor were the Jews so much exalted above the heathen world, as true believers are above all others, even the professed followers of Christ, [Mark 3:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.34-35); [Matthew 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.28).

It will be a profitable subject of meditation, if we inquire into,

II. The source of that privilege.

The Jews owed all their blessings to the distinguishing grace of God.

They were not chosen for their numbers, or for their goodness; for "they were the fewest" and most stiff-necked "of all people." God's love to them had its origin within his own bosom, "he loved them, because he would love them;" and in due season he testified that love to them, because he had voluntarily engaged to do so.

Just so, every true Christian owes all their blessings to the distinguishing grace of God.

God, in choosing us to salvation, has not respect to any goodness in us, whether past, present, or future.

Not to past; for all of us, not excepting even the Apostles themselves, have been inconceivably vile, [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3); [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3).

Not to present; for many of us, like Paul and the three thousand, were in the very midst of our sinful career, when God plucked us as brands from the burning! [Acts 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.13); [Acts 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1).

Not future; for we never would have had anything good in us, if it had not been given us by God, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7).

It is evident that the grace he has given us, can never be the ground and reason of his bestowing that grace upon us. He has "chosen us that we might be holy;" but not because we were so, or because he foresaw we would become holy, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4); [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16).

No reason can be assigned for his choosing us rather than others, except that assigned by our Lord himself, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight, [Matthew 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.26)." Nor has he preserved us in a holy life, on account of our own stability (for we are all bent to backslide from him [Hosea 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.7)), but on account of the covenant he has made with us in Christ, [Psalm 89:29-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.29-35), wherein he has engaged to preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom. In the whole of his conduct towards us, he has acted according to "his eternal purpose and grace! [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5); [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)."

That we may not abuse so great a privilege, let us consider,

III. The improvement to be made of it.

We should attentively consider the character of God:

1. God is **sovereign** in the exercise of his mercy.

His grace is his own, and he may dispose of it as he will, [Matthew 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.15). If he had consigned us all over to perdition as he did the fallen angels—he would have been just. We therefore can have no claim upon him for any share in his mercy. Whether he makes us vessels of honor or of dishonor, we have no more ground of pride or murmuring, than the clay has, which is fashioned according to the potter's will, [Romans 9:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18-21).

Whether we will receive it or not, he is a Sovereign, that dispenses mercy according to his own will, [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11). If there is any difference between one and another, that difference results, not from any power or goodness in us, but from God's free and sovereign grace, [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16); [Romans 9:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18).

2. God is **faithful** in the observance of his promises.

Those who have really a saving interest in the promises, are universally distinguished by this mark, "They love God, and keep his commandments." To these God will most assuredly approve himself "faithful." His "covenant" is ordered in all things, and he will inviolably "keep" it. What Joshua said to the whole Jewish nation, may be yet more extensively applied to all true believers, "No promise ever has failed them, or ever shall! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

3. God is **dreadful** in the execution of his threatenings.

Those who do not love him, and keep his commandments, he considers as "hating him;" and he will surely "repay them to their face!" Their proud rebellious conduct shall be recompensed on their own heads, [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35); [Deuteronomy 29:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.20) and [Ezekiel 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 24.14). And though now they seem as if they defied his majesty, they shall find to their cost that his patience has an end, and that, however merciful he is—he will by no means clear the guilty, [Exodus 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.7).

Having fully considered this character of God, we should have a deep and an abiding persuasion of it wrought in our hearts.

We should know it,

1. For the quickening of our diligence.

Nothing will ever more strongly operate on our minds than the consideration of our obligations to God as the sovereign author of all our good desires, and the faithful preserver of them in our souls. This is the very improvement which Moses himself makes of the truths contained in the text, verse 11; and an inspired Apostle declares, that the dedication of ourselves to God is the very end, for which God himself has distinguished us by his sovereign grace, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9). Let us then be ever saying, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" and let us devote ourselves to him in body, soul, and spirit.

2. For the quieting of our fears.

The two principal sources of disquietude to the soul are:  
a sense of our unworthiness to receive God's mercies;  
a sense of our insufficiency to do his will.

Now both of these are entirely removed by a view of God's character as exhibited in the text. As he is a sovereign, he may bestow his grace, as he often has done, on the most unworthy; he is most glorified by bestowing it on these very people. And, as he is faithful, he may be safely trusted to accomplish his own promises, in his own time and way. Our weakness is no obstacle to him; it shall rather be an occasion of manifesting the perfection of his strength. Let us then commit ourselves into his hands; and every perfection he possesses shall be glorified in our salvation.

#197

THE REASONS OF GOD'S DIVERSIFIED DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE

**[Deuteronomy 8:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.2-3)**

"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

Among the various things which distinguish man from the brute creation, is that faculty which he possesses of grasping within his mind things past and future; and of deriving both from the one and the other the most powerful incentives to action. The consideration of things future is that which operates most upon the bulk of mankind; but men of thoughtful and comprehensive minds derive the most important lessons of wisdom from reflecting on the past; and it is this retrospective view of things which distinguishes one man from another, almost as much as a prospective view of them does an adult person from a child.

Hence Moses was peculiarly solicitous to draw the attention of the Israelites to all those wonderful events which had taken place, from the period when he was first commissioned to effect their deliverance from Egypt, to that hour when they were about to enter into the promised land; and truly there never was such an eventful period from the foundation of the world, nor one so replete with instruction as that.

Two things in particular we notice in the words before us:

I. The diversified dealings of God with his people.

In the dealings of God with the Jews, we see a mixture of mercy and of judgment. His mercies to them were such as never were given to any other people. His interpositions by ten successive plagues in order to effect their deliverance from Egypt, their passage through the sea, their preservation from "serpents and scorpions in that great and terrible wilderness, verse 15;" their miraculous supplies of manna from the clouds, and of "water from the rock of flint;" the preservation of "their garments and of their shoes, verse 4 with [Deuteronomy 29:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.5), from waxing old during the space of forty years," and of "their feet also from swelling," notwithstanding the long journeys which at different times they were obliged to travel, [Numbers 9:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 9.21) with 10:33; these, with innumerable other mercies not specified in the text, distinguished that people above every nation under Heaven.

But at the same time God saw fit occasionally to let them feel the difficulties with which they were encompassed. He allowed them on some occasions to be tried both with hunger and thirst; and inflicted heavy chastisements upon them for their multiplied transgressions.

Now in this we have a looking-glass wherein to see the dealings of God with his people in all ages:

1. His **mercies** to every one of us have been innumerable.

At our very first formation in the womb, the power and goodness of God towards us were exercised in imparting to us all our faculties both of body and mind. We have been preserved by him from innumerable dangers, both seen and unseen. In our national, domestic, and individual capacity—we have been highly privileged. And though the interference of God on our behalf has not been so visible as that which was given to the Jews, it has not been at all less real. Our supplies of food, of clothing, and of health, have been as much owing to the care of his providence, as if they had been given to us by miraculous interpositions.

The benefits of Scripture revelation too which we have enjoyed, have marked his special favor to our souls. In this respect we have been as much elevated above the heathen world as the Jews themselves were; or rather, still more elevated, in proportion to the clearer light which shines on us in the New Testament; which, in comparison with theirs, is as the meridian light to the early dawn.

But what shall we say of those who have tasted of redeeming love, and experienced the transforming efficacy of the Gospel of Christ? What tongue can declare the mercies given to them? Yet,

2. We have also been partakers of his **judgments**.

All of us have found this to be a chequered scene:  
Some have been tried in one way, and others in another.  
Some have been tried for a longer, and others for a shorter period.  
Some have been tried in mind; some in body.  
Some have been tried in estate; some in relations.

Even those who have been most favored in this respect, have found abundant reason to acknowledge that "this is not our rest." To the young and inexperienced, the world appears a garden abounding with delights; but on a fuller acquaintance with it we find, that its roses have their thorns; and even its choicest delicacies often prove occasions of the sorest pain. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward!"

As, from our general notions of God's goodness, we might have expected that his dealings with his people would have been different from what we find them to be, let us inquire into,

II. His end and design in them.

The reasons here assigned for his dispensations towards the Jews, will afford us a clue for discovering his intentions towards ourselves. He diversifies his dispensations towards us:

1. To **humble** us.

Were our mercies altogether unmixed, we would know nothing of the effect of judgments on the rebellious will of man; and if there were no intermission of adversity, we would be strangers to the effect of prosperity upon the carnal heart. But by the variety of states which we pass through, we are led to see the total depravity of our nature; since we can be in no state whatever, wherein the mind does not show itself alienated from God, and averse to bear his yoke.

We are apt to think that a change of circumstances would produce in us a change of conduct. But, as a person in a fever finds no posture easy, nor any food pleasant to his taste—so we, through the corruption of our hearts, find all situations alike unproductive of a permanent change in our dispositions towards God. "We are bent to backslide from him, even as a broken bow;" and every change of situation only serves to establish that melancholy truth, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked!" To convince us of our depravity, is the first work of God upon the soul, [John 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8), and the first object of all his dispensations."

2. To **test** us.

It is easy to obey God at some times and in some respects, in comparison with what it is at other times and in other respects. God therefore puts us into a variety of situations, to test whether we will make him the supreme object of our regard in all.

At some times he gives health, and affluence, and honor, to see whether we will allow these things to draw away our hearts from him, or whether we will improve them all for him.

At other times he lays affliction upon our loins, to see whether we will retain our love to him, and bless him as well when he takes away as when he gives.

At some times he permits us to be sorely tempted by Satan, and by the corrupt propensities of our own hearts, to test whether we will prefer the maintenance of a good conscience to any of the gratifications of sense.

At other times he permits persecution to rage against us, that it may appear whether we will sacrifice our interests, and life itself, for him.

In fact, every change of circumstance is sent by him, precisely as the command respecting the sacrificing of Isaac was sent to Abraham; by that command "God tested him;" and by every circumstance of life he tests us, to "prove whether we will obey his commandments or no."

3. To **instruct** us.

We are apt to imagine that the happiness of man is greatly dependent upon earthly prosperity; and that the loss of temporal comforts is an irreparable evil. But God would teach us, that this is altogether a mistake. By loading us with all that this world can give, he shows us how insufficient earthly things are to make us happy; and, by reducing us to a state of poverty, or pain, or trouble of any kind, he leads us to himself, and then shows us how happy he can make us, though under circumstances the most painful to flesh and blood.

This is a great and valuable lesson—most honorable to him, and most beneficial to us. It elevates us completely above this lower world; and, in proportion as it is learned, enables us to live on God alone.

When Satan tempted our Lord to distrust his heavenly Father's care, and to "command the stones to be made bread," our Lord reminded him of the lesson which was here recorded for the good of the Church; namely, that it was the blessing of God upon bread, and not the bread itself, that could do us good; and that His blessing would as easily produce the effect without means, as with them. Thus he teaches us that, in having God, we have all; and that, without him, we have nothing.

4. To do us good at our latter end, verse 16.

If our state were never diversified, we should have but one set of graces called forth into action; but, by experiencing alterations and reverses, we are led to exercise every kind of grace; and by this means we grow in every part, just as the members of the body grow, when all are duly exercised, [Colossians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.19); [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2).

Moreover, according to the measure which we attain of the stature of Christ, will be the recompense of our reward. Every grace we exercise, whether active or passive, will be noted in the book of God's remembrance, and "be found to our praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7)." The one as well as the other, though but weak and defective in itself, is "working out for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

APPLICATION.

1. Let every one of us trace the dealings of God with us.

We could not read a more instructive history, than that of the Lord's dealings with us from our earliest infancy to the present moment. If it were recorded with the minuteness and fidelity that the history of the Jews has been, we should see, that as face answers to face in a looking-glass, so does our experience to theirs. We are apt to wonder at their wickedness; but we would cease to wonder at them, if we were thoroughly acquainted with ourselves. Our wonder would rather be at the patience and forbearance, the mercy and the kindness—of our God.

Earnestly then would we recommend to every one to apply to himself the injunction in our text, "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness;" and we may rest assured that such habits of reflection will bring their own reward along with them, [Psalm 107:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.43).

2. Let our experience of his past kindness, lead us to confide in him in the future.

The way in which the Israelites were led was circuitous and dreary; yet we are told that God "led them by the right way." It may be that our way also has been such as has excited many murmurs, and great discouragement; but, if we have considered it to any good purpose, we shall acknowledge it to have been on the whole more profitable for us, than any that we should have chosen for ourselves. Perhaps we shall see cause to bless our God for some of our heaviest trials, more than for any of those things which administered to our pleasure.

Convinced then by our past experience, we should be willing to leave matters to the disposal of our God; and to submit to any trials which he sends for the promotion of our eternal welfare. Our only solicitude should be to make a due improvement of his dispensations; and if only we may be humbled, instructed, sanctified, and holier by them, we should cordially and continually say, "Let God do what seems good to him."

#198

AGAINST SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SELF-CONCEIT

**[Deuteronomy 9:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.4-6)**

"After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people."

Man is a dependent creature;  
he has nothing of his own but sin;  
he can do nothing but sin;  
he can control no event whatever;  
he is altogether in the hands of God, who supports him in life, and accomplishes both in him and by him his own sovereign will and pleasure. Yet he boasts in his wisdom, though "he is born like a wild donkey's colt;" and strength, though he is "crushed before the moth!" Nay, so extraordinary is his blindness, that he arrogates righteousness to himself, though he is so corrupt, that he has "not so much as one imagination of the thoughts of his heart which is not evil continually."

If there ever were a people that might be expected to be free from self-satisfied thoughts, it must be the Israelites who were brought out of Egypt; for no people ever had such opportunities of discovering the evil of their hearts as they had. No people ever received such signal mercies, as they; nor did any ever manifest such perverseness of mind, as they. Yet Moses judged it necessary to caution even them, not to ascribe to any merits of their own the interpositions of God in their behalf, but to trace them to their proper source. the determination of God to display in and by them his own glorious perfections.

The words which I have read to you, will furnish me with a fit occasion to show,

I. How prone we are to self-satisfied thoughts.

There are many things which men would not utter with their lips, which yet they will "speak in their hearts." "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God." But no rational man would be such a fool as to say it with his lips. So, one can scarcely conceive any man absurd enough to impute in express terms to himself, his successes, either in temporal or spiritual matters; yet, "in the spirit of our minds," we are prone to do it in reference to both.

1. We are prone to be self-satisfied in reference to **temporal** matters.

In the event of our succeeding in trade, in husbandry, in war, how apt are we to ascribe to ourselves what really has proceeded from God alone. We may have shown wisdom in our use of means; but who has rendered those means effectual? Can the merchant command the seas, or the gardener the clouds, or the warrior the outcome of wars? Yet we take the glory to ourselves, as if we had reaped nothing but the fruits, the necessary fruits, of our own superior skill.

Now what would we have thought of the disciples, if, when they had "toiled all the night in fishing, and had caught nothing," and afterwards, in obedience to their Lord's directions, had "launched out into the deep again, and taken at one draught so many fishes that both their ships began to sink". What, I say, would we have thought of them, if they had ascribed this success to their own wisdom and skill, [Luke 5:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.4-7) and again [John 21:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.3-6). Yet this is the very thing which we do, in reference to our successes in any matter, "we sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense unto our own dragnet, [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.16)."

2. We are prone to be self-satisfied in reference to our **spiritual** matters.

In relation to things of a spiritual nature, we should suppose that no man would think of indulging this propensity; because in the natural man there is not so much as one holy desire. But, strange as it may seem, we are more tenacious of our supposed self-sufficiency in reference to these things than to any others. There is not one who does not hope to conciliate the divine favor by something that he shall do; and that does not imagine himself capable of doing it by his own inherent strength and goodness, whenever he shall be pleased to undertake the work.

To self-righteousness, in particular, men cleave with an obstinacy that nothing but Omnipotence can overcome! This was the real cause of the rejection of the Jews, that they would persist in laboring to establish a righteousness of their own by the works of the Law, when they should have embraced the righteousness which is from God by faith, [Romans 9:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.31-32). And this is the principle which we have to combat in all our ministrations, and which is the very last that yields to the Gospel of Christ.

Men think to get to Heaven by their own righteousness; and hope, like the Israelites in Canaan, to make the very mercy of God himself a pedestal for their own fame. "Stiff-necked" as Israel were, they would arrogate to themselves this glory; and vile as we are, we fondly cherish this vain conceit. To renounce wholly our own righteousness, and to submit cordially to the righteousness of Christ—is the last sacrifice we can be brought to make. Yet it is the crown and glory of converting grace.

That I may, as God shall enable me, beat down all self-satisfied conceits, I will proceed to show,

II. How erroneous they are.

To the self-righteous Israelites, Moses said, "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people."

Now here Moses has informed us what it is that God consults in all his dispensations, even the glory of his own attributes and perfections:

1. Of his **justice** and **holiness**.

God determined to show his indignation against sin; and therefore, when the iniquity of the Canaanites was full, and they were ripe for vengeance—he drove them forth from their land, and utterly destroyed them. The Israelites he used merely as his instruments, whom he had raised up to fulfill his will; and in them he made known his power to execute what his justice had decreed.

Look now at the redemption which he has given to us, and you shall find it altogether ordained to display the very same perfections of the Deity.

Look at the atonement made for sin; go to Calvary, and behold the Lamb of God expiating, by his own blood, the guilt of a ruined world! There read the holiness of God, in his hatred of sin, and his justice in punishing it.

Or go to the Gospel, which proclaims this deliverance; and declares, that none shall ever be saved who do not plead this atonement as their only hope; and none shall ever perish who truly and sincerely rely upon it.

Go, follow the self-complacent Pharisee to the regions of misery, or the believing penitent to the realms of bliss, and you shall see in both an equal display of these very perfections. In the one, the punishment of sin in his own person; in the other, the reward of righteousness, wrought out for him by our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Of his **faithfulness** and truth.

To Abraham, God had promised the possession of the land of Canaan; yet not to Abraham personally, but in his descendants. The fulfillment of this promise was delayed four hundred and thirty years; but it was not forgotten. When the time for its accomplishment was fully come, it was fulfilled; and in fulfilling it, God showed himself faithful to his promises.

If any one of us should ever arrive at the heavenly Canaan, it will be in consequence of the covenant made with Christ; wherein the Father stipulated, that "if his Son would make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)."

Whence is it that any one of us is led to Christ?

Whence is it that we are carried in safety through this dreary wilderness, and brought at last to the possession of the heavenly land?

Was it for our righteousness that we were chosen?

No, "God loved us simply because he would love us, [Deuteronomy 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.7-8)."

Was it for our righteousness that we were preserved?

No, we were "a stiff-necked people" from first to last.

Was it for our righteousness that we were crowned with ultimate success?

No, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us! [Titus 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.4)." "According to the good pleasure of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his own grace, [Ephesians 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-6)."

It is worthy of observation, that no less than three times in the short space of our text does God declare that his people were not thus favored on account of their own righteousness; and among all the glorified ones in Heaven, there will not be found so much as one, who does not ascribe his salvation altogether to God and to the Lamb; that is, to the electing love of the Father, and to the redeeming love of Christ, and to the regenerating love of the Spirit.

In order still more forcibly to counteract self-righteous thoughts, I proceed yet further to show,

III. The importance of utterly discarding self-righteous thoughts from our own minds.

Observe the energy with which this hateful propensity is assailed, "Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." How much more, then, may I say this to you, in reference to the heavenly land! "Understand it," then, and consider it well; for to dream of any righteousness of your own, is to be:

1. Guilty of the grossest injustice.

Did the self-applauding Israelites rob God of his glory? How much more do you!

What becomes of all his stupendous love, in giving his only Son to die for you?

What becomes of his sovereign grace, in choosing you at first, and in giving his Son to die for you?

What becomes of all of:  
his mercy in pardoning you,  
his power in sanctifying you,  
his faithfulness in preserving you to the end?

By this one act of self-righteousness you rob God of it all!

You take the crown from the Savior's head, to put it on your own!

What construction would you put on similar conduct shown towards yourselves? If you had taken the most helpless and worthless of the human race from the street, and had with vast cost and trouble educated him for your heir, and had actually made over to him all that you possess; would you think he offered you no indignity, if he denied his obligations to your unmerited love, and ascribed all the glory of his exaltation to his own superior merit, which left you no option, but claimed it all at your hands?

How base, then, must you be, if you so requite the love of Almighty God! Know, that:

"His is the kingdom," to which you have been called;

"His is the power," by which you have been saved and kept;

and "His must be the glory" forever and ever.

2. Guilty of the extreme folly.

What can provoke God, if this arrogance does not? Or, what can you expect, but that, as the recompense of your conceit and arrogance, he should say to you,

'Go on without my help.

You have done thus much for yourselves—carry on now the good work within you.

You have overcome Satan—overcome him still.

You have merited my favor—continue still to merit it.

You have paid a price for Heaven—complete your purchase.

Bring with you your works to my judgment-seat—and I will deal with you according to them.'

Ah, Beloved! what would become of us, if God were thus to give us up to our proud delusions, and our vain conceits? It would soon appear what we are, and what measure of sufficiency we possess for anything that is good. If, then, you would not provoke God to give you up altogether to yourselves, discard from your minds these "lofty imaginations, and let every thought of your hearts be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!"

Having thus directed my attention, throughout the whole subject, to the self-sufficient, I will conclude with an address to:

1. The desponding sinner.

You are ready to say, God will not have mercy upon me, because I have no righteousness whereby to recommend myself to him. But you need none for this end. It was not the righteous, but sinners, whom he came to save.

You are to go to Christ:  
guilty, that you may be forgiven;  
vile, that you may be made holy; and  
weak, that his strength may be perfected in your weakness.

"Understand" this; and your conscious unworthiness, so far from appearing any longer a bar to your acceptance with him, will be a motive for coming to him, and an encouragement to trust in him; for "where sin has abounded, there you have reason to hope that his grace shall much more abound."

2. The joyful saint.

Let not the freedom of God's grace ever prove a snare to you. Though God will never save you for your righteousness, he will never save you if you continue to live in an unrighteous state. Though he requires no righteousness of yours as the ground of your acceptance with him, he requires the utmost attainments in righteousness as your fitness for Heaven; yes, and as the means whereby he may be glorified. Take heed, therefore, that you "understand" this; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

At the same time, you must cultivate a spirit directly opposite to that of the self-applauding Pharisee—a spirit of humiliation and self-abasement before God. This was the state of mind which he required of those whom he conducted into Canaan; and this is the spirit which he expects to find in us. Hear his own words to them, and to us in them, "You shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up my hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall you remember your ways, and all your doings wherein you have been defiled. And you shall loath yourselves in your own heart for all the evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt dealings, O house of Israel, says the Lord God! [Ezekiel 20:42-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.42-44); [Ezekiel 36:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.22); [Ezekiel 36:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.32)."

Here, I say, you see the spirit that befits you. To your last hour, and in your highest attainments, be abased, and let God be glorified as "all in all!"

#199

A PENITENTIAL RETROSPECT ENJOINED

**[Deuteronomy 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.7)**

"Remember, and forget not, how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness."

There is no sin more deeply rooted in the heart of man than pride; nor is there anything which will not serve as a foundation for it. Even an excess of impiety will afford to some an occasion of glorying; and a precedence in rebellion against God, give them a title to praise among those whom they have out-stripped in the career of wickedness.

It may well be expected that success in any lawful enterprise should very generally be thought to give a man a legitimate ground for self-applause. Yet, doubtless, if ever there were a people less entitled to self-admiration than others, it was the people of Israel, who were a stiff-necked people from the very first moment that God took them under his peculiar care. And, if ever there were a matter that entirely precluded all ground of glorying, surely it was the establishing of that people in the land of Canaan. Their fathers had all provoked God to destroy them in the wilderness; and they themselves were also a rebellious generation; so that they at least might be expected to acknowledge themselves indebted to the sovereign grace of God for all the blessings of the promised land.

But behold! God, who knew what was in man, was constrained to caution them against the enormous evil of ascribing to their own superior goodness all the interpositions of God in their behalf, "After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." This was the state of mind which befit them; and this is the habit that befits us also.

To fix this admonition the more deeply on your minds, I will endeavor to show:

I. What impression sin makes upon the mind of God.

It is not so light an evil as we are ready to imagine. It is most offensive to God; it is "that abominable thing which his soul hates! [Jeremiah 44:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.4)."

1. In what abhorrence God holds sin, we may see by

his own positive declarations.

"In the day that you eat of the forbidden tree, you shall surely die! [Genesis 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.17)," was the declaration of God in Paradise.

And "The soul that sins, it shall die! [Ezekiel 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.4)," has been his solemn warning to all mankind, even to the present hour.

Yes, "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men! [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18)."

"The wicked," says David, "shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)."

And again, "Upon the ungodly shall God rain snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest; this shall be their portion to drink! [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.6)."

"They shall go into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41)."

"They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and the smoke of their torment shall ascend up forever and ever; and they shall have no rest, day nor night! [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11)."

They shall be "where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched! [Mark 9:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.44); [Mark 9:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.46); [Mark 9:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.48)."

They shall spend eternity itself in "weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! [Matthew 25:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.30)."

Now I would ask, What can such declarations mean? Or rather, What can they mean who willingly ignore them, and say, "I shall have peace, though I walk after the imaginations of my own evil heart! [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19)."

2. In what abhorrence God holds sin, we may see by

the actual exhibitions of his wrath.

It is easy to say, "The Lord does not see, neither will the Almighty regard it." But how do his actual dispensations accord with these foolish thoughts?

Was the sin of Adam visited with no expression of his wrath?

Was there no manifestation of his anger at the deluge?

Was there no wrath on the cities of the plain—the punishment of which was a figure of Hell itself?

Look at his dealings with Israel in the wilderness—was sin unpunished there?

Do we see there no marks of his displeasure, no proofs of the connection which he has established between sin and misery?

Does the destruction of that whole people in the wilderness give us no insight into this matter?

When we see what was inflicted:  
on a man for gathering sticks upon the Sabbath, [Numbers 15:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.33-35),  
on Uzzah for a mistake, [2 Samuel 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.6-7),  
on the men of Bethshemesh for unhallowed curiosity, [1 Samuel 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.19),  
on Herod for pride, [Acts 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.23),  
on Ananias for a lie, [Acts 5:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3-10)  
—shall we listen to the voice that tells us, that "the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil? [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)."

Know of a truth, beloved brethren, that "God is angry with the wicked every day! [Psalm 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.11);" and that "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished! [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21)."

From hence, then, we may see,

II. The impression which sin should make on our minds.

Truly, as sin makes a deep impression upon God's mind, so should it also upon ours. We should remember it; and never forget so much as one sin, if it were possible; but should have the iniquity of our whole lives ever treasured up in our minds, and standing in one accumulated mass before our eyes.

This is necessary for the unpardoned sinner.

We are not to imagine that it is sufficient for us to acknowledge in a general way that we are sinners, or to have our minds fixed on one or two enormous transgressions, and to confess them to God. We ought to trace sin to the fountain-head, and see how totally we are by nature alienated from God, and "enemies to him in our minds by wicked works." At the same time we should have such views of particular transgressions, as to be constrained to come to God, saying, "Thus and thus have I done!" Without such a view of our sins we can have no repentance, no forgiveness, nor even so much as any preparation of heart for the Gospel of Christ.

Without calling our ways to remembrance, we can have no repentance. For, what is repentance, but a confession of our sins, and mourning over them before God? We can have no forgiveness; for "he who covers his sins shall not prosper! It is he only who confesses and forsakes them, who shall find mercy [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)." Nor can a person be prepared to receive the Gospel; for the Gospel is a remedy for which they who are unconscious of any malady can have no desire; as our Lord has said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, [Matthew 9:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.12-13)." What then shall an unpardoned sinner do? If he does not look back on his transgressions, to mourn over them before God—he rivets them all upon his own soul, and ensures to himself the judgments of an offended God! [Luke 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.3).

Nor is it a whit less necessary for a pardoned saint.

In a great variety of views it is desirable for him:

First, right views of sin are necessary for the deepening of his humility.

Superficial views of sin, though they may suffice to bring us to the Savior, will never produce that self-loathing and self-abhorrence which are the foundation of all that is good and great in the Christian character, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63); [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31).

Next, right views of sin are necessary for the inflaming of his gratitude.

Our gratitude will always bear proportion to our sense of sin. "The man that has been forgiven little, will love little, [Luke 7:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47);" but the man who is sensible, fully sensible, what his deserts have been, will be filled with such wonder and admiration at the goodness of God towards him, as no words can adequately express! [1 Timothy 1:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13-15). "Grace exceeding abundant."

Further, right views of sin are desirable for the confirming of his principles.

Let him feel the extent of his guilt, and he will not need to be told that salvation must be altogether of grace, or through faith, in Christ. He will see that a soul taken out of Hell itself would not be a greater monument of grace than he! He knows himself to be "a brand plucked out of the burning, [Zechariah 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 3.2);" and that if there were not an atonement provided for him, and a free salvation offered to him, Satan himself would have as good a hope of mercy as he!

Further, right views of sin are desirable for the augmenting of his care and watchfulness.

Let a man see how he has fallen; and how, even though he may not actually have fallen, he has been tempted by sinful inclinations; he will then see what must have been his state to all eternity, if God had left him to himself; and what must yet be his state, if God should not continually uphold him!

Lastly, Further, right views of sin are necessary for the fitting of his soul for glory.

Go up to Heaven, and see the state of the saints there; see how they fall on their faces before the throne; hear with what incessant praises they ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb, [Revelation 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.14). If you were to go from one end of Heaven to the other, you would not hear one self-applauding word, or witness one self-admiring thought. There is but one song throughout all the realms of bliss; and the deeper our sense of obligation to God is for the wonders of redeeming love, the better we shall be prepared to make it the one subject of our thanksgivings to all eternity.

Before I conclude, let me add a few words to those who are either looking to God for acceptance through their own righteousness, or imagining that they have already found mercy on such ground as that.

Take a retrospect of your past lives, and call to remembrance the whole of your conduct in this wilderness world. Compare your lives with the requirements of God's law; and see whether even so much as a day or an hour has ever passed, that has not given you ground for the deepest humiliation. But if you will not remember your sins, know assuredly that God will. He says, by the Prophet Amos, "The Lord has sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works! [Amos 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 8.7)."

In the day of judgment, too, will he remember them; yes, and bring them to your remembrance also; for they are all recorded in his book; and when set before you with all their aggravations, they will then appear to you, not light and venial, as they now do, but worthy of the deepest and heaviest condemnation.

Wait not, then, until that day, but call them to remembrance now, and beg of God to set them all in order before your eyes. As for the pain which a sight of them will occasion, would you not wish to be pained with that which has so grieved God? Is it not better to feel a penitential sorrow now, than to die in impenitence, and lie down under the wrath of God forever?

In recommending penitence, I am your best friend; and those who would encourage you to forget your sins are, in truth, your greatest enemies. Begin, then, to "sorrow after a godly sort, [2 Corinthians 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.11)," and go to the Lord with all your sins upon you; so shall you have them all "blotted out as a morning cloud," and "cast by God himself into the depths of the sea." Here is a great mystery: if you forget your sins, God will remember them; but if you remember them, God will forget them utterly, and "remember them against you no more forever! [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12)."

#200

THE REPLACING OF THE TWO TABLETS OF THE COVENANT

**[Deuteronomy 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.1-2)**

"At that time the LORD said to me: "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden chest. I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Then you are to put them in the chest."

Those to whom the modes of communication which are common in eastern countries are but little known, are at a disadvantage respecting everything that is figurative and emblematical. But even in the New Testament there is much that is hidden under figures. The whole life of our blessed Savior is justly considered as an example; but it is rarely considered that in all its principal events it was also emblematical of what is spiritually experienced in the heart of the believer: the circumcision of Christ representing the circumcision of our hearts; the baptism of Christ, also, and the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ, marking our death unto sin, and our new birth unto righteousness. If then in the New Testament, where truth is exhibited so plainly, there are many things revealed in shadows, we may well expect to find much that is figurative in the Old Testament, where the whole system of religion was veiled under types and figures.

The circumstances before us, we do not hesitate to say, have a hidden meaning, which, when brought forth, will be highly instructive. But in exploring the mysteries that are hidden under these shadows, there is need of the utmost sobriety, that we impose not on Scripture any other sense than that which God himself designed it to convey. However some may gratify themselves with exercising their ingenuity on the sacred writings, and please themselves with their own fanciful interpretations of God's blessed word, I dare not proceed in that unhallowed course; I would "take off my shoes, when I come upon this holy ground;" and be content to leave untouched what I do not understand, and what God has not enabled me to explain, with a good hope at least that I express only "the mind of his Spirit."

With this reverential awe upon my mind, I will endeavor, as God shall help me, to set before you what I conceive to be contained in the passage which we have just read. In it we notice,

I. The breaking of the two tablets of the law.

God, after he had published by an audible voice the law of the Ten Commandments, wrote them upon two tablets of stone, and gave them to Moses upon Mount Horeb, that they might serve as a memorial of what all who entered into covenant with him were bound to perform. But when Moses, on descending from the mount, found that the whole people of Israel were worshiping the golden calf, he was filled with righteous indignation, and "broke the two tablets in pieces before their eyes! [Deuteronomy 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.10); [Deuteronomy 9:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.15-17)."

1. The breaking of the two tablets imported that the covenant which God had made with them was utterly dissolved.

Repeatedly are the two tablets called "the tablets of the covenant, [Deuteronomy 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.9); [Deuteronomy 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.11); [Deuteronomy 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.15);" because they contained the terms on which the Israelites were ultimately to find acceptance before God. But their idolatry was a direct violation of the very first precept of the decalogue, or rather an utter subversion of the whole; and as they had thus broken the covenant on their part, Moses by breaking the two tablets declared it to be annulled on God's part. God now disclaimed all connection with them; and by calling them "your people," that is, Moses' people, he disowned them as His people; and threatened to "blot out their name from under Heaven." All this was intimated, I say, by Moses, in this significant action.

A similar mode of expressing the same idea was adopted by Jehovah in the days of the Prophet Zechariah. He took two staffs, one to represent the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; and the other, the ten tribes. These he broke, the one after the other, in order to show that as they were disjoined from each other, so they should henceforth be separated from him also, and that "his covenant with them" both was dissolved, [Zechariah 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.7); [Zechariah 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.10); [Zechariah 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.14). Thus far then, we apprehend, the import of this expressive action is clear.

The further light which I shall endeavor to throw upon it, though not so clear to a superficial observer, will to a well-instructed mind approve itself to be both just and important.

2. The breaking of the two tablets imported that that mode of covenanting with God was from that time forever closed.

This, I grant, does not at first sight appear; though it may be inferred from the very circumstance of the same law being afterwards given in a different way. This mode of conveying such instruction repeatedly occurs in the Holy Scriptures. The Prophet Jeremiah tells the Jews that God would "make a new covenant with them;" from whence Paul infers that the covenant under which they lived, was old, and "ready to vanish away, [Jeremiah 31:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31) with [Hebrews 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.13)." The Prophet Haggai speaks of God "shaking once more the heavens and the earth;" and this Paul interprets as an utter removal of the Jewish dispensation, that "the things which could not be shaken," the Christian dispensation, "might remain, [Haggai 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.6) with [Hebrews 12:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.26-27)." Now if these apparently incidental words conveyed so much, what must have been intended by that action—an action which, in point of singularity, yields not to any within the whole compass of the sacred records?

But is this view of the subject confirmed by any further evidence? I answer, Yes! It is agreeable to the whole scope of the inspired volume. Throughout the New Testament we have this truth continually and most forcibly inculcated, that the law, having been once broken, can never justify; that, while under it, we are, and ever must be, under a curse; and therefore we must be dead to it, and renounce all hope of acceptance by it.

And the breaking of the tablets before their eyes was in effect like the driving of our first parents out of Paradise, and the preventing of their return to it by the threats of a flaming sword. The tree of life which was to them in their state of innocence, a pledge of eternal life, was no longer such when they had fallen; and therefore God in mercy prohibited their access to it, in order that they might be shut up to that way of reconciliation which God had provided for them in the promised seed. And thus did Moses by this significant action cut off from the Jews all hope of return to God by that covenant which they had broken, and shut them up to that other, and better, covenant, which God was about to shadow forth to them.

But the chief mystery lies in,

II. The manner in which they were replaced.

Moses, having by his intercession obtained forgiveness for the people, was ordered to prepare tablets of stone similar to those which he had broken, and to carry them up to the mount, that God might write upon them with his own finger a fresh copy of the law. He was ordered also to make an ark, in which to deposit the tablets when so inscribed. Now what was the scope and intent of these directions? Truly they were of pre-eminent importance, and were intended to convey the most valuable instruction. Mark,

1. The renewing of the tablets which had been broken.

This intimated that God was reconciled towards them, and was still willing to take them as his people, and to give himself to them as their God. The very first words of the Law thus given said to them, "I am the Lord your God." So that on this part of the subject it is unnecessary to dwell.

2. The putting of the tablets, when so renewed, into an **ark**.

Christ is that ark into which the law was put. To him it was committed, in order that he might fulfill it for us. He was made under the law for this express end, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4-5); and he has fulfilled it in all its parts; enduring all its penalties, and obeying all its precepts, [Galatians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13-14); [Philippians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.8). This he was appointed of God to do; the law was put into his heart on purpose that he might do it, [Psalm 40:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.8); and having done it, he is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes, [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4)."

Hence we are enabled to view the law without fear, and to hear it without trembling. Now we can contemplate its utmost requirements, and see that it has been satisfied in its highest demands. We can now even found our hopes upon it; not as obeyed by us; but as obeyed by our surety and substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ; by whose obedience it has been more magnified than it has ever been dishonored by our disobedience.

It is no longer now a "ministration of death and condemnation, 2 Corinthians 3:7; [2 Corinthians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.9)," but a source of life to those who plead the sacrifice and obedience of Jesus Christ. In this view, the law itself, no less than the prophets, bears, testimony to Christ, [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.21-22), and declares that, through his righteousness, God can be "a just God, and yet a Savior, [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21)," "just, and yet the justifier of all those who believe, [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26)." This is the great mystery which the angels so much admire, and which they are ever endeavoring to look into. Carefully compare [Exodus 25:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.17-20) with [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12).

If it appears strange that so much should be intimated in so small a matter, let us only consider what we know assuredly to have been intimated in an occurrence equally insignificant, which took place at the very same time.

When Moses came down with these tablets in his hand, his face shined so brightly that the people were unable to approach him; and he was constrained to put a veil upon his face in order that they might have access to him to hear his instructions, [Exodus 34:29-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.29-35). This denoted their incapacity to comprehend the law, until Christ should come to remove the veil from their hearts, [2 Corinthians 3:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.13-16).

And precisely in the same manner the putting of the law into the ark denoted the incapacity of man to receive it at it is in itself, and the necessity of viewing it only as fulfilled in Christ. "Through the law" itself which denounces such curses, [Galatians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.19), and "through the body of Christ" which sustained those curses, [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4), we must be "dead to the law," and have no hope whatever towards God, but in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, [Galatians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.15-16); [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9), who, in consequence of obeying its precepts and enduring its penalties, is to be called by every man, "The Lord our Righteousness!"

3. The preparing of the tablets on which the law was written.

The first tablets were prepared by God himself; but, when they were broken, and to be renewed, Moses was ordered to prepare the tablets, and carry them up to the mount, that they might there have the law inscribed upon them by God himself. Commentators have suggested that this was intended to intimate, that though God alone could write the law on the heart, means were to be used for that end by people for themselves, and by ministers in their behalf.

But I rather gather from it a deeper and more important lesson, namely, that notwithstanding the law was fulfilled for us by Christ, we must seek to have it inscribed on our stony hearts; and that, if we go up with them to the mount of God from time to time for that end, God will write his law there. I the rather believe this to be the true meaning, because our deadness to the law as a covenant of works is continually associated with a delight in it as a rule of life. See [Galatians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.19) and [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4) before cited; and because the writing of the law upon our hearts is the great distinguishing promise of the New Covenant, [Jeremiah 31:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31-33) with [Hebrews 8:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.8-10). In this view the direction respecting the tablets is very instructive, seeing that it unites what can never be separated, a "hope in Christ" as the only Savior of the world, and a "purifying of the heart as he is pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

Improvement.

1. Let us be thankful that the law is given to us in this mitigated form.

The law is the same as ever; not a jot or tittle of it was altered, or ever can be; it is as immutable as God himself, [Matthew 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.17-18). But as given on Mount Sinai, it was "a fiery law;" and so terrible, that the people could not endure it; and "even Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake! [Hebrews 12:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.19-21)."

But in the ark, Christ Jesus, its terrors are abated; yes, to those who believe in him, it has no terror at all; its demands are satisfied in their behalf, and its penalties sustained; and, on it, as fulfilled in him, they found their claims of everlasting life! [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24).

It must never be forgotten, that the mercy-seat was of the same dimensions with the ark; and to all who are in Christ Jesus does the mercy of God extend, [Exodus 25:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.10); [Exodus 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.21-22). Mark the promise in verse 22. If we look to the law as fulfilled in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, we have nothing to fear, "we are no longer under the law, but under grace, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14);" and "there is no condemnation to us, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1)." "Only let us rely on him as having effected everything for us, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34), and all that he possesses shall be ours! [1 Corinthians 3:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-23)."

2. Let us seek to have the law written upon our hearts.

None but God can write it there; our stony hearts are harder than adamant. Nevertheless, if we go up to God in the holy mount, "he will take away from us the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh, [Ezekiel 36:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26);" and then "on the fleshly tablets of our heart" will he write his perfect law, [2 Corinthians 3:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.2-3).

O blessed privilege! Beloved brethren, let us covet it, and seek it night and day. Only think, what a change will take place in you when this is wrought! What a luster will be diffused over your very countenance! [Exodus 34:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.29-30). Yes truly, all who then behold you shall "take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus," and "confess, that God is truly with you." Despair not, any of you; though you have turned from God to the basest idolatry—yet has your great Advocate and Intercessor prevailed for you to remove the curses of the broken law, and to restore you to the favor of your offended God.

Bring, says God, your hearts of stone, and I will so inscribe my law upon them, that "you shall never more depart from me, nor will I ever more depart from you." brethren, obey the call without delay; lose not a single hour. Hasten into the presence of your God; and there abide with him, until he has granted your request. So shall "you be God's people, and he shall be your God, forever and ever!

[Jeremiah 32:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.38-41), "They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul."

#201

REASONABLENESS AND EXCELLENCY OF GOD'S COMMANDS

**[Deuteronomy 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.12-13)**

"And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?"

[This sermon was given on a New-Year's Day]

Peculiar seasons call for the exercise of peculiar duties. A new era was just opening upon the Hebrews, at the time when this address to them was delivered. They had, by the worshiping of the golden calf, entirely annulled the covenant which God had made with them, and had subjected themselves to his heavy displeasure. But at the intercession of Moses, God had graciously renewed his covenant with them, by giving them again a copy of that Law which they had broken, and by committing them again to the care of Moses, whom he had appointed to conduct them to the land of Canaan.

Now, therefore, Moses called on them to renew their solemn dedication of themselves to God, according to the tenor of those commandments which he had given them.

Somewhat of a similar era has commenced to us this day. Many have been our offences in the past year; and God might have justly cast us off, and abandoned us to utter ruin. But he is now renewing to us his tender mercies; and may, therefore, justly call upon us to renew our surrender of ourselves to his service.

The words which I have just read to you will lead me to point out,

I. What God requires from us.

Israel had been redeemed from Egypt, and were regarded as a peculiar people unto the Lord. And such is our state. We have been redeemed from a far sorer bondage, by the blood of God's only dear Son; and by the very name we bear, we profess ourselves to be followers of Christ, and servants of the living God. Our duty, then, is "to serve our God," and to serve him in the very way prescribed in our text.

1. We must serve God with **reverential fear**.

Never for a moment must we forget that we are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation. The circumstance of our having been forgiven by him, so far from removing all occasion for reverential fear, is rather a reason for the augmentation of it. We should "loath ourselves the more because our God is pacified towards us, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63);" for his very mercy shows how basely we have acted, in sinning against so good a God.

If the glorified saints in Heaven fall upon their faces before the throne, while yet they are singing praises to God and to the Lamb, much more should we on earth, who have yet so much corruption to mourn over, and so many evils to deplore. As for that kind of experience which some think to be warranted by their views of God's faithfulness to his promises, and which others derive from a conceit of their own sinless perfection, (I mean, that confidence, on the one hand, which is divested of fear; and that familiarity, on the other hand, which is not tempered with contrition,) I cannot but regard it as most delusive and dangerous. It would be well, too, if some who are not carried to these extremes of doctrinal error are not equally defective, through a captious abhorrence of all forms in external discipline and deportment. Many, from a zeal against what they are pleased to designate as Popish superstition, conduct themselves with sad irreverence in the worship of the Most High; and, if they feel not already a contempt for the Majesty of Heaven, I am sure that they take the most effectual means to generate it in their hearts.

Men, as sinners, should lie low in the dust before God; and though, as redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ, they are to put away slavish fear, they are never for a moment to divest themselves of that fear which is filial, but to "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

2. We must serve God with **ardent love**.

A filial fear will not in the least degree impede the exercise of love; but will temper it with a befitting modesty and care. Blended with fear, love cannot possibly be too ardent. We should so "love our God, as to serve him with all our heart and with all our soul." In truth, without love, our obedience, however exact, would be worthless. Love is the crown of all. Even among men, it is love which constitutes the essence of every acceptable service.

We value not the efforts of friends by their intrinsic worth, so much as by the measure of affection displayed in them; and much more is this the standard by which the Almighty will try, and estimate, our services to him.

It was this which rendered the widow's mite a more acceptable offering to God, than all the treasures of the opulent; and if only we give our whole souls to God, the very disposition to glorify him shall be equivalent to the act. We may not be able to do great things for him; but, if we have the desire, he will accept it, and say, "You did well, in that it was in your heart."

3. We must serve God with **unreserved faithfulness**.

There is to be no limit to our obedience; no line beyond which we will not go, if God call us. "No commandment is to be considered as grievous, 1 [John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.3);" nor is anything to be regarded as "a hard saying, [John 6:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.60)." We are to "walk in all God's ways," obeying every commandment "without partiality and without hypocrisy."

We are to "do his will on earth, even as it is done in Heaven." Of the angels we are told, that "they do God's will, hearkening to the voice of his Word." They look for the very first intimation of his will, and fly to execute it with all their might. They never for a moment consider what bearing the command may have on their own personal concerns; they find all their happiness in fulfilling the divine will.

This should be the state of our minds as well; it should be "our food and our drink to do the will of Him who sent us." And, if persecution is allotted to us, we should "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for His sake." Even life itself should not be dear to us in comparison with His honor; and we should be ready to lay it down, at any time, and in any way, that the sacrifice may be demanded of us.

The text will lead me to show you further,

II. The reasonableness and excellency of God's requirements

That they are reasonable, is evident from the appeal which Moses makes respecting them.

Two things are intimated in this appeal to Israel:  
the one, that these things were required of them;  
the other, that the requisitions were such as they could not but approve.

If they only considered themselves as God's creatures, they could not but acknowledge that these services were due to him; but when they viewed the mercies that had been given unto them, and the blessings which God had yet further in reserve for them, they could not doubt God's right to every return which it was in their power to make.

How much stronger his claim is to our obedience, must be obvious to every considerate mind. Think of yourselves, brethren, as redeemed from death and Hell by the blood of God's only dear Son, and then say whether you are not bound to love and serve him with your whole hearts! Think how mercifully God has borne with your transgressions hitherto, (for you have been a stiff-necked people, even as Israel of old were,) think how your every need is still supplied, not only for the body, as theirs was, but for the soul, by the bread of life sent down from Heaven, and by water from Christ Jesus, the stricken rock! Think how mercifully God has committed you to the guidance of his own Son; and to what a glorious land he is leading you, even "a land flowing with milk and honey."

Can you, in the contemplation of these things, doubt whether the entire surrender of your souls to God be "a reasonable service [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." Or rather say, whether the smallest wish to reduce or limit His claims would not be the most unreasonable thing that could enter into your minds?

But the excellency of them also is equally apparent.

Every command of God is given us "for our good." There is not one which has not a direct tendency to make us happy.

If they require us to subdue and mortify our indwelling corruptions, what is this, but to heal the diseases of our souls, and to restore us to the image of our God?

If they require us to love and serve our God, what is this, but to bring us, so far as they are obeyed, to a foretaste of our heavenly inheritance?

Who ever found an evil issuing out of a conformity to God's holy will? If it has brought a cross upon us, who has not found that very cross an occasion and a ground of more exalted joy? Were present happiness alone consulted, there is nothing in the universe that can advance it like the service of our God; but, if the future state is considered, and the augmented weight of glory which shall be accorded to us in proportion to our services, we may well say, that every command of God is good, and that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward."

Let me now address you, brethren, in a way,

1. Of faithful reproof.

You all profess yourselves to be the "Israel" of God; and are convinced that your obligations to Jehovah are as much superior to those of the Jews, as your redemption and your destination are superior to theirs. But how have you requited the Lord? Oh! compare your lives with what has been before spoken, and with what you cannot but acknowledge to have been your bounden duty. Which of you, in the retrospect, has not reason to blush and be ashamed?

And as for the generality among us, is there not just ground to utter against them that complaint of the Prophet Jeremiah, "I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward! [Jeremiah 7:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.23-24)."

In truth, this is but too faithful a picture of the generality among us. And what can be expected, but that God's wrath should break forth to the uttermost against such a sinful and rebellious generation!

Let me then add a word,

2. Of affectionate admonition.

"I call Heaven and earth to record this day against you all, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that you may live! [Deuteronomy 30:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.19-20)." You cannot but acknowledge that everything which God requires of you is both good in itself, and conducive to your greatest good. "Observe, then, to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left, [Deuteronomy 5:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.32)." You surely have every inducement to serve God that your hearts can wish.

Oh, be not stiff-necked; be not like that faithless generation, respecting whom "God swore, in his wrath, that they should never enter into his rest;" but "today, while it is called today," devote yourselves altogether to His service! And "then shall you not be ashamed, when you have respect unto all his commandments! [Psalm 119:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.6)."

#202

THE ELECTING LOVE OF GOD, AN INCENTIVE TO HOLINESS

**[Deuteronomy 10:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.14-16)**

"To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer!"

The true tendency of religion is marked in the words preceding our text. Under the Christian dispensation, no less than under the Jewish dispensation, it is altogether practical; so that in every age of the Church we may adopt that appeal of Moses, "And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?"

But we must not in our zeal for morals overlook those principles which alone have efficacy to produce them. The principles which call forth our hopes and our fears, have necessarily a powerful effect on our conduct; but a more refined operation is derived from those principles which excite our love and gratitude. The electing love of God, for instance, when brought home with a personal application to the soul, has a constraining influence which nothing can resist.

Hence Moses so often reminds the Israelites of their peculiar obligations to God, such as no other people from the beginning of the world could ever boast of; and takes occasion from those distinguishing favors to urge them the more powerfully to devote themselves to his service.

What he considered as their duty we have already noticed; his mode of urging them to perform it comes now to be more particularly considered, "The Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer."

From these words we shall show,

I. That God's people are brought into that relation to him, not by any merits of their own, but solely in consequence of his sovereign electing love.

The whole universe, both "the heavens and the earth," is the Lord's; it owes its existence to his all-creating power; and it is altogether at his disposal. He has the same power over it as the potter has over the clay; and, if it had pleased him to mar, or to annihilate, any part of the creation, as soon as he had formed it—he had a right to do so.

But, while he has the same right over all his intelligent creatures, he has seen fit to bring some, and some only, into a saving relationship with himself.

Into this state he brings them of his own sovereign will and pleasure.

Abraham was an idolater, as all his family were, when God first called him by his grace; nor had he any more claim to the blessings promised him, than any other person whatever.

Isaac was appointed to be the channel of these blessings in preference to Ishmael, long before he was born into the world.

Jacob also the younger was chosen before Esau the elder, "even while they were both yet in the womb, and consequently had done neither good nor evil." "Just as it is written: Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated! [Romans 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.13).

And why were they chosen? Was it for their superior goodness either seen or foreseen? It could not be for anything seen; for they were yet unborn when the blessings were promised to them; and it could not be for anything foreseen, for they proved a rebellious and stiff-necked people from the very first! [Deuteronomy 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.13); [Deuteronomy 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.24). The selection of them can be traced to nothing but to God's sovereign will and good pleasure! [Deuteronomy 7:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6-8).

In every age he has done the same. Those who love and serve God have always been a remnant only; but they have been "a remnant according to the election of grace." All true believers at this day, as well as in the apostolic age, must acknowledge that, "God has called them, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)." It is "to the good pleasure of his will," and not to anything in themselves, that they must ascribe the gift of their election, spiritual privileges, and spiritual attainments. No one of them can say, that he "made himself to differ," or that he possesses "anything which he has not received." All that even the most eminent saints possess, is a free unmerited gift from God!

Moreover, in this exercise of his sovereign will and pleasure, he gives no just occasion for any to complain.

This exercise of his sovereignty is condemned by many, as being an act of injustice; since to choose some and to leave others gives to the chosen ones a preference which they do not deserve. But it must be remembered, that none had any claim upon God; and, if we had all been left, like the fallen angels, to endure the full consequences of our transgression, God would still have been holy and just and good; and, if for his own glory he has decreed to rescue any from destruction, he does no injury to any, nor is accountable to any for this display of his sovereign grace.

I well know that this doctrine is controverted by many. But the very people who deny the doctrine of election, as applied to individuals, are constrained to acknowledge it in reference to nations. But where is the difference? If it is unjust in the one case, then it is unjust in the other. If it is unjust to elect any to salvation, then it is unjust to elect them to the means of salvation; those from whom he withholds the means, have the same ground of complaint as those from whom he withholds the end.

It is nothing to say that the injury is less in the one case than in the other; for if it is injurious at all, God would never have done it; but if it is not injurious at all, then does all opposition to the doctrine fall to the ground.

The principle must be conceded or denied altogether. Denied it cannot be, because it is an unquestionable fact that God has exercised his sovereignly, and does still exercise it, in instances without number. But if it be conceded, then is the objector silenced; and he must admit that God has a right to do what he will with his own.

Perhaps it may be said that election is, and has always been, conditional. But this is not true. As far as related to the possession of Canaan, the election of the Jews might be said to be conditional; but on what conditions was the election of Abraham, or of Isaac, or of Jacob, suspended? On what was the election of their posterity to the means of salvation suspended? On what conditions has God chosen us to enjoy the sound of the Gospel, in preference to millions of heathens, who have never been blessed with the light of revelation?

The truth is, we know nothing of the doctrines of grace but as God has revealed them; and his choice of some to salvation now stands on the very same authority as his choice of others to the means of salvation in the days of old. If such an exercise of sovereignty was wrong then, it is wrong now. If it was right then, it is right now. If it was right in respect to nations, it cannot be wrong in reference to individuals. The same principle which vindicates or condemns it in the one case, must hold good in the other also. The extent of the benefits conferred cannot change the nature of the act that confers them; it may cause the measure of good or evil that is in the act to vary; but the intrinsic quality of the act must in either case remain the same.

That this doctrine may not appear injurious to morality, I proceed to observe,

II. That the circumstance of God's exercising this sovereignty is so far from weakening our obligation to good works, that it binds us the more strongly to the performance of them.

Moses says, "The LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." Here observe,

1. The duty enjoined.

We are all by nature a rebellious and stiff-necked people. We wonder at the conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness; but in that we may see a perfect image of our own conduct. We have not been obedient to God's revealed will. We have been alike rebellious, whether loaded with mercies, or visited with judgments. As light and easy as the yoke of Christ is, we have not taken it upon us, but have lived to the flesh and not to the Spirit, to ourselves, and not unto our God.

But we must no longer proceed in this impious career; it is high time that we cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and humble ourselves before God. We must "be no more stiff-necked," but humble, penitent, obedient. Nor is it an external obedience only that we must render to our God; we must "circumcise our hearts," mortifying every corrupt propensity, and "crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts." It must not be grievous to us to part with sin, however painful may be the act of cutting it off. We must cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, and retain nothing that is displeasing to our God. There is no measure of holiness with which we should be satisfied; we should seek to "be pure even as Christ himself is pure," and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

2. The motive to the performance of it.

To this duty the Jews are urged by the consideration of God's electing love, and of the distinguishing favors which he of his own sovereign grace and mercy had given unto them!

And what more powerful motive could Moses urge than this? It was not to make them happy in a way of sin that God had chosen them, but to make them "a holy nation, God's own special people, zealous of good works." And, if they did not follow after universal holiness, they would counteract the designs of his providence and grace. They would deprive themselves also of the blessings provided for them. For it was only in the way of obedience that God could ever finally accept them. And thus it is with us also; we are "chosen unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them;" and it is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing that we can ever attain eternal life." We are "chosen to salvation," it is true; but it is "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth;" and it is in that way alone that we can ever attain the end.

But there is another view in which the consideration of God's electing love should operate powerfully on our hearts to the production of universal holiness; namely, by filling our souls with holy gratitude to him, and an ardent desire to obey him in the way that he himself directs.

There is nothing under Heaven that can constrain a pious soul, like a sense of redeeming love! Let anyone who has been "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel, and has been turned from the power of Satan unto God," look around him, and see how many, not of heathen only, but of professed Christians also, are yet in the darkness of depravity and the bonds of sin; and then let him recollect who it is that has made him to differ both from them and from his former self; and will not that make him cry out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me!" Yes, that view of his obligations to God will so inflame and penetrate his soul, that its utmost energies will from thenceforth be employed in honoring his adorable Benefactor.

This we say is the true and proper tendency of the doctrine in our text. The Jews, if they had justly appreciated the favors given to them, would have been the holiest of all people upon earth; and so will Christians be, if once they are sensible of the obligations conferred upon them by God's electing and redeeming love.

Improvement.

1. Let those who are zealous about external religious duties, not be forgetful of their obligations.

It is frequently found that people altogether hostile to all the doctrines of grace, profess a great regard for the interests of morality. I stop not at present to inquire how far their professions are realized in practice; all I intend is simply to suggest, that sincere and holy affections are necessary to all acceptable obedience; and that those affections can only be excited in us by a sense of our obligations to God. If we attempt to lessen those obligations, we weaken and paralyze our own exertions. If we have been forgiven much, we shall love much; if we have received much, we shall return the more.

If then it be only for the sake of that morality about which you profess so much concern, we would say to the moralist: Search into the mysteries of sovereign grace, and of redeeming love. If without the knowledge of them you may walk to a certain degree uprightly, you can never soar into the regions of love and peace and joy; your obedience will be rather that of a servant, than a son; and you will never acquire that delight in God, which is the duty and privilege of the believing soul.

2. Let those who boast of their obligations to God, not be inattentive to their duties.

They who "cry, Lord, Lord! and neglect to do the things which he commands," miserably deceive their own souls. And it must be confessed that many such self-deceivers do exist, and ever have existed in the Church of God. But let those who glory in the deeper doctrines of religion bear in mind, that nothing can supersede an observance of its duties; for "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29)."

That is a solemn admonition which God has given to us all, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it! [Jeremiah 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 4.4)."

It is not by our professions, but by our practice, that we shall be judged in the last day! "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you! Away from me, you evildoers!' [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23)!

To all then who account themselves the elect of God, I say: Let the truth of your principles be seen in the excellence of your works! And, as you profess to be more indebted to God than others, let the heavenliness of your minds and the holiness of your lives be proportionably sublime and manifest. For it is in this way alone that you can approve yourselves to God, or justify your professions in the sight of man.

#203

THE SCRIPTURES RECOMMENDED TO US

**[Deuteronomy 11:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18-21)**

"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth."

To have the holy oracles in our hands is one of the greatest advantages that we enjoy above the heathen! [Romans 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.2). A due improvement of them therefore will be expected of us. The Jews, who were in like manner distinguished above all other nations upon earth, were required to show the most affectionate, obediential regard to the writings of Moses. But the injunctions given to them with respect to the revelation they possessed, are still more obligatory on us, who have the sacred canon completed, and, by the superior light of the New Testament, are enabled to enter more fully into its mysterious import.

The words which we have just read, point out to us,

I. Our duty with respect to the Word of God.

A revelation from Heaven cannot but demand our most serious attention.

1. We should treasure Scripture up in our hearts.

It is not sufficient to study the Scriptures merely as we read other books; we must search into them for hidden treasures! [Proverbs 2:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-4), and lay up "in our hearts," yes, in our inmost "souls," the glorious truths which they unfold to our view; and be careful never to let them slip, [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1). They should be our delight, and our meditation all the day, [Psalm 119:92](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.92); [Psalm 119:97](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.97).

2. We should make Scripture a frequent subject of our conversation.

It is to be regretted that there is no other subject so universally proscribed and banished, as that of religion. But, if we loved God as we ought, we could not but love to speak of his Word, that Word which is our light in this dark world, and the one foundation of all our hopes.

When Moses and Elijah came from Heaven to converse with our Lord, the prophecies relating to the sufferings and glory of Christ were their one topic of discourse, [Luke 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.30-31). Thus at all times and places should our conversation be seasoned with salt, [Colossians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.6), and tend to the use of edifying, [Ephesians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.29). If it were thus with us, God would listen to us with approbation, [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17), and Jesus would often come and unite himself to our company, [Luke 24:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.14-15).

3. We should bring Scripture on all occasions to our remembrance.

The Jews, putting a literal construction on the passage before us, wrote portions of God's Word on scraps of parchment, and wore them as bracelets on their wrists, and as frontlets on their heads. But we shall more truly answer the end of this commandment by consulting the Scriptures on all occasions as our sure and only guide, and making them the one rule of our faith and practice. There are many general precepts and promises which we should have continually in view, as much as if they were fixed on our doors and gates; which also, as if fastened on our foreheads and our hands, should both direct our ways, and regulate our actions.

4. We should instruct the rising generation in the knowledge of the Scriptures.

All are solicitous to teach their children some business, whereby they may provide a maintenance for their bodies; and should we not endeavor to instruct them in the things relating to their souls? Abraham was particularly commended for his care with respect to this, [Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19); and the injunction in the text, confirmed by many other passages, [Exodus 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.8); [Exodus 13:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.14-16); [Psalm 78:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.5-8), requires that we should "diligently" perform this duty. Nor should we imagine that the mere teaching of children to repeat a catechism will suffice; we should open to them all the wonders of redemption, and endeavor to cast their minds, as it were, into the very mold of the Gospel.

In the close of the text we are directed to bear in mind,

II. Our encouragement to fulfill this duty.

This sincere love to the Scriptures will be productive of the greatest good:

1. It will tend greatly to our **present**happiness.

A peaceful enjoyment of the promised land, and of all the good things of this life, was held forth to the Jews as the reward of their obedience; but we are taught rather to look forward to the possession of a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Nevertheless, "godliness has at this time also the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, 1 Timothy 4:8;" and therefore we may properly consider the present benefits arising from a due attention to the Scriptures.

Suppose then that the blessed Word of God were regarded by us as it ought to be, that it engaged our affections, entered into our conversation, regulated our conduct, and were instilled into the minds of the rising generation.

Would not much frivolous, obscene, and impious discourse be suppressed?

Would not sin of every kind receive a beneficial check?

Would not many of the diseases, the troubles, the feuds, and the miseries that result from sin, be prevented?

Would not many of the judgments of God which now desolate the earth—the wars, the famines, the pestilences, be removed? verse 13-17.

Would not, in numberless instances, knowledge be diffused, consolation administered, and virtue called forth into act and exercise?

Would not our children, as they grow up, reap the benefit of such examples? [Proverbs 22:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.6).

Let anyone judge impartially, and say, whether a due regard to the Scriptures would not greatly improve the state of society, and of every individual, in proportion as his life was conformed to them? [Psalm 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.11).

2. It will secure an inheritance beyond the grave.

The earthly Canaan was typical of the Heavenly Canaan; when therefore we see the possession of that good land promised to the Jews, we must, in applying the promises to ourselves, raise our views to the heavenly Canaan above.

Now what are the means which God has prescribed for the securing of that glorious inheritance? Certainly an attention to the Scriptures is that one means, without which we never can attain to happiness, and in the use of which we cannot but attain it. It is by the Scriptures that God quickens us, [Psalm 19:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7-8); [Psalm 119:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.50), and brings us into God's family, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18); [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23). See also [Acts 8:28-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.28-39). It is by the Scriptures that God directs our way, [Psalm 119:105](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.105), and keeps our feet, [Psalm 119:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.9); [Psalm 119:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.11); [Psalm 37:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.31), and sanctifies our hearts, [Ephesians 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.26), and makes us wise unto salvation, [2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15), and gives us a very "Heaven upon earth."

And shall not the hope of such benefits allure us? When we have the one way to eternal life explained in the Scriptures—shall we not search them? [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39), yes, and meditate upon them day and night! [Psalm 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.2). Let then the word be sweeter to us than honey or the honey-comb, [Psalm 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.10), and be esteemed by us more than our necessary food! [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12).

#204

THE GREAT ALTERNATIVE

**[Deuteronomy 11:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.26-28)**

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known."

On whatever occasion these words had been spoken, they must have appeared most weighty, and most important; but, as the parting address of Moses to the whole nation of Israel, when he was about to be withdrawn from them, they have a force and emphasis that can scarcely be exceeded. Imagine the aged servant of Jehovah, who, forty years before, had delivered to their fathers the law written with the finger of God, and who had lived to see the utter extinction of that rebellious generation for their transgressions against it; imagine him, I say, now affectionately warning this new generation, with all the solicitude of a father, and all the fidelity of one who was about to give up an immediate account of his stewardship. In this view, the words inspire us with solemn awe, and impress us with a fearful sense of our responsibility to God. May God accompany them with a divine energy to our souls, while we consider,

I. The solemn alternative proposed to us.

As addressed to the Jews, these words may be understood as containing the terms of their national covenant, in which the blessings promised them depended on their obedience to the divine commands. But if we enter fully into the subject, we shall find it replete with instruction to us also, especially as exhibiting to our view the Christian covenant. Let us consider,

1. The fuller explanation which Moses himself gave of this alternative.

The blessing and the curse are more fully stated in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapters of this book. But to what is the blessing annexed? To an unreserved obedience to all God's commandments, [Deuteronomy 28:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.1). And against what is the curse denounced? not only against some particular and more flagrant transgressions, [Deuteronomy 27:15-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.15-25), but against any single deviation from the law of God, however small, however inadvertent, [Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26); and all the people were required to give their consent to these terms, acknowledging the justice of them, and professing their willingness to be dealt with according to them, [Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26).

Now, I ask, who could obtain salvation on such terms as these? who could even venture to indulge a hope of ultimate acceptance with his God? It is obvious that according to these terms the whole human race must perish. But was this the design of God in publishing such a covenant? Did he intend to mock his creatures with offers of mercy on terms which it was impossible to perform, and then to require of them a public acknowledgment of their approbation of them?

No, he intended at this very time to show them their need of a better covenant, and, in reality, to point out that very covenant for their acceptance. He intended to show them, that, however in their national capacity they might secure a continuance of his favor by an observance of his commands, they could never attain eternal blessedness in such a way; they must look to their Messiah for the removal of the curses, which, according to their own acknowledgment, they merited; and obtain through him those blessings, which they would in vain attempt to earn by any merits of their own.

That this is the true scope of those chapters, will appear from the light thrown upon them by Paul; who quotes the very words of Moses which we have been considering, and declares, that, according to them, every human being is under a curse, and is therefore necessitated to look to Christ who became a "curse" for us, and to expect a "blessing" through him alone, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); [Galatians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13-14).

But this will receive additional light by considering,

2. The peculiar circumstances attending the publication of it.

It was particularly commanded by Moses, that as soon as that portion of the promised land on which Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim stood should be subdued, an altar of whole stones should be erected to the Lord; that it should be plastered over; that the law should be written in very large and legible characters upon it; that burnt-offerings and peace-offerings should be offered upon it; that the terms of the covenant should be recited in the hearing of all the people; that the blessings should be pronounced on Mount Gerizim, and the curses on Mount Ebal; and that all the people should give their public assent to the whole and every part of that covenant, [Deuteronomy 27:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.2-8).

Now, while this command was a pledge to the people of their future success—it was an intimation to them that the work of covenanting with God should take precedence of every other; and that, whatever were their occupations, whatever their difficulties, they must on no account forget to serve and honor God.

Accordingly, as soon as Joshua had conquered Jericho and Ai, and had obtained possession of that spot of ground, notwithstanding he was surrounded by enemies on every side, he convened the people and complied with the divine command in every respect, "there was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, [Joshua 8:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 8.30-35)."

But why were these burnt-offerings to be offered on the occasion? and how could the people "eat their peace-offerings there, and rejoice before the Lord, [Deuteronomy 27:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.7)." Methinks, if they were ratifying a covenant by which they could never obtain a blessing, and by which they must perish under a curse, there was little reason to "rejoice." But these burnt-offerings were to direct their attention to the great sacrifice, by which all their curses should be removed, and all the blessings of salvation be secured to them. In the view of that great sacrifice, they might hear all the curses published, and feel no cause of dread or apprehension. In the view of that great sacrifice, they might contemplate the imperfections of their obedience without despondency; yes, they might "eat their peace-offerings" in token of their acceptance with God, and might "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

By this sacrifice they were taught, not to confine their views to the Law, but to extend them to the Gospel; and, in the terms to which they assented, they were taught to include obedience to the Gospel, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, even to that great "commandment of God, which enjoins us to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ John, 6:29 and [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23)."

To this we also may assent; yes, to this we must assent; and we now set before you the blessing and the curse; we now propose to you the great alternative. If you will obey the commandments of the Lord, believing in his only dear Son as the only ground of your hopes, and, from a sense of love to him, endeavoring unreservedly to fulfill his will—we promise you, in the name of Almighty God, a fullness of all spiritual and eternal blessings. But, if you will not thus obey his commandments, we declare to you, that the curse of God shall rest upon your souls in time and in eternity!

Such being the alternative proposed to us, we would set before you,

II. Some reflections arising from it.

We cannot but notice from hence,

1. That ministers must faithfully execute their high office.

It was not from a lack of tenderness that Moses thus faithfully declared the whole counsel of God, but because his duty to God, and to the people also, constrained him to declare it; and there is something peculiarly instructive in the directions he gave respecting the delivery of the blessing and the curse from the two juxtaposed mounts. Six of the tribes were to be stationed on the one mount, and six on the other; those who were born of the free-women, were to be on Mount Gerizim; and those who were of the bond-women, together with Reuben, who had been degraded, and Zebulun, the youngest of Lean's children, (to make the numbers equal,) were to be on Mount Ebal, from whence the curses were to proceed.

The tribe of Levi then were, where we should expect to find them, on the side from whence the blessings were pronounced, [Deuteronomy 27:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.11-13). This showed, that, while the liberty of the Gospel led to true blessedness, it was the true end and scope of the ministry to make men blessed, [Deuteronomy 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.8); that is the delightful employment of the sons of Levi; the highest character of a pious minister is, to be "a helper of your joy."

But it was ordered that some of the Levites should also be stationed on Mount Ebal to pronounce the curses, [Deuteronomy 27:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.14-15); because, however painful it may be to ministers to exhibit the terrors of the law, the necessities of men require it, and the duties of their office demand it.

Let us not then be thought harsh, if on proper occasions we make known to you the dangers of disobedience, "a necessity is imposed upon us; and woe be to us if we decline" executing the commission we have received. We must "warn every man, as well as teach every man, if we would present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, [Colossians 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.28)."

It would be a more pleasing task to dwell only on the brighter side, and to speak to you only from Mount Gerizim; but we must occasionally stand also on Mount Ebal, and make you to hear the more awful part of the alternative which we are commissioned to propose. The message which we must deliver to every creature that is under Heaven, consists of these two parts, "He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; and he who believes not, shall be damned!"

2. That faith and works are equally necessary to our salvation, though on different grounds.

God forbid that for one moment we should attempt to lessen the importance and necessity of good works; they are indispensably necessary to our salvation; they are as necessary under the Gospel, as under the law. The only difference is, that according to the strict tenor of the law, good works were the ground of our hope; whereas, under the Gospel, good works are the fruits and evidences of our faith.

To found our hopes of salvation on our obedience to the holy law of God, would, as we have before seen, cut off all possibility of salvation; because our obedience must be perfect, in order to secure the promised "blessing;" and every act of disobedience has entailed on us an everlasting "curse;" but, if we comprehend, in our views of obedience, an obedience to the Gospel; if we comprehend in it the trusting in Christ for salvation, and the free endeavors of the soul to serve and honor him; then we may adopt the words of our text, and address them confidently to every living man.

But then we must not forget, that it is the sin-atoning sacrifice of Christ that alone enables us to hear even such a proposal with any degree of comfort. We can no more yield a perfect obedience to the Gospel, than we could to the Law; our faith is imperfect, as well as our works; but, if we seek reconciliation with God through the death of his Son, we shall have peace with him, and may eat our peace-offering with confidence and joy.

In our views of this subject, we need only set before our eyes that solemn transaction, to which we have referred; we shall there see, on what all the hopes of Israel were founded, namely, the sacrifice of Christ; we shall see at the same time, to what all Israel were bound, namely, a life of holy and unreserved obedience.

It is precisely thus with ourselves:  
Our obedience does not supersede the necessity of faith.  
Nor does our faith set aside the necessity of obedience.  
  
Faith is the root, and obedience is the fruit.  
  
Faith is the foundation, and obedience is the superstructure.

Faith is the means of acceptance with God, and obedience is the means of honoring him and of adorning our holy profession.

3. That happiness or misery is the fruit of our own choice.

The very proposal of an alternative implies a choice; but this choice is yet intimated in a subsequent passage to the same effect, [Deuteronomy 30:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.15); [Deuteronomy 30:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.19); nor can there be any doubt but that every man is called to make his choice; and that his eternal state is fixed agreeably to the choice he makes. Not that we mean to set aside the election of God; for we know full well, that God's people are "a remnant according to the election of grace, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5);" and that "it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy, [Romans 9:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.15-16)."

Nevertheless, no man is brought to Heaven against his own will. He has felt the attractive influences of divine grace, and has been "made willing in the day of God's power, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)." He is drawn indeed, but it is "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love."

On the other hand, no man is sentenced to misery, who has not first chosen the ways of sin. He perishes, not because God has "ordained him to wrath, [1 Thessalonians 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.9)," but because "he will not come to Christ that he may have life, [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40)." Christ would gladly have "gathered him, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but he would not."

It may be said perhaps, that, while we thus attempt to vindicate the justice of God, we countenance the workings of pride in man. But we have no fear that anyone who has been drawn by the Spirit of God, will ever ascribe his conversion to the operations of his own natural will; he will readily own, that "it is God, who of his own good pleasure has given him both to will and to do, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13);" and that it is "by the grace of God he is what he is."

On the other hand, all excuse is cut off from the ungodly; they must ever take the whole blame of their condemnation to themselves, and never presume to cast the least atom of it upon God.

Make then your choice, beloved brethren! We this day set before you life and death, a blessing and a curse; choose therefore life, that your souls may live. God has declared that "he wills not the death of any sinner; therefore turn and live! [Ezekiel 18:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.32); [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11)." In his sacred name I promise to the righteous, that "it shall be well with him; but I denounce a woe unto the wicked, for it shall be woe with him, and the reward of his hands shall be given to him, [Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10-11)."

#205

THE PROHIBITION OF EATING BLOOD

**[Deuteronomy 12:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.23-25)**

"But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water. Do not eat it, so that it may go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD."

There are many injunctions in the Mosaic law which appear to have been given with more solemnity than their comparative importance demands; nor can we account for the importance laid upon them, but by supposing them to have had a typical reference. What is here said, for instance, respecting the eating of blood, if we consider it as intended only to give a hint of the duties of humanity and self-denial, is delivered in a far more emphatic manner than we should expect such an intimation to be given; for though a plain precept relating to them might fitly be enjoined in the strongest terms, and enforced by the strongest sanctions, it is not to be conceived that the image by which they would be shadowed forth, should be made to assume such an important aspect.

If we mark the force and energy with which the prohibition of eating blood is here repeated, we shall be well persuaded that it contains some deeper mystery, which demands our most attentive consideration. But as, from the strength of the expressions, we may be ready to imagine that it is still binding upon us, we feel it necessary to guard against that mistake; and shall therefore consider,

I. The prohibition given.

The manner in which it was given, must by no means be overlooked.

There is not in all the sacred volume any prohibition or command delivered more peremptorily than this. Four times it is repeated even in the short space of our text:

But be sure you do not eat the blood.

You must not eat the blood with the meat.

You must not eat the blood.

Do not eat it.

The frequency too with which it is received in the Scriptures is truly astonishing. When first the use of animals for food was permitted to Noah, the grant was accompanied with this restriction, "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat, [Genesis 9:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 9.3-4)." By Moses the restriction is repeated again and again, [Leviticus 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 3.16-17); [Leviticus 7:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.26-27); [Deuteronomy 15:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 15.23) and several other places.

The sanctions with which it is enforced are also peculiarly solemn. Not only was the prosperity of the people suspended on their obedience to this command, see the text, but they were threatened with the most tremendous vengeance, if they should presume to violate it, "I will set my face against that soul that eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people! Read attentively [Leviticus 17:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 17.10-14)."

Even if they took in hunting or caught by any means a beast or bird, they must "pour its blood upon the earth as water, and cover it with dust" and all these injunctions must be observed by all, by strangers and sojourners as well as Jews. Now I ask, Would this prohibition have been so peremptorily given, (read attentively [Leviticus 17:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 17.10-14),) so frequently repeated, so solemnly enforced; would such particular directions have been added; and would they have been made so universally binding, if there had been nothing mysterious in this appointment?

We may be sure that the grounds of it are deserving of the deepest investigation.

We speak not of such grounds as might probably exist, such as those before referred to, namely, the promotion of humanity and self-denial, (though in both of these views the prohibition may be considered as highly instructive,) but of those grounds which we know assuredly to have been the principal object, if not the only object of the institution.

We must remember that offerings were by the divine appointment presented from time to time as an atonement for sin; that the blood of those offerings being, as it were, the life of the animals—was considered as exclusively prevailing for the remission of sins; and that on that very account it was poured out upon the altar, in token that it was presented to God as an expiation for iniquity, and was accepted by him instead of the life of the offender.

We must remember also, that all these offerings had respect to the sacrifice of Christ, which was in due time to be offered for the sins of the whole world.

Now it was of infinite importance that the highest possible veneration should be instilled into the minds of men for the offerings which they presented to God; and that they should be deeply impressed with a consciousness of their mysterious reference to the sacrifice of Christ. But, if they had been permitted to eat of blood, this reverence would have quickly abated; whereas by the strictness of the prohibition, it was kept alive in their minds; and even their common meals were rendered an occasion of bringing to their recollection the use of blood in their offerings, and the efficacy of that blood which was at a future period to be poured out upon the cross.

Here then was a reason for the prohibition—a reason, which accounts at once for the strictness, the frequency, the vehemence, with which it was given, and for the tremendous sanctions with which it was enforced. Nothing could be unimportant that had such a reference; and the more insignificant the prohibited thing was in itself, the more need there was that all possible weight should be given to it by the manner of its prohibition.

But we shall not have a complete view of the subject, unless we consider,

II. The prohibition reversed.

It is reversed, as it relates to the use of blood.

To the first converts indeed it was enjoined, that they should abstain from the eating of blood, [Acts 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.20); [Acts 15:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.29), no less than from fornication itself; and hence it has been supposed that there was a moral evil in the one, as well as in the other; and that, consequently, the prohibition still equally exists against both.

But this is by no means the case. There was a necessity at that time to prohibit fornication, because the Gentile converts, who had been habituated from their youth to regard it as allowable, and in some instances even to practice it in their idolatrous worship, were still in a great measure insensible of its moral turpitude. They therefore needed to be more clearly informed respecting that sin, and to be cautioned against it; while we, having been educated with clearer views and better habits, are well aware of the sinfulness of such a practice.

There was also a need to prohibit the eating of blood, because the Jews, who had been accustomed to regard the use of it with such abhorrence, would have been greatly offended when they saw Christians taking so great a liberty in direct opposition to what they considered as the law of God. On this account it was thought right to continue the prohibition for a time, that they might not shock the prejudices of the Jewish nation.

But Paul assures us repeatedly that another part of this same prohibition was revoked; and declares that the circumstance of meat having been offered unto idols does not render it unfit for a Christian's use, provided he sees the liberty into which the Gospel has brought him, [1 Corinthians 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.4); 1 Corinthians 8:8.

In like manner he declares, that "there is nothing unclean of itself," but that "to the pure all things are pure, [Romans 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.14); [Romans 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.20); 1 Timothy 4:4-5." Hence we are sure, that the prohibition in our text is reversed.

It is reversed also in a far higher sense.

The real intent of the offerings under the Old Testament is abundantly declared in the New; and the blood of Christ which was once shed on Calvary for the remission of sins, is uniformly represented as the great Antitype to which all the types referred. Now it is true, that that material blood cannot be drunk by us; but in a spiritual sense it may. Do I say, It may? I must add, It must; we are required to drink it; and the command is enforced with sanctions still more solemn than those by which the prohibition in our text was enforced.

Let us attend to the words of Christ himself, "Unless you eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed! [John 6:53-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53-55)." Here the command is as universal, as, before, the prohibition was.

Need we to explain this to any of you? We would hope, there are few so ignorant as not to know what was designed by our blessed Lord; he meant that, as he was about to give himself as an offering and a sacrifice for sin—we must all believe in him as the only Savior of the world, and apply to ourselves all the benefits of his atonement.

But lest this injunction of his should be forgotten, he actually instituted an ordinance, wherein he appointed wine to be drunk in remembrance of his blood, and expressly said of the cup, when he put it into the hands of his disciples, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins! [Matthew 26:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.27-28)."

And Paul explaining the reason of this ordinance, observes, that it was instituted in order that we might "show forth the Lord's death, until he comes, [1 Corinthians 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.25-26)."

Here then we see that the prohibition under the Old Testament, and the command under the New Testament, have one and the same object.

The prohibition was to call the attention of men to the death of the Messiah at his first advent.

And the command is to keep up the remembrance of his death until his second advent.

The ends of the prohibition are the same, whether we consider it as given, or as reversed; and the duty of every living creature is pointed out, that we must look unto the blood of our great Sacrifice as the only means of reconciliation with our offended God! [Colossians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.14); [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20); [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22); [Romans 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25). In reference to that therefore we must say, "Be sure you eat the blood; you may eat; and you shall eat it, that it may go well with you."

As an **improvement**of this subject, we beg permission to add a few words of advice:

1. Do not think light of any sin.

The Jews might readily have said, "What need is there of being so particular about getting out all the blood? The meat will be improved by retaining some of it; and no injury will be done to anyone." We read indeed on one occasion, that they acted upon this presumption; they had taken great spoils from the Philistines, and were so eager to get some refreshment, that they overlooked in their haste the divine command. But was this deemed a just excuse for their conduct? No! They were severely reproved for it; and all the people were commanded to take their cattle to be slaughtered at a particular place, where the observance of this law might be scrutinized and secured, [1 Samuel 14:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 14.31-34).

Let us not then presume to set aside any of God's commands, however small they may appear, or whatever reasons we may have to extenuate the violation of them. In fact, the commission of every sin very much resembles this of which we are speaking. God has allowed us every species of gratification, if we will take it in the way and manner prescribed by him. But we say, 'No, I will have it in my own way; I will not be content with the flesh, but I will have the blood. I will not indeed drink it in bowls; but I will reserve a little of it to improve the flavor of my food.' What would we think of a Jew that would deliberately provoke God to anger, and bring ruin on his own soul, for such a gratification as this?

Yet such is the conduct of every sinner; and such are the gratifications for which he sells his soul! O remember, that, if we could gain the whole world at the expense of our own souls, we would make a sad exchange. Be careful therefore not only not to violate any command of God, but not to lower in any one particular the standard of his law. For, "if in one thing only you deliberately and allowedly offend, you are guilty of all, [James 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10)," and infallibly subject yourselves to his everlasting displeasure!

2. Above all things, do not think lightly of the blood of Christ.

The means used to beget a reverence for the blood which only shadows it forth, may clearly show us what reverential thoughts we ought to entertain of the sin-atoning blood of Christ. In that is all our hope, "by that alone we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins. Through the sin-atoning blood of Christ, the vilest sinner in the universe may obtain mercy, for it is able to "cleanse us from all sin."

It is of the sin-atoning blood of Christ, that the hosts of Heaven are making mention continually before the throne of God; their anthems are addressed "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood!" Of that then should we also sing; and in that should we glory.

But if we be disposed to disregard it, let us contemplate the fate of him who disregarded the typical injunction, "God declared, that he would set his face against him and cut him off!" The proper reflection to be made on that, is suggested to us by God himself, "If he who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment suppose you shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing! [Hebrews 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29)."

It was terrible to "die without mercy;" but there is a "much sorer punishment" than that; there is a "second death," which they shall suffer, who trample on the blood of Christ! May the Lord grant that we may never turn the means of happiness into an occasion of so great a calamity! Let us rather take the cup of salvation into our hands, and drink it with the liveliest emotions of gratitude and joy!

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THE JEWS' LEADING OBJECTION TO CHRISTIANITY CONSIDERED

**[Deuteronomy 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.1-3)**

"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul."

It has commonly, and with justice, been thought, that the two great pillars on which a revelation from God must stand, are miracles and prophecies. Without these, we cannot be assured, that any discovery which may have been made to man, is really divine. The points that are traced to a divine origin may be highly reasonable and excellent in themselves; yet, before they are clothed with a divine authority, we very properly ask, What proof is there that they are from God? What evidence do you give that they are not the offspring of your own mind? If they are from God, I take for granted that God does not leave you without witness; tell me then, what works do you perform, which no created power can perform; or what other credentials have you, whereby your heavenly mission may be known? If you can foretell things to come, I shall then know that you are from God; because none but God can certainly foreknow them. Or if you can work things above, and contrary to the course of nature, then I shall know that you have that power from on high; because no created being can impart it.

This, I say, is the established mode of judging concerning a revelation from God; and, according as anything professing to be from God is thus confirmed, or not, we give to it, or withhold from it, our assent. It is from grounds like these that we judge of the revelation given to Moses; and from similar grounds must we judge of the truth of Christianity also.

We must indeed inspect the matter of the thing revealed, to see whether it be worthy of him from whom it is said to come; and from its internal evidence our faith will derive great strength; but still in the first instance we look rather to external proofs, such as we have before spoken of.

But the Jews imagine that they are precluded from judging of Christianity on such grounds as these, since Moses, in the passage we have just read, guards them against any such inferences as we are led to draw from the prophecies and miracles on which our religion is founded. He concedes that some prophecies may be uttered, and some miracles be wrought, in favor of a false religion; and that, even if that should be the case, the Jews are not to regard any evidences arising from those sources, but to hold fast their religion in opposition to them.

This is an objection commonly urged among the Jews, when we invite them to embrace the Christian religion. That we may meet it fairly, we will, first, state the objection in all its force, and then give what we apprehend to be the proper answer to it.

I. We begin then with stating **the objection**; and we will do it in such a way as to give the Jew all possible advantage.

The scope of the passage is to guard the Jews against idolatry. They were, and would continue to be, surrounded by idolatrous nations, who would strive to the utmost to draw them from Jehovah to the worship of false gods. And the Jews themselves having from the earliest period of their existence as a people been accustomed to see the idolatrous worship of Egypt, were of themselves strongly attached to idolatry; so that it was necessary to guard them against it by the most awful threats, and the most impressive cautions.

The caution here given is certainly most solemn. That we may give it all the force of which it is capable, we will notice distinctly these three things:

The supposition here made.

The injunction given notwithstanding that supposition.

The argument founded on that injunction.

First, mark the supposition here made, namely, that God may permit miraculous and prophetic powers to be exercised even in support of a false religion. We are not indeed to imagine that God himself will work miracles in order to deceive his people, and lead them astray; nor are we to imagine that he will allow Satan to work them in such an unlimited way as to be a counterbalance to the miracles by which God has confirmed his own religion; but he will, for reasons which we shall presently consider, permit some to be wrought, and some prophecies to come to pass, notwithstanding they are designed to uphold an imposture. The magicians of Pharaoh, we must confess, wrought real miracles. When they changed their rods into serpents, it was not a deception, but a reality; and when they inflicted plagues upon Egypt after the example of Moses, it was not a deception, but a reality. But at the same time that they thus, in appearance, vied with Moses himself, and with Jehovah, in whose name he came, there was abundant evidence of their inferiority to Moses, and of their being under the control of a superior power; for the magicians could not remove one of the plagues which they themselves had produced; nor could they continue to imitate Moses in all the exercises of his power (from whence they themselves were led to confess their own inferiority to him,) nor could they avert from themselves the plagues which Moses inflicted on them in common with the rest of the Egyptians. They were permitted to do so much as should give Pharaoh an occasion for hardening his own heart, but not sufficient to show that they could at all come in competition with Moses.

In every age there were also false prophets, who endeavored to draw the people from their allegiance to God; and in the multitude of prophecies that they would utter, it must be naturally supposed that some would be verified in the outcome. Our blessed Lord has taught us to expect, even under the Christian dispensation, that some efforts of this kind will be made by "Antichrist, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who perish, [2 Thessalonians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.9-10)." He has moreover told us that these false prophets should "show such signs and wonders as to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect, [Matthew 24:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.24);" nay more, that in the last day some will appeal to him respecting the prophecies they have uttered, and the miracles they have wrought in his name, and will plead them in arrest of judgment, [Matthew 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22). We may therefore safely concede what is here supposed, namely, that God may allow miraculous and prophetic powers to be exercised to a certain degree even in support of idolatry itself.

Now then, in the next place, let us notice the injunction given to the Jews notwithstanding this supposition. God commands them "not to give heed to that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, even though his predictions should be verified, if his object is to turn them from him; for that he himself allows these illusions to be practiced upon them, in order that their fidelity to him may be tried, and their love to him approved."

It may seem strange that God should allow such stumbling-blocks to be cast in the way of his people; but it is not for us to say what Jehovah may, or may not, do. We are sure that "he tempts no man," so as to lead him into sin, [James 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.13); and that the "Judge of all the earth will do nothing but what is right." But it is a fact, that he thus permitted Job to be tried, in order that he might approve himself a perfect man; and in like manner he tried Abraham, in order that it might appear whether his regard for God's authority, and his confidence in God's Word, were sufficient to induce him to sacrifice his Isaac, the child of promise, [Genesis 22:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.1-2); [Genesis 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.12). It was for similar ends that God permitted his people to be tried for forty years in the wilderness, [Deuteronomy 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.2); and in the same way he has tried his Church in every period of the world.

This is the true reason of so many stumbling-blocks being laid in the way of those who embrace the Christian faith. Christianity is not revealed in a way to meet with the approbation of proud and carnal men; it is foolishness to the natural man. Yes, even Christ himself is a stumbling-block to some, as well as a sanctuary to others; and such a stumbling-block, as to be "a snare to both the houses of Israel," among whom it was foretold, "many should stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken, [Isaiah 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14-15)."

It is God's express design in the whole constitution of our religion, to discover the secret bent of men's minds; and while to the humble he has given abundant evidence for their conviction, he has left to the proud sufficient difficulties to call forth their latent animosity, and to justify in their own apprehensions, their obstinate unbelief, [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34-35). He gave originally to the Jews, as he has also given to us, sufficient evidence to satisfy any honest mind; and this is all that we have any right to expect. It was not necessary that our Lord should give to every man in the Jewish nation the same evidence of his resurrection, as he gave to Thomas. It was reasonable that there should be scope left for every man to exercise his own judgment on the evidences that were placed within his reach; as our Lord said to Thomas, "Because you have seen, you have believed; but blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed."

Hence then God enjoined his people not to regard any person who should attempt to draw them to idolatry, even though he should work a miracle before their eyes, or foretell an event that should afterwards come to pass. They had had abundant evidence, that the religion they had embraced was from God; they possessed also in the very nature of that religion an internal evidence of its excellency; and they had received from God such demonstrations of his power and goodness, as ought to unite them to him in the most indissoluble bonds of faith and love. If therefore they should be induced to renounce their allegiance to him, and to transfer it to dumb idols that had never done anything for them, nor ever could do anything—they would betray a manifest lack of love to him, and must blame themselves only, if they should ultimately be "given up to a delusion to believe a lie, and be left to perish" in their iniquity! [2 Thessalonians 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.11-12). He would have them therefore upon their guard in relation to this matter, and resolutely to resist every attempt to draw them from him, however specious that attempt might be.

The argument founded on this injunction comes now before us with all the force that can be given to it. A Jew will say, 'You Christians found your faith on prophecies and on miracles; and admitting that Jesus did work some miracles, and did foretell some events which afterwards came to pass, God permitted it only to try us, and to prove our fidelity to him. He has cautioned us beforehand not to be led astray from him by any such things as these; he has expressly forbidden us to regard anything that such a prophet might either say or do. Nay more, he commanded that we should take such a prophet before the civil magistrate, and have him put to death; and therefore, however specious your reasonings appear, we dare not listen to them or regard them.

Having thus given to the objection all the force that the most hostile Jew can wish, I now come in the second place to,

II. Offer what we hope will prove a satisfactory answer to the above objection.

It cannot but have struck the attentive reader, that in this objection there are two things taken for granted; namely, that in calling Jews to Christianity we are calling them from Jehovah; and that our authority for calling them to Christianity is founded on such miracles as an impostor might work, and such prophecies as an impostor might expect to see verified.

But in answer to these two points we declare:

First, that we do not call them from Jehovah, but to him.

Next, that our authority is not founded on such miracles and prophecies as might have issued from an impostor, but such as it was impossible for an impostor to produce.

Lastly, that, in calling them to Christ, we have the express command of God himself.

First, we do not call our Jewish brethren **from**Jehovah, but **to**him.

We worship the very same God whom the Jews worship; and we maintain his unity as strongly as any Jew in the universe can maintain it. As for idols of every kind, we abhor them as much as Moses himself abhorred them. Moreover, we consider the law which was written on the two tablets of stone as binding upon us, precisely as much as if it were again promulgated by an audible voice from Heaven.

Instead of calling them from the law, we call them to it; we declare that every man who has transgressed it in any one particular, is deservedly condemned to everlasting misery! [Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26); [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); and it is from a consciousness that this sentence must fall on every person who has not fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel, that we are so anxious to call both Jews and Gentiles to a belief of the Gospel. We go further, and say, that no human being can be saved, who has not a perfect obedience to that law as his justifying righteousness. But where shall we find a perfect obedience to that law? Where shall we find a man who can say, he has fulfilled it in every jot and tittle? Alas! we all have transgressed it times without number; we are all therefore condemned by it; and being condemned for our disobedience, we can never be justified by our obedience to it. Would to God, that this matter were understood by the Jews! We would find no difficulty then in leading them to Christ. Did they but know what wrath they have merited, they would be glad to hear of one who has borne it for them; and did they but know how impossible it is for an imperfect obedience to that law to justify them, they would be glad to hear of one who has fulfilled it in all its extent, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for all who believe in him.

Yes, my Jewish brethren, know assuredly that the Christian "does not make void the law, but establishes the law, [Romans 3:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.31);" and has no hope of salvation in anyway, but such as "magnifies the law and makes it honorable, [Isaiah 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.21);" and it is his earnest desire that you should agree with him in this matter; because he is sure that when once you come to understand your own law, and see how "Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes," your difficulties will all vanish as the morning dew before the rising sun.

With respect to the ceremonial law, we do indeed call you from the observance of that; and we have good reason so to do; for you yourselves know, that all the essential part of your religion existed before the ceremonial law was given; and that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who lived hundreds of years before the ceremonial law was given, were saved simply and entirely by faith in that promised "Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed." By faith then in this promised Seed must you be saved; every child of Abraham must seek for acceptance in the way that Abraham did.

If you ask, Why then was the ceremonial law given? I answer, To shadow forth your Messiah, and to lead you to him; and when he would come and fulfill it in all its parts, it was then to cease; and you yourselves know that it was intended by God himself to cease at that appointed time. Do you not know that your Messiah was to come out of the loins of king David; and that he was also to be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek? But if there was to be a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, the priesthood of Aaron must cease; and if the new priest was to spring from David, who was of the tribe of Judah, and not from Levi to whose descendants the priesthood was confined, then it is clear from this also that the Aaronic priesthood must cease; and if that is changed, then must there of necessity be a change of the law also [Hebrews 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.11-12); so that you yourselves know that the ceremonial law was never intended to continue any longer than the time fixed for its completion in the predicted Messiah.

If then we call you away from the outward observances of that law, it is not from disrespect to that law, but from a conviction that it has been fulfilled and abrogated by the Lord Jesus. We call you only from shadows to the substance. We call you to Christ as uniting in himself all that the ceremonial law was intended to shadow forth. He is the true tabernacle, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He is the true "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," even that "Lamb of God who, as John the Baptist testified, takes away the sins of the world." He is the great High-Priest, who, having "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God," is now "entered into the holy place with his own blood," and there "he ever lives to make intercession for us;" and is to come forth from thence once more to bless in his Father's name his waiting people.

I wish then, my Jewish brethren, that you would particularly bear this in mind. We honor the ceremonial law as admirably calculated to prepare your minds for the Gospel; not only because it exhibited so fully and so minutely every part of the mediatorial office which our Lord was to sustain, but because by the burdensomeness of its rites, it tended to break your spirit, and to make you sigh for deliverance. And methinks, it should be no grievance to you to be called from those observances, because you neither do, nor can, continue them. The destruction of your city and temple, and your whole ecclesiastical and civil polity, have rendered impossible for you to comply with them, and have thus shut you up to the faith of Abraham, which is the faith of the Gospel.

I am aware that in calling you to worship the Lord Jesus Christ we appear to you to be transferring to him the honor due to God alone. But if you will look into your own Scriptures, you will find that the person who was foretold as your Messiah is no other than God himself. Examine the Psalm before referred to, Psalm 110, and see how David speaks of your Messiah, "The Lord said unto my LORD, Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." David here calls him Jehovah; and how could he do that, if that title did not properly belong to him? This question Jesus put to the Pharisees in his day; and they could not answer him a word; nor can all the Rabbis upon the face of the earth suggest any satisfactory answer to it now. The only answer that can be given is, that the same person, who as man, was David's son; as Jehovah, was David's Lord, or, as Isaiah calls him, "Emmanuel, God with us." Receive him in the character in which the Prophet Isaiah foretold his advent, as "the Child born, the Son given, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace." Call him, as another prophet instructs you, "Jehovah our righteousness;" and know, that, in thus "honoring Christ, you will honor the Father who sent him."

This then is my first answer: that in no respect whatever do we call you from God, but wholly and altogether to him:  
to Him, as the One true God, in opposition to all idols;  
to his law, as fulfilled in Christ, and directing you to him;  
and to his Gospel, as the completion and consummation of all the wonders of his love.

In as far as we call you from your present course, it is only from types and shadows to the substance and reality. You remember that at the moment of our Lord's death the veil of the temple was rent in twain, and the most holy place was laid open to the view of all who were worshiping before it. The way into the holiest being thus opened to you by God himself, we invite all to enter in with boldness, and assure you in God's name that you shall find acceptance with him.

The next thing which we proposed to show was, that our authority for calling you thus to Christ is not founded on such prophecies or miracles as might have issued from an impostor, but on such as it was impossible for an impostor to produce.

Consider the prophecies: they were not some few dark predictions of mysterious import and of doubtful outcome, uttered by our Lord himself; but a continued series of prophecies from the very fall of Adam to the time of Christ; of prophecies comprehending an almost infinite variety of subjects, and those so minute, as to defy all collusion either in those who uttered, or those who fulfilled, them. A great multitude of them were of such a kind that they could not possibly be fulfilled by any but the most inveterate enemies. Who but an enemy would have nailed him to the cross, or pierced him to the heart with a spear, or offered him gall and vinegar to drink, or mocked and insulted him in the midst of all his agonies? Do not these put his Messiahship beyond a doubt?

I will mention only one prophecy of Christ himself; but it is such a one as no impostor would utter, and no impostor could fulfill. What impostor would rest all the credit of his mission on his being put to a cruel, ignominious, and accursed death, and rising from the dead the third day? Or if an impostor were foolish enough to utter such a prophecy—then how, when he was actually dead, could he fulfill it? But the whole Scriptures predicted these things of Jesus, as Jesus also did of himself; and the exact fulfillment of them proves beyond all reasonable doubt his true Messiahship.

Consider the miracles also: these were beyond all comparison greater and more numerous than Moses ever wrought. The healing all manner of diseases was the daily and hourly employment of the Lord Jesus for the three or four last years of his life. The whole creation, men, devils, fish, elements—all obeyed his voice; and at his command the dead arose to life again. But there is one miracle also which in particular we will mention. Jesus said, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again;" and the former of these he proved by speaking with a loud voice the very instant he gave up the Spirit, showing thereby, that he did not die in consequence of his nature being exhausted, but by a voluntary surrender of his life into his Father's hands.

And at the appointed time he proved the latter also, notwithstanding all the preparations made to defeat his purpose, all of which proved in the outcome the strongest testimonies to the truth of his Word.

Could an impostor have pretended to such a power; or when actually dead, could he have exercised it? And, when the interval between his death and resurrection was to be so short, would not the stone, the seal, the watch, have been sufficient to secure the detection of the imposture? Further, would an impostor have undertaken to send down the Holy Spirit after his death for the purpose of enabling his followers to speak all manner of languages, and of working all kinds of miracles; or if he had predicted such things, could he have fulfilled them?

Judge then whether here be not ground enough for that faith which we call you to exercise towards him? If there are not, how do you prove the divine authority of your own lawgiver? In point of testimony, great as was that which proved the divine mission of Moses, it was nothing when compared with that which substantiated the Messiahship of Jesus. We therefore confidently call you to believe in him, and to embrace the salvation which he offers to you in the Gospel.

But there is one great argument which we have reserved until now, in order that it may bear upon you with the greater weight.

We declare to you then, in the last place, that, in calling you to Christ, we have the express command of God himself.

Moses, in chapter 13 of Deuteronomy, bids you, as we have seen, not to listen to any false prophet. But in [Deuteronomy 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.18), [19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deuteronomy 18.19), he most explicitly declares, that a Prophet should arise, to whom you should attend. Hear his own words, "I will raise up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto you, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I command him. And it shall come to pass, that whoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

Now I ask you, Who is the Prophet here spoken of? Where was there ever, besides Moses, a prophet that was a Mediator, a Lawgiver, a Ruler, a Deliverer? Was there ever such a one, except Jesus? And was not Jesus such a one in all respects? Yes; he has wrought for you not a mere temporal deliverance like Moses, but a spiritual and eternal deliverance from sin and Satan, death and Hell. He has redeemed you, not by power only, but by price also, even the inestimable price of his own blood. Having thus bought you with his blood, he ever lives in Heaven itself to make continual intercession for you.

A new law also has he given you, "the law of faith," in conformity to which he enjoins you to walk, and by which he will judge you in the last day. Of this blessed person all your own prophets have spoken; and this very Moses, in whom you trust, declares to you, that, "if you will not hear and obey this Prophet, God will require it of you." When therefore you plead the authority of Moses, we join issue with you, and say: Be consistent.

Renounce false prophets, because he bids you; but believe in the true Prophet, whom God according to his Word has raised up to you, because he bids you. Let his authority weigh equally with you in both cases; and then we shall not fear, but that you will embrace the salvation offered to you in the Gospel, and be the spiritual children, as you already are the natural descendants, of believing Abraham. "Abraham looked forward with eager expectation to see the day of Christ, and saw it, and was glad." May you also now see it, and rejoice in him as your Savior for evermore!

It is for your unbelief in this respect that God has punished you now these eighteen hundred years, and is punishing you at this day. He told you, "he would require of you" your rejection of this Prophet; and he has required it more severely, than he has all your other sins ever since you became a nation. O repent of this evil, and turn to God in his appointed way! So shall his wrath be turned away from you, and "you shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation!"

We cannot conclude our subject without suggesting a suitable improvement of it to our Christian brethren.

As the Jews were constantly assailed by idolaters who sought to draw them from the worship of the true God—so are you by infidels, or worldlings, to draw you from the belief or practice of the Gospel. But do infidels assault you? Ask them whether their objections, all of which arise from ignorance alone, are sufficient to invalidate all the evidences which may be adduced in support of our religion? If not, then "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering."

Do worldlings tell you that God does not require you to renounce the world, and to give yourselves up entirely to him? Ask them, what proof they can give that God has authorized them to set aside the plainest declarations of his Word. You may expect at least that they shall be possessed of miraculous and prophetic powers, or else they have not so much as the semblance of true prophets. But even if they had these powers and displayed them evidently before your eyes—yet you ought not to regard their counsels, because they seek to turn you from God to a poor perishing and worthless idol; from God, who has redeemed you by the blood of his only dear Son, and given you all things in and with him, to an idol, that never has done anything for you, nor ever can.

Be firm therefore, even though your father or your mother, your brother or your sister, or even the wife of your own bosom, should seek to turn you from the Lord. Your plain answer to them all is, "Whether it is right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge." Whatever temptations they offer, or threats they employ, let nothing induce you to draw back from following the Lord fully. "Be faithful unto death; and he will give you a crown of life!"

#207

GUILT AND DANGER OF IDOLATRY

**[Deuteronomy 13:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.6-11)**

"If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again."

There is a striking difference between the laws of man and the laws of God; those which are framed by human legislators, proportion always the sanctions to the influence which crimes have upon the public welfare; whereas those laws enacted by our heavenly Lawgiver, mark with greater severity the evils which more immediately affect His own honor and glory.

If one man robbed or maimed another, his law required only a four-fold restitution, or the infliction of a punishment precisely similar to the injury sustained. But if a man, even the dearest relative they had, should only propose to any of his people to worship another God in preference to Jehovah, he must instantly be brought before the magistrates, and, on conviction of the offence, be stoned to death.

It will be proper to consider this ordinance in a two-fold view;

I. As a temporary enactment.

This enactment, or law, appears at first sight to be severe; but we undertake to show that:

1. This law was **just**, as it respected the individual.

The greatest crimes against any human government are treason and murder; and, by the general consent of mankind, the principals who are found guilty of those crimes are put to death. Now, in the tempting of men to idolatry, both of these crimes were contained:  
there was treason against the King of kings;  
and there was murder, not indeed of the bodies, but of the souls, of men.

The person who made the proposal, did by that very act endeavor to draw men from their allegiance to God, and to engage them on the side of God's enemy and rival. And, as far as his endeavors were attended with success, he eternally destroyed all who complied with his solicitations.

Now compare the crimes, and see whether those committed against God and the souls of men be not infinitely more heinous than those which reach no further than to human governments, and the bodily life; and, if they are, the justice of the punishment annexed to them will admit of no doubt:

it will be just that He whose throne we would subvert, should inflict upon us the penalty of death;

and that those whom we would ruin forever, should be made the executioners of that sentence.

2. This law was **merciful**, as it respected the public.

The Jews had been nurtured in the midst of an idolatrous nation; and, after their settlement in Canaan they were surrounded with idolaters on every side. Moreover they were of themselves exceedingly addicted to idolatry. But the consequence of their departure from God would be, that they would bring his heaviest judgments upon them, and be reduced to a more calamitous condition than any people under Heaven. But God was graciously pleased to put a barrier in their way, which, it might be hoped, they would never be able to pass. He not only annexed the penalty of death to an act of idolatry, but even to a proposal to commit that sin! Yes, to prevent such a proposal from being ever made, he not only authorized, but commanded, the person to whom it was made, to give immediate information of it to the magistrates, and to be the first in inflicting the punishment of death. If the person making the proposal should be ever so dear to him, though it should be his own brother, or son or daughter, or even the wife of his bosom, or his friend that is as his own soul—he must make no difference; he must show no respect of persons whatever, "You shall not consent unto him, says God, nor hearken unto him; neither shall your eye pity him, neither shall you spare, neither shall you conceal him; but you shall surely kill him!" All natural affection must be laid aside, and be swallowed up in a concern for God's honor; and the man himself must become the informer, the witness, and the executioner, even where the delinquent is dearer to him than his own soul.

What child, what wife, what friend, if he had conceived an idolatrous inclination in his heart, would dare to mention it, when the person to whom he should mention it was precluded from all exercise of mercy, and was constrained to proceed against him according to this law?

Thus then provision was made to prevent the possibility, as it should seem, of the nation ever yielding to idolatry, or provoking God to abandon them according to the threatenings which he had denounced against them. We are informed in the text that the very execution of this law was designed to produce this beneficial effect, verse 11; and therefore much more must the enactment of it be an expression of love and mercy to the whole nation!

This law indeed was only temporary; it was to continue in force only during the continuance of the Jewish polity; but it is nevertheless most instructive to us,

II. As a lasting admonition.

To the very end of time it will speak loudly to us: it declares to us, in the strongest terms:

1. The evil of departing from God.

The annexing of the penalty of death, and of so cruel a death as that of stoning, is of itself no slight intimation of the evil of idolatry; but the requiring a man to execute this sentence against the wife of his bosom, or the friend that is as his own soul; the requiring him to do it even on account of a mere proposal, though the proposal was never carried into effect; the not allowing him to overlook or conceal the matter, but constraining him instantly to enforce the law without pity! How was it possible for God himself to mark the evil of this sin in blacker colors, or to show his abhorrence of it in a stronger manner, than by such an enactment as this? The command to destroy a whole city for idolatry was scarcely a more awful demonstration of his anger than this, verse 12-18.

But it may be said, "This was idolatry, a sin to which we have no temptation." It was idolatry; but permit me to ask, wherein the great evil of idolatry consists? Is it not in alienating our affections from God, and placing them on some creature? Is it not justly described by the Apostle as "loving and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore?" Is it not in this very view of the subject that covetousness is called idolatry, and that men are said to make "a god of their belly?" Is it not in this view that John says to all the Christian Church, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols!"

What then does it signify, that we are not bowing down to stocks and stones, if there are idols enthroned in our hearts? God is equally provoked to jealousy, whether our idolatry be open and carnal, or secret and spiritual; and though he does not authorize man to proceed against us—He will take the matter into his own hand, and inflict upon us the punishment we deserve.

It is in reference to this that Paul utters that severe denunciation against all who decline from their love to Christ, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema! Maranatha;" that is, His departure from Christ deserves the heaviest judgments; and though we are not now at liberty to inflict them, God surely and quickly will.

O that all who have waxed cold in their affections towards God, would lay this to heart! If God is not seated on the throne of our hearts and sweetly ruling and reigning there—then the creature is! And whether the idol is pleasure, or riches, or honor, or anything else, however excellent or however base—we are idolaters! And we shall be made to feel, that "it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord;" yes, that "It would have been better never to have known him, than, after knowing him, to depart from him."

2. The danger of being **accessory**to any one's departure from him.

There are a variety of ways in which we may be instrumental in turning others from God. What if we scoff at religion, and deride the practice of it as folly or enthusiasm; do we not, in fact, say to those around us, "Come, let us serve other gods?" What if we exert our influence and authority to deter people from attending where the word is preached with fidelity and power, or from associating with the despised followers of Jesus—are we not yet more decidedly guilty of hostility to God? For when we only scoff at religion, we leave people an alternative; but when we set ourselves to intimidate men from following after God, we are no longer seducers, but persecutors.

But, supposing we do not take so decided a part against God—yet, if all our fears are against excess in religion, and none against a defect in it, if all the advice we give is to shun the cross and avoid the shame of a religious profession, and none at all to "endure the cross and despise the shame," whom is it that we serve? Can we with propriety be called the friends and servants of our God? No! Find in all the sacred records one single servant of his that ever showed such dispositions as these. I forget; we can find one; we remember Peter's kind solicitude for his Master, and his affectionate expression of it too, "Master, spare yourself!" But we remember also the answer of Jesus to him, "Get behind me, Satan; you are an offence unto me; for you savor not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men." Let me then warn friends and relatives of every description how they use their influence; lest, while they think that they are showing kindness to man, they be found in reality fighting against God.

Let me remind them, that, whether they succeed or not, their guilt is the same; they have made the proposal, and for that proposal they shall die; and would to God that the being stoned to death were the worst punishment they shall endure! But, alas! it were infinitely "better that a millstone were put about their neck, and that they were cast into the midst of the sea, than that they should offend one of God's little ones." It would have been better, I say; because they would lose only the bodily life; but in turning anyone from God, they forfeit their own souls, and expose themselves to everlasting misery in Hell!

If friends would see what use they should make of their influence, the prophet will tell them; they should endeavor to draw one another nearer unto God; and should themselves endeavor to lead the way, [Zechariah 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.21).

3. The need we have of firmness and steadfastness in religion.

No one can tell what temptations he may have to encounter, or from what quarter they shall spring, or how specious and powerful they may be. Perhaps the children whom we have fondled with delight, or the wife of our bosom, or the friend that is as our own soul—may be our tempters to decline from God, or the occasions of our yielding to temptation. Perhaps the suggestion may be so specious, that it shall appear to have come from a prophet of the Lord, and to have been confirmed by a sign from Heaven! verse 1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:13-13.

But our principles of religion should be so fixed, as to be incapable of being moved even by an angel from Heaven, [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9); and our practice of it should be so determined, that no considerations whatever should be able to make us swerve for one moment from the path of duty. The fate of the man of God who listened to the lying prophet, should teach us this, [1 Kings 13:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 13.18-24). Our rule is clear, and we should follow it without turning either to the right hand or the left, verse 4.

But it will be asked, How shall I obtain this steadfastness? I answer: Compare the God whom you serve, with all the gods that are his rivals and competitors. This is the consideration by which God himself enforces that which might otherwise have appeared as a bloody edict; he grounds the severity of his displeasure on the greatness of the mercies he had bestowed upon them, verse 10. But what were those mercies in comparison with the blessings he has conferred on you?

Think from what a bondage you are redeemed!

Think by what means that redemption has been accomplished for you!

Think what an inheritance is purchased for you!

And then say whether anything in this world can have such a claim to your regards as the Lord Jesus Christ has. Only get your hearts impressed with a sense of his dying love for you—and the vanities of time and sense will be to you no more than the dirt under your feet! Only commit yourselves to Christ, "and be strong in the grace that is in him," and you will find, that "neither angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus!" "He is able to keep you from falling," and "will preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." Whatever then your temptations are, or from whatever quarter they may spring, I say to every one of you, "Hold fast what you have, and let no man take your crown! [Revelation 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.11)."

#208

THE DUTY OF CHARITY ENFORCED

**[Deuteronomy 15:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 15.7-11)**

"If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land."

The existence of various ranks and orders among men is the necessary consequence of civilization. A perfect equality among them is impossible in the nature of things; nor, if it were made to exist, could it continue for any time. An inequality of condition is even far more conducive to the general good, not only in that it tends to keep up a due subordination of the lower to the higher classes, but that it binds all the classes of men together by the ties of mutual usefulness and dependence. Even in the state that was formed by God himself, it was ordained that such a diversity of ranks should exist "The poor shall never cease out of the land," verse 11. Still, however, it never was the divine intention that some should be left destitute of all the comforts of life, while others rioted in opulence and prodigality. To prevent this he commanded his people to forgive the poor their debts at the year of release. He assigns as his reason for this ordinance. "to the end that there may be no poor among you," verses 3, 4; and required all who should enjoy a comparative state of affluence, to relieve the poor and indigent.

In discoursing on the words before us, we shall consider,

I. The duty enjoined.

God commanded his people to exercise liberality to the poor.

He had appointed every seventh year to be a year of release, verses 1, 2. By this means the poor could not be oppressed for any length of time. But this very law might also tend to the disadvantage of the poor. To prevent any such evil consequence, God ordered that his people should be equally favorable to the poor notwithstanding the year of release. He enjoined the rich to lend to the poor, even under a moral certainty of losing their debt. Yes, they were to perform this duty in a bountiful and willing manner.

His injunctions to the Jews are, as far as it respects the spirit of them, equally binding upon us.

God requires us to "do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, [Luke 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.35)." And certainly this is our duty. The relation which the poor bear to us necessarily involves in it this obligation. They are four times in the text called "our brethren." The force of this idea is admirably expressed in [Job 31:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.15-19), and it is further confirmed by the words of our Lord, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40). The Scriptures at large, as well as the immediate expressions in the text, inculcate this duty in the strongest terms, "You shall not harden your heart or your hand. You shall surely lend. You shall surely give. I command you saying. You shall open your hand wide," etc. See this enjoined:  
on all generally, [Luke 11:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.41);  
on all individually, [1 Corinthians 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.2);  
and in the most solemn manner, [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17). "I charge you," etc.

The manner also of performing this duty is as strongly enjoined as the duty itself. We must act bountifully towards the poor, proportioning our alms to our own ability, and, as far as possible, to their necessities "You shall open your hand wide. You shall lend him sufficient for his need." See:  
true bountifulness defined, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12);  
true bountifulness exemplified, [2 Corinthians 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.2);  
true bountifulness encouraged, [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6).

We must also administer relief cheerfully. Grudging and niggardly thoughts are apt to arise in our minds; but they proceed from a "wicked heart;" and must be guarded against with all possible circumspection. "Beware that your eye be evil against your poor brother. Beware that your heart shall not be grieved when than give," etc. See similar directions in [Romans 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.8); [1 Timothy 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.18). "Ready to distribute; willing to give." Our alms are then only acceptable to God, when they are offered with a willing heart, [2 Corinthians 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.7).

To call forth a just sense of our duty, let us consider,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced.

Waving all other arguments that might be adduced, we shall confine our attention to those specified in the text. There are two considerations urged as inducements to the performance of this duty:

1. The danger of neglecting this duty to the poor.

Men are apt to think themselves sole proprietors of what they have; but, in fact, they are only God's stewards. The poor have, from God's command, a claim upon us; and when their distresses are not relieved, he will hear their complaints. He expressly warns us that, "when they cry to him, it shall be sin to us." Our guilt contracted by lack of liberality, shall surely be visited upon our own heads; it shall bring upon us the execration of our fellow-creatures, [Proverbs 28:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.27), a dereliction from our God, [Proverbs 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.13), yes, an everlasting dismissal from his presence and glory, [Matthew 25:41-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41-43). Who that reflects a moment on these consequences, will not "beware" of indulging a disposition that must infallibly entail them upon him?

2. The reward of practicing this duty to the poor.

Heaven cannot be purchased by almsgiving; and to think it could, would be a most fatal delusion. Nevertheless God has annexed a blessing to the performance of this duty, "For this thing the Lord your God shall bless you in all that you do." Supposing our motives and principles be such as the Gospel requires, and our alms be really the fruits of faith and love—the Scriptures assure us that they shall be followed with:

Temporal blessings, [Luke 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.35), and [Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10).

Spiritual blessings, [Isaiah 58:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.7); [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11).

Eternal blessings, [Luke 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.9); [Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.14); [1 Timothy 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.19); [Matthew 25:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-35).

Yes, God, speaking after the manner of men, condescends to say, that we make him our debtor; and to promise, that He will repay us the full amount of whatever we give to others for his sake, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17) and [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6). What greater encouragement can we have than such assurances as these?

APPLICATION.

The occasion on which we now solicit your alms, is urgent; the objects of distress are many. The season is inclement. Work is scarce. Needs are numerous. There are few to administer relief.

Consider then:

The urgency of the call.

The danger of non-compliance.

The blessings promised.

And especially, the great account to be given.

Guard against a grudging spirit; and act towards the poor at this time, as you, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to act towards you.

#209

THE RELEASE OF BOND-SERVANTS

**[Deuteronomy 15:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 15.12-15)**

"If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today."

Benevolence characterized the whole of the Jewish law; as well of that law which regulated the state, as of that which was to govern the souls of individuals. Some things indeed were tolerated under that dispensation which do not accord with the more sublime morality of the Gospel. Polygamy and divorce were allowed, on account of the hardness of the people's hearts, and in order to prevent the still greater evils which would have resulted from the entire prohibition of them. Slavery also was permitted for the same reasons; but still there were restraints put upon men in relation to these things, and many regulations were framed, to counteract the abuses which were likely to flow from the licence afforded them. It was permitted to men to purchase slaves, and that even from among their brethren. But an express command was given, that no man should "rule over them with rigor;" that every slave should be liberated after six years of service; and that ample provision should be made for him on his dismissal, in order that he might be able in the future to support himself. It is of this ordinance that we are now to speak; and in it we may see,

I. An encouraging emblem.

As the whole of the ceremonial law, so parts also of the judicial law, were of a typical nature. This appointment in particular emblematically represented two things:

1. The redemption which God gives to his people.

Both Scripture and experience attest, that all mankind are in a state of bondage. They are "tied and bound with the chain of their sins;" they are "led captive by the devil at his will." But the time has come when we are permitted to assert our liberty. The Lord Jesus Christ has "proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" and it must be by our own voluntary consent alone that we can be retained any longer in our former bondage.

Whatever had been the occasion of the Hebrew servant's bondage, whether he had sold himself through poverty, or been sold by a relentless creditor to pay his debts, or been sentenced to such a punishment by the civil magistrate for his crimes, he was equally free the very moment that the six years of his servitude were expired.

Thus it is with us; there is no room to ask in desponding strains, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.24-25)." For the truth now sounds in our ears, and "the truth shall make us free! [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32)." As surely as ever Moses was sent to the oppressed Israelites to deliver them, so surely are the tidings of salvation now sent to us; and though our tyrannical master may use his utmost efforts to keep us in subjection, he shall not prevail. The Lord Jesus Christ has come to deliver us; and "if the Son makes us free, we shall be free indeed! [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36)."

2. The mercy which God exercises towards his redeemed people.

There was a direction given to Moses, that the people at their departure from Egypt should "borrow of their neighbors jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and that they should plunder the Egyptians." "When you go," said God to them, "you shall not go empty, [Exodus 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.21-22)." In like manner this injunction was given to the Hebrew master, at the time when he should be required to liberate his slave, "When you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you."

Is it not thus that God deals with his redeemed people? "Does he require any man to go a warfare at his own charges?" True it is, he does not set up his people with a stock of grace, that they may afterwards live independent of him; but "he will supply all their need" out of the fullness which he has treasured up for them in Christ Jesus; and "out of that fullness they shall all receive, even grace upon grace, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19) with [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)." Yes assuredly, this picture shall be realized in all who receive your liberty from sin by sincerely trusting in Christ; for "those who fear the Lord shall lack nothing that is good."

But besides this emblematical representation, there is in the test,

II. An instructive lesson.

The Hebrew masters were bidden to "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today," and that on that very account God had given them this command in relation to their slaves. From hence it appears, that we are to regard God's mercies,

1. As a pattern for our imitation.

When Israel were groaning under their burdens in Egypt, God said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people; I know their sorrows;" and on another occasion we are told, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel, [Judges 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.16)." And when once they were liberated from their bondage, what incessant kindness did he show them, administering to all their needs, and fulfilling all their desires! This was the conduct which the Hebrew masters were to imitate; and this tenderness, this compassion, this sympathy, this love, is to characterize his people to the end of time. Remarkable is that direction given us by the Apostle Paul, "Be imitators of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ has loved us, [Ephesians 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.1-2)." Here the same principle is established; we are to imitate God in all his imitable perfections, and especially in that which is the crown and summit of them all, unbounded love. We are, as far as it is possible for finite creatures to do it, to tread in the very steps of Christ himself, and to follow him even in that stupendous effort of love, his dying on the cross; for John, having spoken of his "love in laying down his life for us," adds, "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16)."

What an object for our ambition is here! O that we might be satisfied with nothing short of this! That instead of admiring ourselves on account of more common exercises of love, we might rather see how defective we are even in our best duties; and might learn to overlook all past attainments as nothing, and to be pressing forward for higher degrees of conformity to our God and Savior! [Philippians 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-15).

2. As a motive for our exertion.

The mercy given to the Jewish nation was to operate on all of them as an incentive to obedience; and, as God has required acts of love to our brethren as the best evidence of our love to him, it is in that more especially that we must endeavor to requite the loving-kindness of our God. The man that grudges a few pence to a fellow-servant after having been forgiven by his Lord a debt of ten thousand talents, can expect nothing but indignation from the hands of God! [Matthew 18:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.32-34).

The true spirit of God's redeemed people was well exemplified in the Apostle Paul, when he declared, "The love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again." If then we have any hope that we ourselves have been partakers of saving mercy, let us feel our obligations, and say with David, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?" And, if we have in ourselves an evidence that God has "bought us with a price," let us strive to the uttermost to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his! 1 Corinthians 6:20."

Address,

1. Those who are yet in bondage to sin and Satan.

Why should you continue in bondage another day? May not the past time suffice to have served such hard masters? and is not liberty at this moment proclaimed to you? "Behold, this is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation." Think not of the difficulties that are in your way, but of the power that will enable you to surmount them. He who rescued Israel from Egypt yet lives; and "will show himself strong in behalf of all who call upon him."

If you continue in your bondage. O think of the wages that you will receive! "the wages of sin is death!" But if you receive your liberty from sin by sincerely trusting in Christ—then you shall be numbered among "the freemen of the Lord," and have him for your portion in time and in eternity!

2. Those who profess to have been freed from their bondage.

You have seen wherein you are to glorify your God. Remember, that it is in common life especially you are to show forth the power of divine grace. Let it be seen in your households, that you are enabled to walk worthy of your high calling. It is in your families that the truth and excellence of your Christian principles is to be displayed. It is easy enough to be kind and liberal abroad; but look to it that these graces are exercised at home. Let your wife and children reap the benefit of your conversion. Let love be in your hearts, and the law of kindness in your lips. Show that your religion is an operative principle in your life at home. Know that a profession of religion without such an exhibition of its power, will be accounted no better than hypocrisy either by God or man! If you would be approved of God at last, you must "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

#210

THE SERVANT DEVOTING HIMSELF TO HIS MASTER'S SERVICE

**[Deuteronomy 15:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 15.16-17)**

"But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant."

The work of redemption was typified, not only by stated proclamations of liberty every fiftieth year, which was called the year of jubilee—but also by provision that all Hebrew servants, for whatever cause they had become bond-men, should be liberated from their bondage after the expiration of six years. But it would sometimes happen that a person might be so well pleased with his situation as not to wish to leave it, but to prefer it before that to which he was entitled. For such cases particular provision was made by God himself; and a very singular rite was appointed for the ratification of his purpose; on declaring before a magistrate that he chose to continue his master's bond-servant, his master was to bore his ear through with an awl to the door or door-post; and the servant could never afterwards claim his liberty until the year of jubilee.

We should not have ventured to annex any great importance to this ordinance, if the inspired writers themselves had not led the way. But we apprehend that they refer to it as a type; and in that view we conceive it deserves peculiar attention. We shall endeavor therefore to point out to you,

I. Its **typical**reference.

It is well known that our Savior, as Mediator between God and man, was the Father's servant, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1); [John 12:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.49); in this capacity he set himself wholly to do the Father's will, [John 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.34); and never for one moment admitted so much as a thought of relinquishing his service, until he could say, "I have finished the work which you have given me to do."

Let us briefly notice this at the different periods of his humiliation.

At his incarnation. When the fullness of time was come, and the season had arrived when he must assume our fallen nature in order to execute the work assigned to him, though he must empty himself of all his glory, and leave his Father's bosom, and "make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant," and be "made in the likeness of sinful flesh," and bear all the infirmities (the sinless infirmities) of our nature, he would not go back from the engagements which he had entered into with his Father, but condescended to he born of a virgin, and to become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He loved the work he had undertaken; he delighted in the prospect of glorifying his Father, and saving our ruined race; and accounted no condescension too great for the accomplishing of this stupendous purpose.

At the time of his sufferings and death, he still persisted in his resolution to do and suffer all that was necessary for our redemption. He often forewarned his disciples of the precise sufferings which he was to endure; and when one of the most highly favored among them endeavored to dissuade him from his purpose, he reproved him with great severity, [Matthew 16:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.21-23), determining never to recede until he had completed the work which he had engaged to perform.

When, under the pressure of inconceivable agonies, his human nature began, as it were, to fail, he still maintained his steadfastness, "Not my will, but may yours be done." Had it pleased him, even when apprehended by his enemies, or hanging on the cross, to terminate his sufferings before the time, he might have had legions of angels sent for his deliverance, [Matthew 26:53-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.53-54); but he would not allow the cup to pass from him until he had drunk it to the lowest dregs.

All this, it may be said, is very true; but what relation has it to the point before us? We answer, that this steadfastness of his in performing engagements, which without any necessity on his part he had undertaken, was the very thing typified in the ordinance we are now considering.

The Psalmist expressly speaking of Christ's appointment to make that atonement for sin which the Mosaic sacrifices only prefigured, says, (in allusion to the ordinance before us,) that God the Father had "opened, or bored, the ears" of his servant, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8). And Paul, citing that very passage, quotes it, not in the same precise words, but according to their true meaning, "Sacrifice and burnt-offering you did not desire; but a body have you prepared for me, [Hebrews 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-7)."

Moreover both the inspired writers go on to mark in the strongest terms the determination of heart with which the Messiah should fulfill, and actually did fulfill, the inconceivably arduous task which he had undertaken. Note the varied expressions, "Lo, I come; I delight to do your will, O my God; yes, your law is within my heart." These, applied as they are to the whole of the Messiah's humiliation, ([Hebrews 10:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.8-10)) mark strongly his determination as grounded upon love.

Trusting that we have not been guided by fancy in our interpretation of this type, let us inquire into,

II. The **practical instruction** to be deduced from it.

As a civil ordinance, it seems to have been well calculated to instill into the minds both of masters and servants a strict attention to each other's happiness and welfare, so that neither of them might ever wish for a dissolution of their mutual bonds. (And O! that our present consideration of it might be so improved by all who sustain either of those relations!) But, as a typical ordinance, it must, in its practical improvement, have a wider range.

Our blessed Lord has not only redeemed us to God by his blood, but has also "set an example for us, that we should follow in his steps." Hence it is evident that we should:

1. Love the service of our God.

We should not account any of "his commandments grievous," or say concerning any precept of his, "This is a hard saying." He himself has told us that "his yoke is easy, and his burden is light;" and we acknowledge that his service to be perfect freedom. Such was the language of David, "O how I love your law!" "I esteem your commandments concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way." Let it "not then be of constraint that you serve him, but willingly and of a ready mind." And if you foresee difficulties and trials in your way, be not ashamed; but give up yourself unreservedly to God, and adopt the language of the Messiah himself, "Lo, I come; I delight to do your will, O my God; yes, your law is within my heart!"

2. Adhere to it steadfastly to the last hour of your life.

Many reasons might have operated on the mind of a servant to prevent him from perpetuating his bondage. He might fear an alteration in the behavior of his master, and comfort himself with the idea of liberty.

In like manner we may paint to ourselves many trials that may be avoided, and many gratifications that maybe enjoyed, by declining the service of God. But let no considerations operate upon your minds; you shall lose no gratification that shall not be far overbalanced by the comfort of a good conscience; nor suffer any trial, which shall not be recompensed with a proportionable weight of glory in a better world.

You are not likely to lose more than Paul; yet he says, "Whatever was gain to me, that I counted loss for Christ; yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him." You are not likely to suffer more than he, yet he says:

"But none of these things move me; neither do I count my life dear unto myself."

Thus let it be with you, "Be not weary in well-doing;" but "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart."

"Be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in his work."

"Be faithful unto death, and he shall give you a crown of life!"

Address,

1. Those who have already declined from the Lord's ways.

I ask not what sufferings you have avoided, or what pleasures you have gained. This only will I ask: Are you as happy as you were? I am content to put the whole to the issue; and to abide by the decision of your own conscience. I know that though a conscience may be seared, a soul cannot be happy that departs from God. O think what a Master you have slighted; and say, "I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now."

2. Those who are doubting whether to devote themselves to God or not.

Many there are who, seeing the necessity of serving God, are contriving how they may do it with the least risk or trouble to themselves. They are thinking to "serve both God and Mammon." But this is impossible, because the two services are opposite and inconsistent.

Let us not however be misunderstood. We may, and must, fulfill our duties in the world, yes, and fulfill them diligently too; but God alone must be our Lord and Governor. He will not accept such a measure of our affection and service as the world will deign to allow him; but says, "My son, give me your heart," your whole heart. Every interest of ours, and every wish, must be subordinated to his will. Determine this then with yourselves, that you will be his, wholly and forever. Let your ears be bored to his door-post; and let, not your actions merely, but your very thoughts, be henceforth kept in a willing captivity to him. "If Baal is God, serve him; but if the Lord is God, then serve him!"

3. Those who profess themselves his willing and devoted servants.

Show to the world that his service is a reasonable and a delightful service. Let not the difference between you and others be found merely in some foolish peculiarities, but in a holy, heavenly life. And be not mournful and dejected, as if God were a hard master; but "serve him with gladness and joyfulness of heart," that all around you may see the comforts of true religion, and know, from what they behold in you, that the Church militant and Church triumphant are one; one in occupation, and one in joy.

#211

REDEMPTION TO BE EVER BORNE IN MIND

**[Deuteronomy 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.3)**

"Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste—so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt."

Of all the facts recorded in the Old Testament, the Resurrection of our blessed Lord created the most general and intense interest; because, by that, the hopes of his enemies were blasted, and the fears of his followers were dispelled.

We may judge of the emotions that were excited by it from this circumstance, that, when two of the disciples, in their way to Emmaus, had seen their Lord, and had returned to Jerusalem to inform their brethren, they, on entering the room where they were assembled together, found them all saying one to another with most joyous exultation, "The Lord is risen indeed! the Lord is risen indeed! [Luke 24:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.1-3); [Luke 24:30-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.30-34)."

Between that and the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, there is a strict analogy. In fact, the deliverance from Egypt was typical of our redemption by Christ; and, as God required that the people of Israel should remember the one to their last hour, so does he expect that we should remember the other "all the days of our life."

The words which I have read to you are assigned by Moses as the end for which the paschal feast, and the feast of unleavened bread, were instituted; namely, to keep up in the minds of that people, to their last posterity, the remembrance of the typical deliverance.

With the same object in view, I would now call your attention to the Resurrection of our blessed Lord. Beloved brethren, it is a subject of supreme importance; and to every one of you I would say,

I. Treasure it up in your minds.

There was good reason why the Jews should remember their deliverance from Egypt.

Most grievous was their bondage there, [Exodus 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.7); and most wonderful were God's interpositions for them. The ten plagues, and the passage of the Red Sea, etc. Never, from the beginning of the world, had God exerted himself in behalf of any people as he did for them, [Deuteronomy 4:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.32-34). There was good reason, therefore, why so singular a mercy should be had in everlasting remembrance.

But far greater reason is there why we should bear in mind the resurrection of our blessed Lord.

Far more grievous was our bondage to sin and Satan, death and Hell. And infinitely more wonderful were the means used for our deliverance—the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son. Yes, and infinitely more blessed the outcome of it—not mere temporal benefits in Canaan, but everlasting happiness in Heaven! Shall we, then, ever forget this? Would not the "very stones cry out against us?"

Yet, dwell not on it as a mere fact, but,

II. Improve it in your lives.

The Jews, in remembrance of their redemption, were to kill the Passover lamb, and to keep the feast of unleavened bread verse 1-3. Just so, if we would answer God's end in our deliverance, we must improve it:

1. By a renewed application to that sacrifice by which the deliverance was obtained.

It was by sprinkling the blood of the paschal lamb on the door-posts and lintels of their houses, that the Jews obtained deliverance from the sword of the destroying angel, [Deuteronomy 12:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.21-24). Just so, to the blood of Christ, who is "the true paschal sacrifice," must we apply, "sprinkling it on our hearts and consciences, [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22)," and expecting from it the most perfect deliverance, [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7). To those who use these means, there is no danger, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7). But to those who neglect to use them, there is no escape! [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3).

2. By more diligent endeavors after universal holiness.

What the meaning of the unleavened feast was, we are told by the Apostle Paul, who urges us to carry into effect what that typified, "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth! [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7-8)."

In vain we keep the Passover, if we do not also keep the feast of unleavened bread; they are absolutely inseparable. The very end for which Christ redeemed us, was, "that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works! [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." Just so, if we would reap the full benefit of his resurrection, "we must seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God! [Colossians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1)." This was designed by God in the appointment of the feast we have been speaking of, [Exodus 13:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.8-10); and the same is designed in the mercy given to us [Romans 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.9).

In conclusion, then, I say,

Be thankful to God for the special call which is now given you to observe this day. If to the Jews it was said, "This is a night to be much observed to the Lord, for bringing them out of the land of Egypt; this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations, [Exodus 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.42);" then how much more may it be said to us! Methinks, any man who kept the Passion-week, as it is appointed to be observed among us, could scarcely fail of attaining the salvation of his soul; so plain are the instructions given us throughout the whole course of our services, and so exclusively is Christ held forth to us as "the way, the truth, and the life."

My dear brethren, we really are great losers by our neglect of these seasons. Doubtless they may be observed with superstitious formality; but they may be kept with infinite profit to the soul. And I beg of you not to let the present opportunity pass away without a suitable improvement. But, as David said, with a direct reference to the Savior's resurrection, "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it [Psalm 118:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.22-24)." Just so, engage with your whole souls in securing the blessings which the Redeemer's triumphs, as on this day, have obtained for us.

#212

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

**[Deuteronomy 18:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.13)**

"You must be blameless (KJV "perfect") before the LORD your God."

It seems strange that any who have ever heard of Jehovah, should need to be put on their guard against alienating their hearts from him, and placing their affections on any created object in preference to him; but the Israelites, who had seen all his wonders in Egypt and in the wilderness, were ever prone to depart from him, even as we also are, notwithstanding all that we have heard respecting that infinitely greater redemption which he has given to us through the incarnation and death of his only dear Son.

Permit me, therefore, to remind you, as Moses reminded the people committed to his charge, that you must on no account, and in no degree, transfer to the creature the regards which are due to your Maker alone; since his injunction to you, and to every man, is, "You shall be perfect with the Lord your God."

In order to bring home to your hearts and consciences this solemn injunction, I will,

I. Unfold its import.

As for absolute perfection, there is no hope of attaining it in this world. Job himself, whom God pronounced a "perfect man [Job 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.1); [Job 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.8)," declared, that if he should arrogate to himself a claim of absolute perfection, his own mouth would condemn him, and prove him perverse, [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21). But uprightness there is, and must be, in all who shall be approved of their God. In this sense, we must be perfect with the Lord our God:

1. In love to his name.

We are commanded to "love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength." And every one of us should be able to say with David, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you! [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)."

2. In trust in his care.

Whatever our trials be, there should be no leaning either upon our own strength or on any created power; for "cursed is the man that makes flesh his arm, whose heart departs from the Lord his God, [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5)." Our trust should be in God alone; and on him should we rely without the smallest measure of diffidence or fear. Our continual boast should be, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what either men or devils can do against me!"

3. In zeal for his glory.

As we have received our all from him, so we should improve everything for him. We should live entirely for our God; and, if only he may be glorified in us, it should be a matter of indifference to us, whether it be by life or by death.

Are we called to act? We must resemble Asa, who, with impartial energy, dethroned his own mother for her idolatry, and ground her idols to dust! [1 Kings 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 15.13).

Are we called to suffer? We should yield our bodies to be burned, rather than swerve a hair's breadth from the path of duty, [Daniel 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.17-18). In the whole of our Christian course we should be "pressing forward continually towards the goal, if by any means we may obtain from God the prize of our high calling." This is the true nature of Christian perfection, [Philippians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.15).

Such being the injunction, I will proceed to,

II. Enforce its authority.

Without real integrity before God, we can have,

1. No comfort in our souls.

A man may, by aN excessive conceit of his own attainments, buoy himself up with somewhat of a pleasing satisfaction respecting his state; but there will be secret misgivings in hours of reflection, and especially in that hour when he is about to enter into the immediate presence of his God.

Even at present, an insincere man feels no real delight in God; and a consciousness of that, will occasionally disturb his ill-acquired peace. But the man whose heart is right with God will have a holy confidence before him; according as the Psalmist has said, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace, [Psalm 37:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.37)." Hezekiah's blissful retrospect, if not in its full extent—yet in good measure, will be his, "I beseech you, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight, [2 Kings 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.3)."

2. No stability in our ways.

"A double-minded man will be unstable in all his ways, [James 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.8)." Let but a sufficient temptation arise, and he will turn aside, even as Demas did, to the indulgence of his besetting sin. The stony-ground hearers, for lack of a root of integrity within themselves, will fall away; and the thorny-ground hearers, not being purged from secret lusts, will never bring forth fruit unto perfection. It is "the honest and good heart" alone that will approve itself steadfast unto the end. But the upright man God will uphold under every temptation; as an inspired prophet has assured us, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him, [2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9)."

3. No acceptance with our God.

We may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive our God, "to him all things are naked and open;" and, however we be admired by our fellow-creatures, he will discern our true state; as he did that of the Church at Sardis; of whom he says, "I know that you have a name to live, but are dead; for I have not found your ways perfect before God, [Revelation 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1-2)." It is to no purpose to dissemble with him; for "he searches the heart and tries the thoughts, and will give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings, [Jeremiah 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.10)."

Address,

1. Those who are unable to ascertain with confidence their real state.

Surely you should not allow this to remain in doubt. Look into the Scriptures; and you will find in the saints of old a well-grounded persuasion that they had passed from death unto life. Real uprightness is like light, which carries its own evidence along with it. I would not encourage an ill-founded confidence; nor would I, on the other hand, encourage that kind of distrust which puts away the consolations provided for us in the Gospel. Examine yourselves as before God; and never rest until you have the testimony of God's Spirit, that you are Israelites indeed, in whom is no deceit.

2. Those who have an inward evidence that their hearts are right with God.

What is there under Heaven that can equal such a blessing as this? Paul himself had no greater joy, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12). For you, brethren, death has no sting, and the day of judgment itself no terror. You may look and long for the coming of your Lord. Be thankful then; and let the brightness of your prospects increase your vigilance in the path of duty, that "you may never fall, but have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11)."

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THE METHOD OF EXPIATING AN UNKNOWN MURDER

**[Deuteronomy 21:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.6-8)**

"Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, and they shall declare: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O LORD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man." And the bloodshed will be atoned for."

The ceremonial law of the Jews was confessedly figurative and typical in every part; nor was even their judicial law altogether destitute of a spiritual import. The injunction, "not to muzzle the ox that trod out the corn," appears as void of any, except a literal, meaning, as any law whatever; yet was there in that law a particular reference to the preachers of the Gospel, who were to be supported by the people to whom they ministered.

In the law that we are now to consider, there is indeed a manifest appearance of mystery; and we shall find it by no means unprofitable to consider the mystery contained in it. We shall endeavor then,

I. To explain the ordinance.

In doing this we must notice,

1. Its general design.

God, no doubt, intended by this law, to prevent the commission of murder. The shedding of human blood was, in his eyes, so great a crime, that it must never be pardoned by the civil magistrate. If a willful murderer had fled to a city of refuge, or even to the altar itself, neither the one nor the other was to prove a sanctuary to him; he must be taken thence, and be carried forth for execution. See [Numbers 35:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 35.31); [Numbers 35:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 35.33); [Deuteronomy 19:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 19.11-13) and [Exodus 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.14).

In the event of a slain man being found, and the murderer being unknown, this law was to be carried into effect; the elders of the city that was nearest to the slain man, (which, if doubtful, was to be ascertained by measurement,) were, together with the priests, to go to a uncultivated valley, and there slay a heifer, and wash their hands over him, protesting their own innocence, and their inability to discover the offender; and in that manner to implore forgiveness for the guilty land, verse 1-9.

Now this had a tendency to strike a terror into the minds of all the people, to fill them with an abhorrence of murder, to show them what pains would be taken to discover the person who should be guilty of it, and what terrible vengeance he must expect at the hands of God, though he should escape the punishment that he deserved from man.

Somewhat of a similar process prevails among us; a coroner's inquest is taken whenever a suspicion of murder or of suicide appears to have any just foundation. But there is no comparison between our law and that which existed among the Jews; so far superior was the solemnity of their proceedings; and so much more calculated to beget in the minds of men an abhorrence of the dreadful sin of murder.

But besides this more obvious end of the law, God designed also to provide means for removing guilt from his land. No sooner had the whole world sinned in Adam, than He devised means for their restoration to his favor through the incarnation and death of his only dear Son.

And when "all flesh had corrupted their way before him," and determined him to execute vengeance upon them, he still waited to be gracious unto them, and sent them messages of mercy by the hands of Noah for the space of a hundred and twenty years.

When the destruction of Nineveh was so imminent, that there remained but forty days before its completion, he sent them a prophet to warn them of their danger, and to bring them to repentance. Thus at all times has God been slow to anger, while the exercise of mercy was his delight.

Now considering the wickedness of the human heart, it could not be but that sometimes murder should have been committed; and God had declared that, in that case, "the land could not be cleansed from blood but by the blood of him who shed it." Yet, as it must sometimes happen that the criminal could not be discovered, here was a method provided for expiating the guilt, so that God's judgments might not fall upon any in this world, but only on the criminal himself in the world to come. How amiable does God appear in this view! How plainly may we see in this very ordinance that "judgment is a strange act," to which he is extremely averse; and that he is rich in mercy unto all those who call upon him!

2. Its particular provisions.

These deserve a minute attention. Some have thought that the heifer which had not drawn in the yoke represented the murderer, the son of Belial, who refused to bear the yoke of God's law; and that "the uncultivated valley in which he was to be slain, denoted the worthlessness of the criminal's character, or the disagreeableness of the business." But we apprehend that much more was designed by these particular appointments.

The heifer that had not drawn in the yoke represented Christ, who, though he died under the curse of the law, had no previous obligation to do so, but did it voluntarily, giving himself freely for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. Compare [Numbers 19:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 19.2) and [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2). His death marked the utter excision which the murderer deserved; and the uncultivated valley in which the heifer's neck was broken, marked the desolation, which the land itself merited for the transgression that had been committed. See [Psalm 107:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.34) and [Hebrews 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.8).

Thus, the victim, the death, the place, all conspired to impress the minds of the beholders with the malignity of the offence, which required such a sacrifice; while the presence of the priests, which was especially required, (not to officiate themselves, but to overlook and direct the offices of others,) intimated the indispensable necessity of seeking pardon precisely in God's appointed way, and not in any method of their own devising, [Deuteronomy 17:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.8-12).

To this sacrifice was to be added a public profession of their personal innocence, and, at the same time, a public acknowledgment of their national guilt; they must profess their innocence both by an appropriate sign, (washing their hands over the slain heifer,) and an express declaration; and they must acknowledge their guilt, with earnest supplications for mercy and forgiveness.

Thus, namely, by their protestations and petitions, did they show to all that, as God would "not hear those who regarded iniquity in their hearts," so neither would he punish any, who would humble themselves before him in his appointed way. Truly, in this view, the ordinance, though merely judicial, was most interesting and most instructive.

The mystical import of the ordinance being explained, we proceed,

II. To point out some **lessons**which may be learned from it.

We of course pass over those things which are less appropriate, and fix our attention upon those which seem to arise most naturally out of the subject before us.

We may learn then,

1. The importance of preventing or punishing sin.

The concurrence of the elders and the priests in this ordinance shows, that magistrates and ministers should unite their efforts for the preservation of the public morals, and the averting of guilt from the land in which they dwell. To discourage, detect, and punish evil, should be their constant endeavor; that the interests of society may not suffer, and that the honor of God may be maintained. The magistrate ought "not to bear the sword in vain;" he should be "a terror to evil-doers, and a revenger to execute wrath upon them;" and though it does not comport so well with the ministerial office to be exercising civil authority, the minister should be forward on every occasion to aid and stimulate to the utmost of his power those whom God has ordained to be his viceregents upon earth. Were such a cooperation more common, the flagrant violations of the Sabbath, and a thousand other enormities which are daily committed in our streets, would vanish at least from public view, and in a great measure be prevented.

But it is not only public sin which should be thus discountenanced; the crimes perpetrated in secret, and especially the hidden abominations of our own hearts, should be carefully investigated by us, and unreservedly suppressed. Every one should consider sin, of whatever kind it be, as that "abominable thing which God hates;" and should remember, that, though it should never be detected and punished in this world. God will expose it in the world to come, and manifest his righteous indignation against all who commit it. Then at least, if not now, "our sin will find us out;" and therefore it befits us now with all diligence to search and try ourselves, and to beg of God also to "search and try us, to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting!"

2. The comfort of a good conscience.

The people who were thus solemnly to assert their innocence in the presence of God, would doubtless feel happy that they were able to make their appeal to him in truth. To do so with respect to all sin, would be impossible, because "there is no man that lives and sins not;" but with respect to allowed and indulged sin, we all ought to be able to call God to witness that we are free from it. We must be Israelites indeed, and without any allowed deceit. And O! what a comfort is it when we can say with Job, "O God, you know I am not wicked! [Job 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.7)."

Such was the comfort enjoyed by Paul, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conduct in the world, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12);" When indeed we can make that appeal to God, we should do it with holy fear and jealousy, lest there should, after all, be some sin undiscovered by us. We should say with Paul, "Though I know nothing by myself—yet am I not hereby justified; but he who judges me is the Lord, 1 Corinthians 4:4."

We may see in the instance of Pilate how awfully a man may deceive his own soul; he washed his hands before the multitude, and said, "I am free from the blood of this just person;" but his reluctance to commit sin could not excuse the actual commission of it; any more than the washing of his hands could cleanse his soul. Nevertheless we should labor to "keep a conscience void of offence," and so to have every evil disposition mortified, as to be able constantly to say with David, "I will wash my hands in innocence, O Lord, and so will I come to your altar, [Psalm 26:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.6)."

3. The efficacy of united faith and prayer.

As great as the guilt of murder was, the Lord declared that it should not be imputed to the land, if this ordinance were duly complied with. And what sin is there that shall be imputed to us, if we look by faith to that great Sacrifice which was once offered for sin, and implore mercy from God "as his redeemed people?" Not even murder itself should be excepted, if the forgiveness of it were diligently sought in this manner. Hear how David prayed, after the murder of Uriah, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, you God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness! Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! [Psalm 51:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.2); [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7); [Psalm 51:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.14)." O glorious truth! "Though our sins be as crimson, they may be made white as snow."

Beloved brethren, see your guilt as already irrevocably contracted; see the judgments of God hanging over you; see death ready to execute its commission, and the jaws of Hell opening to swallow you up. And now turn your eyes to the "heifer slain in the uncultivated valley," and averting from you the wrath of an offended God; in that heifer, see the Lord Jesus Christ, who has "redeemed you from the curse of the law, being made a curse for you." To you, even to you, that blessed Redeemer says, "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" O look to Him, plead with him, trust in him! and "he will never cast you out." This is "the violence by which the kingdom of Heaven is taken," even the violence of faith and prayer; and this force shall never be exerted in vain! [Matthew 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.12).

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BENEVOLENCE TOWARDS GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE

**[Deuteronomy 23:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 23.3-4)**

"No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you."

In reading the history of God's ancient people, we shall do well to notice even the most minute occurrences; since there will scarcely be found one which is not capable of spiritual improvement, or one from which the most important lessons may not be derived. The record before us would be passed over by the generality of readers, as pertaining only to that particular dispensation, and as affording but little instruction for us at this time; yet it does in reality contain as great practical information as can be found in any of the more signal events with which the inspired history abounds.

A thousand years after this record was written, it was referred to, not by accident, as we call it, but by the special direction of Divine Providence; and was made the ground of the most self-denying command that could be given to men; and the ground, also, of the most prompt obedience to that command, that it was possible for fallen man to render.

The Jews after their return from Babylon had formed connections with the heathen that had occupied Judea in their absence; but Nehemiah, determining to rectify this great evil, read to all the people the very words which I have now read to you; and, by his clear and unquestionable inferences from them, prevailed on all the people of the land to "separate themselves from the mixed multitude," and to act up to the spirit of the injunction there given, [Nehemiah 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 13.1-3). Now it is to the practical improvement of them that I wish to direct your attention; and for that end I shall set before you,

I. The duty of benevolence in general.

Love is a duty.

Love is the very essence of all practical religion. It is in a most peculiar manner inculcated under the Christian dispensation; and it is to be exercised towards every man. God, who is love itself, "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain both on the just and unjust;" and our duty is to resemble him, and to be "perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect, [Matthew 5:44-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44-48)." If we be doubtful how far this precept is to be obeyed, the parable of the good Samaritan gives us a clear and unerring direction, [Luke 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.37). No man under Heaven can be so distant from us, but he is entitled to the offices of our love, so far as our opportunities and ability give scope for its exercise.

Love towards others is absolutely indispensable to our acceptance with God.

Whatever else we may possess, yes, whatever we may either do or suffer for the Lord's sake, if we have not an active principle of love in our hearts, "we are only as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal! [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3)." John even appeals to us on this subject, and makes us judges in our own cause, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17)." In truth, the lack of this principle, whatever else we may possess, will be adduced by our Judge, in the last day, as the ground of our eternal condemnation, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me!' [Matthew 25:41-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41-45)."

Thus, then, as the Moabites and Ammonites are condemned for not administering to the necessities of Israel in the wilderness, so shall we, if we do not exercise benevolence towards our indigent fellow-creatures, to whatever sect or nation they belong, so far as it shall be in our power to afford them the relief which they stand in need of.

Conceiving the general point established, that we should show benevolence to all, I proceed to mark,

II. Our special obligation to exercise it towards God's ancient people.

The Jews have, at all events, the same claim to our benevolence as any other people whatever. There is no exception made in Scripture with respect to them; and, consequently, if we should fail in establishing their peculiar claims, our main argument would remain in all its force. But they have claims superior to any other people upon earth.

1. We are more indebted to them than to any other people under Heaven.

To whom are we indebted for all the instruction which we have received respecting the way of peace and salvation? We owe it all to the Jews. We know nothing of God and of his Christ, but as it has been revealed to us by Jewish prophets and Apostles; yes, the very Savior himself was of Jewish extraction; and, therefore, in that very fact we may well find a motive to exercise benevolence towards all who are related to him according to the flesh. Such infinite obligations as we owe to that people should surely be requited in acts of love towards their descendants; even as God himself often showed mercy to rebellious Israel for Abraham's and for David's sake; and as David for Jonathan's sake spared Mephibosheth, who must otherwise, as a descendant of Saul, have been involved in the ruin of all his household, 2 Samuel 21:7.

2. The very blessings which we enjoy were taken from them, on purpose that they might be transferred to us.

The Jews were once the only people upon earth who possessed the blessings of salvation. But God, in righteous indignation, cast them off; and, in a way of sovereign grace and mercy, took us Gentiles from a wild olive-tree, and grafted us in upon the stock from which they had been broken, and "from which they had been broken on purpose that we might be grafted in, [Romans 11:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.19-20)." The fact is, that every soul among us, that now derives sap and nourishment from God's olive-tree, actually occupies, as it were, the place of a Jew, who has been dispossessed of his privileges, in order that we Gentiles might enjoy them.

Now, I would submit it to your own judgment. Suppose a person to have been disinherited by his father, on purpose that I, who had no relation to him, nor any more worthiness in myself than the disinherited offender, might he made his heir; suppose that disinherited son, in a state of extreme distress, should ask alms of you, while I was living in affluence close at hand; would you not refer him to me, as the person who might well be expected to attend to his case, and to relieve his necessities? If I dismissed him from my door as a worthless vagabond, in whose welfare I had no concern, would you not feel surprise and grief, yes, and a measure of indignation too? If I professed to be a man of piety and benevolence, would you not spurn at my profession, as downright hypocrisy?

Now, then, if under such circumstances you would condemn me, know that "you yourself are the man." For, all that you have of spiritual good was once the exclusive heritage of the Jew; and you are possessing what has been taken from him; yes, you are reveling in abundance, while he is perishing in utter want; and all the obligation which, by your own confession, would attach to me in the case I have stated, is entailed on you; and you, in refusing to fulfill it, are sinning against God, and against your own soul.

3. This very transfer of their blessings to us has been made for the express purpose that we might dispense them to that bereaved people in the hour of their necessity.

True, we are permitted to enjoy them ourselves, yes, and to enjoy them in the richest abundance; but we are particularly entrusted with them for the benefit of the Jews. Hear what God himself has declared on this subject, "Just as you (Gentiles) who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they (Jews) too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you, [Romans 11:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.30-31)."

Now, take again the case before stated; and suppose the man who had disinherited his son, and left me his estate, to have declared in his will, that he left me the estate on purpose that in the hour of his son's extremity I might show kindness to him, and relieve his necessities; what would you say of me then, if I spurned him from my door, and left him to perish with hunger, when I was myself reveling in all manner of luxurious abundance?

Well, "You are the man!" and what you would say of me, you must say of yourself, as long as you neglect to promote the welfare of God's ancient people; yes, "out of your own mouth shall you be judged, you wicked servant."

God has made you a trustee for the Jew; and you have not only betrayed your trust, but left him to perish, when you had in possession all that his soul needs; and which you could impart to him, to the full extent of his necessities, without feeling any sensible diminution of your wealth; yes, when, strange to say! you might increase your wealth by relieving him. Tell me, then, in this view of the matter, whether you have not special obligations to show benevolence to the Jew?

But I must go further, and mark,

III. The more particular obligations which we have to exercise benevolence towards them at this time.

God, by his providence, called the Ammonites and Moabites to show kindness to Israel; and their guilt was greatly aggravated by their manifesting such unwillingness to cooperate with him in his designs of love towards them; and on this account was so heavy a judgment denounced against them, "even to their tenth generation." And is not God now calling us to concur with him in what he is doing for his ancient people? Yes, I think his call to us is clear and loud. Observe,

1. The interest which is now felt in the Christian world for the restoration of the Jews to God.

This interest is really unprecedented. There have been times when a few people have labored for their welfare; but now there is, throughout Europe and America, a very great and general increase of kindness towards them. They are no longer made the universal objects of hatred and persecution, as in former ages; even where there is no love towards them, there is a great diminution of hostility; and in many instances they have been treated with much liberality and respect by Christian governments, being raised by them to a measure of respect and honor that has not been accorded to them in former times. And for their conversion to Christianity, and their restoration to the divine favor, exertions are making to a considerable extent. And is not this of the Lord? Methinks, such a victory over the prejudices of Christians is scarcely less a work of divine power, than was the deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Egyptians; and, as such, it is a call from God to concur with him in his labors of love towards them. See what is at this moment doing among the more pious part of the Christian community, in the circulation of the Scriptures, and especially of the New Testament; and what efforts are making by Christian missionaries for the conversion of the Jews! and I must say, that this is a call from God to us, and that it is no less our privilege, than it is our duty, to obey it.

2. The stir which prevails among the Jews themselves.

This also obtains to a degree unprecedented since the early ages of Christianity. "Truly, there is a stir among the dry bones throughout the whole valley of vision, [Ezekiel 37:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.7-8)." Great numbers of Jews, upon the continent especially, and to a certain extent at home also, begin to think that Christianity may be true; and that that Jesus, whom their fathers crucified, may be the Messiah; and, if they did but know how, in the event of their embracing Christianity, they might support themselves and their families, great multitudes, I doubt not, would pursue their inquiries, until they had attained the true knowledge of their Messiah and of his salvation.

Let me then ask, Whence is this? Is not this the work of God? And is it not an encouragement to us to exert ourselves for their entire conversion? Methinks they are saying to us: "Come over to Macedonia, and help us!" And we ought, one and all of us, according to our ability, to obey the call.

3. The pledges which God has given us in the actual conversion of some to the Christian faith.

If we cannot speak of Pentecostal days, we can declare that God has accompanied his Word with power to the hearts of some; and that "one of a city and two of a tribe" have already, as God has given us reason to expect, [Isaiah 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 17.6), been brought to the saving knowledge of their Messiah. Of those who have embraced "the truth as it is in Jesus," some have attained to a real eminence in the divine life, and are at this moment not inferior to the most exalted characters in the Christian world. This shows that God is about to rebuild his temple; and surely it does not befit us "to dwell in our paneled houses" at ease [Haggai 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 1.4), when he is so plainly calling upon us to co-operate with him; we should rather "strengthen the hands of those who are laboring in this good work," and, like Cyrus, afford every possible facility for the accomplishment of this vast and glorious undertaking, [Ezra 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 1.5-7).

We should endeavor to improve "this acceptable time, [Isaiah 49:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.8);" removing to the utmost of our power all obstacles to their conversion, [Isaiah 62:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.10); and laboring, if by any means we may be God's honored instruments, to bring them home to him, and to present them as "an offering in a clean vessel to the Lord, [Isaiah 66:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.19-20)."

4. The general voice of prophecy.

Prophecy begins to be better understood among us; and it is the united conviction of all who have studied the prophecies, that the time for the restoration and conversion of the Jews is near at hand. The twelve hundred and sixty years spoken of by Daniel, as the period fixed in the divine counsels for the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom among them, are, on any computation, nearly expired. Ought we not then, like Daniel, to put forth our prayers to God for the consummation of this great event, and by all possible means to help it forward?

I think, that, putting all these circumstances together: the concern of Christians, the stir among the Jews, the real converts from among them, and the unquestionable ground which is given us in prophecy to expect their speedy conversion; we may regard it all as a call from God, scarcely less powerful than that given to the Moabites and Ammonites of old, to "come to the help of the Lord," and to labor with all our might for their salvation. In truth, if we do not act thus, we can expect nothing but "the curse of God, [Judges 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 5.23)," and the most lasting tokens of his displeasure.

1. You will say, perhaps, that You have no connection with the Jews, and therefore may well be excused from all concern about them.

But what had the Ammonites and Moabites to do with the Jews? They were descended, not from Abraham, but from Lot, and had never had any fellowship with them. But this was no excuse for their neglect; nor can any similar excuse avail for us.

2. You will reply that it is God's work, and that it should be left to him to accomplish it in his own time and way.

And might not the Ammonites and Moabites say the same? God not only could, but did, supply Their needs by miracle; but this was no justification of those who refused to them the proper offices of love. Nor will this be any justification of our neglect.

Permit me, in conclusion, to bring two things to your remembrance:

1. That the Ammonites and Moabites had an excuse which you have not.

They might have said: These Israelites are going to extirpate the seven nations of Canaan; and we will not concur in such a work as this. But, in converting the Jews to Christ, we adopt the readiest and most certain way for the salvation of the whole world. If they, then, were excluded from the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation, for their inhumanity—then judge what tokens of God's displeasure await you for your indifference.

2. That they were condemned for not coming forth, as volunteers, to "meet Israel with bread and water".

What shall you then be, who are thus entreated and solicited to concur with Jehovah in this good work, if you still refuse your aid, or give it with such indifference, as to show that your heart does not go forth with your hands in the service of the Lord? You remember, that when Nabal said, "Shall I take my bread and my water, and give them to those whom I know not whence they came?" it well near cost him his life; yes, it actually did cost him his life, [1 Samuel 25:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.11); [1 Samuel 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.21-22); [1 Samuel 25:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.37-38). And I tremble to think what judgments await you, if you resist our importunity, and refuse to co-operate with God in the work proposed.

But "I hope better things of you, my brethren, though I thus speak;" and I hope and trust that you will henceforth, each according to his ability, be workers together with God for the salvation of God's ancient people, and through them for the salvation of the whole world.

Let me not be misunderstood; I am far from intending to say that all who have neglected this sacred cause are equally liable to God's displeasure; for it is but lately that the attention of the Christian world has been called to it; but I think you will agree with me, that it is now high time to exert ourselves for God, and to redeem, as far as possible, the time we have lost. The cause well deserves our most assiduous efforts; and we may be sure that God, who so indignantly resented the supineness of the Ammonites, will richly repay all that we can do for the furtherance of his gracious designs; for he has said, "Blessed is he who blesses you; and cursed is he who curses you."

#215

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE

**[Deuteronomy 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 23.5)**

"However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you."

To those who are ignorant of the way of salvation, we preach Christ crucified; for "there is no other name under Heaven but his, whereby any man can be saved."

But to those who are well instructed in the fundamental truths of our holy religion, we bring forward rather what relates to the life of godliness; having laid the foundation, we endeavor to build upon it a suitable superstructure.

Now, a realizing sense of God's care and love, such a sense of his goodness as leads us to live altogether by faith in him—is one of the sublimest attainments that can be made in this world. And to assist you in this, will be my endeavor at this time.

Let us notice, then, from the words before us,

I. God's love to his ancient people.

This appeared in bringing them forth out of Egypt, and in preserving them throughout their wanderings in the wilderness; and especially, also, in the instance that is here specified, the counteracting of the designs of Balaam, and "the turning of his curse into a blessing unto them."

See the account given to us by Moses.

To enter fully into this, the whole history of the transaction, the 22nd, 23nd, and 24th chapters of the Book of Numbers should be attentively perused. Instigated by a desire to obtain "the wages of unrighteousness," yet conscious that he was under a restraint from the Most High God, Balaam madly pursued his object, even after he was rebuked for his iniquity by the donkey on which he rode, and which, was enabled to utter the reproof in language used by man, [2 Peter 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.15-16). Balaam constantly confesses his inability to go beyond what Jehovah should see fit to permit; yet as constantly sought to evade or change the divine counsels, and to execute the project for which he was hired. Every distinct prophecy which he utters, rises in force and grandeur; and when complained of by Balak for pouring forth blessings upon them, instead of denouncing curses against them, he confesses, "I have received commandment to bless; and God has blessed; and I cannot reverse it, [Numbers 23:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.20)."

At last, finding how vain it was to seek by enchantments to alter the divine purpose, Balaam forbore to offer any more of his sacrifices. and yielded to the impulse within him to foretell the certain successes of those whom he had sought to destroy, [Numbers 24:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.1-9). And, having thus provoked the king of Moab to dismiss him without the promised rewards, [Numbers 24:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.10-14), he resumed his prophetic strains, and declared, not only that this people should triumph over Moab, but that from them should One arise, who should establish a universal empire, and have dominion over the whole world! [Numbers 24:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.15-19).

All this, Joshua brought to the remembrance of Israel, long after they had been established in the land of Canaan; saying, "When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand, [Joshua 24:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.9-10)."

Now all this was the fruit of God's unchanging love.

God had chosen them to himself in Abraham, and had ordained that they should be to him a peculiar people above all others upon the face of the whole earth. In this choice of them God had been influenced, not by any foreseen worthiness in them; for he knew, from the beginning, what a stiff-necked people they would prove; but solely by his own sovereign will and pleasure, "He loved them because he would love them! [Deuteronomy 7:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6-9)." To them, also, had he promised the land of Canaan; and therefore, when the time was come for their possession of it, no enemy could stand before them, nor could any conspiracies which could be formed prevail against them. Hence, in despite of all the efforts which Balaam made to curse them—he was constrained to "bless them still."

From the whole of God's kindness to them, we may be led to contemplate,

II. God's love to his elect people at this day.

His people are now redeemed, even as they were of old, only from infinitely sorer bondage, a bondage to sin and Satan, to death and Hell. They are brought also through a dreary wilderness, towards the heavenly Canaan. They have enemies also to contend with. True it is, they have not to dispossess any of their land; nor do they, by invading the property of others, provoke hostility; but they have enemies notwithstanding, yes, and enemies who are bent upon their destruction; but from all of them God will surely deliver his redeemed people.

He will deliver them both from men and devils.

From the beginning of the world have God's chosen people been opposed and persecuted, even from the time of Abel to the present hour. It was the superior piety of Abel that called forth the resentment of the envious Cain, and stimulated him to imbrue his hands in his brother's blood, [1 John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.12). And our Lord puts the question to his malignant enemies, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" It might be thought, indeed, that it would be impossible for anyone to hate and persecute the holy Jesus, in whose whole life not a single flaw could be found, and who, by his benevolent and unnumbered miracles, must have endeared himself to every one. But the brighter his light was, the more were the children of darkness incensed against him; so that they never ceased, until they had prevailed against him, and "crucified the Lord of Glory."

All his Apostles, too, were objects of the world's hatred; and our Lord has told us, that all his followers will have their cross to bear, after the example which he has set for us. And do we not find it so? Is there a faithful servant of the Lord, especially if he fills any important station, and is active in honoring his Divine Master. Is there one I say, that is not reviled and persecuted for righteousness sake? True, fires are not now kindled, as once they were, to consume them, because the laws of the land forbid it; but it is as true at this day as ever it was in the apostolic age, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

And has the hostility of Satan at all abated? Does not "that roaring lion go about at this day as much as ever, seeking whom he may devour?" What can the Apostle mean, when he says, "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, (not with flesh and blood alone,) but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places? [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12)." Or for what end are we still enjoined to "put on the whole armor of God? [Ephesians 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.13)," if we have not still many enemies to contend with?

But God will preserve us from them all, and "turn their curses into blessings." "Whatever will ultimately advance our welfare, he will permit; but whatever would have an injurious effect, he will avert; as it is said, "The wrath of man shall praise You, [Psalm 76:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.10)."

We may not see the precise way in which good shall be brought out of evil; Joseph could form no idea of the benefit which was ultimately to accrue from all his trials; nor could Job from his; but they were constrained to acknowledge, that, however designed for evil, the events, every one of them, issued in good; and thus has God engaged, that "we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose! [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)." And that their "light and momentary afflictions shall work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17)."

To this Almighty God is pledged, by the love that he bears towards us.

God has loved his people with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness he both draws us to him, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3), and secures our welfare. Now, the record in my text is especially intended by God himself to illustrate and confirm this truth. Hear what God says by the Prophet Micah, "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal, that you may know the righteousness of the Lord, [Micah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.5)." God is a righteous and faithful God; and he has engaged, that "no weapon that is formed against his people shall prosper," and that "none shall prevail against them to pluck them out of his hands." We may be perfectly assured, therefore, that he will keep them to the end; and that "not one jot or tittle of his Word will ever fail." "Having loved his own, he will love them to the end! [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1)."

I close with a word or two of **advice**.

1. Be not hasty in your anticipations of evil as the result of your trials.

Jacob, on the loss of his favorite son Joseph, exclaimed, "All these things are against me!" But that was the very event which God had ordained for the preservation of himself and his whole family; yes, and for the completion of all his promises respecting the Messiah, and the salvation of the whole world by him. And perhaps that very trial, of which we are ready to complain, is, according to his eternal purpose, to be the destined means of preserving us from destruction, and of preparing us for glory. Wait, and "see the end of the Lord, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11);" and you will find as much reason to bless God for your severest troubles, as for the most acceptable of all his blessings.

2. Learn in every dispensation to acknowledge your heavenly Father's love.

There is not, in fact, any single trial that does not proceed from God. "Not a hair of your head can fall" but by his gracious permission! Men, devils, yes the very elements, are only instruments in his hands to fulfill his will! [Isaiah 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5); [Psalm 148:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.8). The Jews, in crucifying the Messiah, executed only "what God's will and counsel had determined before to be done, [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28);" and, though "they neither meant nor thought so," they were his agents to accomplish what was necessary for the redemption of God's people. Men and devils may have prepared a furnace for you; but it is God who puts you into it, to purify you from your dross, and to "bring you forth as vessels fit for the Master's use." True, he will punish those agents; as he did Balaam, who was slain among the enemies of God. But you "he will make perfect through sufferings," and recompense in proportion to all that you have endured for him.

#216

GLEANING, A DIVINE ORDINANCE

**[Deuteronomy 24:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 24.19-22)**

"When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this."

It is surprising to see to what minute things Jehovah condescends in his legislation to the Jews. In no other community under Heaven were such things accounted worthy of distinct and authoritative enactments. People must not yoke together in a plough an ox and a donkey. They must not seethe a goat in its mother's milk. In taking a bird's nest, they must not take the mother with her young.

But "God, their great Lawgiver, is love;" and all his laws breathed love, not to men only, but to the whole creation; and by them he has shown, that he desired all his people to live under the influence of this divine principle; and, in the smallest matters no less than in the greatest, to bring it into exercise.

Hence he appointed, that, when they gathered in the fruits of the earth, they should guard against selfishness, and manifest a spirit of love towards their more indigent and afflicted brethren.

In the very words which I have just read, the threefold repetition of them shows what tenderness there is in the bosom of Almighty God towards the poor and afflicted, and how desirous he is that all his people should resemble him; and for this end he commands, that, in the season of their own prosperity, they should be especially mindful of "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow." The manner in which he enforces this command respecting gleaning, will lead me to consider,

I. The privilege of gleaning, as accorded to the Jews.

The Jews had been brought out from Egypt from the sorest bondage.

By mighty signs and wonders had God brought them out; and had throughout all their generations caused them to enjoy blessings for which they had not labored, and to reap a harvest which they had never sown. For the space of forty years in the wilderness they had no occasion for agricultural labors; but from day to day did they glean around their tents the food which the Great Proprietor of all caused to be scattered for their use. And when they came into the promised land, "they found great and goodly cities which they had never built, and houses filled with all manner of good things which they had never filled, and wells which they had never dug, [Deuteronomy 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 6.10-11)." Like gleaners, they had only to enter on the field, and to appropriate everything which they found to their own use.

From this consideration they were enjoined to give somewhat of a like advantage to their poorer brethren.

"Freely they had received; and freely they were to give." They were to bear in mind the misery from which their forefathers had been delivered; and from a sense of gratitude to their Heavenly Benefactor, they were to show love to their brethren, and liberality to the poor. They were not to be exact even in the reaping of their crops, but to leave the corners of their fields standing, [Leviticus 19:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.9), for the benefit of "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow;" and, after having gathered in their grain, or their grapes, or olives, they were not to be going over their ground or their trees again, but to leave the remaining produce for those whose necessities called for such aid; yes, and to rejoice in seeing the needs of others supplied, though at their expense. And surely this was reasonable in the highest degree, since the whole land itself had been originally the gift of God, as was also the produce of it in every successive year. What could their own labors effect without the fruitful showers and the genial warmth of the sun? On God they depended, notwithstanding their own efforts; and God gave them an assurance, that on a cheerful and liberal discharge of their duty towards their brethren, they should receive his blessing on their own labors.

But let me proceed to mark,

II. The far higher grounds of this privilege as existing among Christians.

True, the Jewish law does not extend to us; nor does the law of this land accord in this respect with the Jewish law. The matter has been tried, and authoritatively decided. But, so general is the sense of propriety which exists in this kingdom, that the privilege of gleaning is conceded to the poor, as much as if it were a right established by law; and I suppose that for every thousand pounds that are paid in rent to the proprietor of the soil, not less than one hundred pounds, and perhaps two hundred, are gratuitously left to be gathered by the poor in the way of gleaning. And this is as it should be, for,

Let it be recollected from what misery we have been redeemed.

Not an Egyptian bondage merely was ours, but a bondage to sin and Satan, death and Hell. And what has the Great Proprietor of Heaven and earth done for us? He has, by the blood of his only dear Son, brought us out from this bondage; and in the field of his Gospel has strewed a rich profusion of food, of which all of us may eat, and live forever! Take the inspired volume—there is the field, into which all may enter and gather for themselves. The promises there scattered, and standing, as it were, in every corner, [Leviticus 19:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.9), of the Bible, are sufficient for the whole world. All that is required is that we go in and glean for ourselves.

The manna in the wilderness nourished those only who gathered it for their daily use; and, if the poor will avail themselves of the bounty scattered in our fields, they must go out and gather it. Were all the harvest left upon the field, it would benefit none, unless it were reaped and appropriated to our use. Just so, all the promises of salvation will have been given to us in vain, if we do not exert ourselves, from day to day, to appropriate them to ourselves, for our own personal benefit. But, if we will "labor thus for the meat that endures unto eternal life, the Son of Man will give it to us" according to the utmost extent of our necessities. Then shall we gather all the blessings, both of grace and glory; for no one of which have we any other claim, than as gratuitous endowments, bestowed by the Lord of the harvest on his necessitous and dependent people!

And can we have any stronger argument than this for liberality to the poor?

Methinks, "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow," should be made to share our temporal blessings, when we are so richly and gratuitously nourished with those which are spiritual and eternal. We are taught to "love one another, as Christ has loved us, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)." And when Paul was urging the Corinthian Church to liberality, he could find no stronger argument than this, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich—yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)." Say, brethren, whether this consideration is not amply sufficient to animate us to the most enlarged liberality for his sake? Yes, truly; instead of grudging to others the remnants of our harvest, we should be ready to say with Zaccheus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, [Luke 19:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.8)." Indeed, even for our own sakes we might practice this divine lesson; for "if we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord; and whatever we lay out, he will pay us again." In truth, to "honor the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase, is the way, the surest way, to fill our barns with plenty, and to make our presses burst out with new wine, [Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10)."

But I rather dwell on the other motive only; because the "love of Christ," if duly felt in our hearts, "will constrain us" to every possible exercise of love to him, and to the poor for his sake [Matthew 25:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.45).

Let me now, then, address you all.

1. As gleaners, avail yourselves of your privilege.

I say again, the whole field is open before you! As God's servant, I have been commissioned to "scatter handfuls for you," that you may not labor in vain; yes, I have invited you to "come, even among the sheaves," and, so far from "reproaching you" for your boldness, have encouraged you, [Ruth 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 2.16), by the strongest assurances of the unbounded liberality of my Divine Master.

Bear in mind, that you are gleaners. You must indeed labor with diligence; but the whole that you gather is a gift; you never raised by your own personal labor one single grain of what you gather; all your labor consists in gathering up what the Great Proprietor, your Lord and Savior, has strewed for you. While you, then, have all the benefit—let him have all the glory!

2. As proprietors, perform the duty that is here enjoined to you.

Cultivate, every one of you, a spirit of liberality. Let "the stranger" share your bounty; and let "the fatherless and widows" be the special objects of your care and tender compassion. If you do not comply readily with this injunction, what pretensions can you have to call yourselves followers of Christ? "If any man sees his brother in need, and shuts up his compassion from him, how does the the love of God dwell in him? [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17)." "He who loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" On the other hand, "abound in the riches of liberality;" and "so shall your light break forth as the morning, [Isaiah 58:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.7-8)," and "a recompense be given you at the resurrection of the just, [Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.14)."

#217

GRATITUDE TO GOD ENFORCED

**[Deuteronomy 26:3-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.3-9)**

"Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the LORD your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. "You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare this day to the LORD my God that I have entered the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.' "Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a perishing Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 'Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

The ceremonial law is considered in general as a system of burdensome rites, that had in themselves no intrinsic value, and were useful only as prefiguring the mysteries of the Gospel. But though this view of it is in a measure correct—yet we may disparage that law too much; because there was in many of its ordinances a proper tendency to generate divine affections.

In the law before us, certain professions were required to be made at the same time that the first-fruits were presented; and the words that were put into the mouths of the offerers, reminded them of the obligations which they owed to God, and, consequently, were suited to excite, as well as to express, their gratitude to God. As far as respected the deliverance of that people from Egypt, there is no further occasion for the law; and therefore it is superseded with the rest of the Jewish ritual; but as an intimation of the high value which God sets on grateful recollections, it is worthy of our highest regard.

We shall take occasion from it,

I. To point out our duty in reference to the mercies we have received.

We surely ought not to receive them like the brute beasts which have no understanding; it is our duty to act as intelligent creatures; and to make the mercies of our God an occasion of augmented benefit to our souls. For this purpose we ought:

1. To review our mercies frequently.

Even national mercies ought not to be overlooked by us. It was to them in a peculiar manner that the ordinance before us had respect. The Jews were required not only to look back to the deliverance of their nation from Egypt, but to trace back their origin to Jacob their father, whose mother was a Syrian, who himself married two Syrian women, and himself lived in Syria for twenty years; whose children also, with the exception of Benjamin, were all born in Syria, and were the heads and progenitors of all the Jewish tribes. Jacob on many occasions was near perishing; when he fled from the face of Esau, when he was followed by Laban his father-in-law, and when he was met again by Esau at the head of four hundred men, he was in danger of being destroyed; in which case his children would either never have existed, or would all have been destroyed with him. But God had preserved him from every danger, and brought his posterity to Canaan agreeably to his promise; and they in grateful remembrance of this were to profess it openly from year to year, "A Syrian ready to perish was our father."

Perhaps it rarely occurs to our minds that we have quite as much reason for gratitude on a national account as even the Jews themselves; but, if we call to mind the state of our forefathers, who were as ignorant of God as the most savage Indians, and remember, that we ourselves would have been bowing down to stocks and stones just like them, if the light of the Gospel had not been sent to dispel our darkness, we shall see that we may well adopt the language of our text and say, "A Syrian ready to perish was our father."

But we should be careful also to review our personal mercies. Let us look back to the weakness of infancy, the thoughtlessness of childhood, the folly of youth, and see now marvelously God has preserved us to the present hour—while millions have been cut off by a premature death, or left to protract a miserable existence in pain, or infamy, or poverty. The means by which we have been rescued from danger, and even the minutest occurrences that have contributed to our deliverance, are worthy of our most attentive survey, and must be distinctly viewed, if ever we would "understand aright the loving-kindness of the Lord."

We must not however dwell solely, or even chiefly, on temporal mercies—but must raise our thoughts to those which are spiritual. What matter for reflection will these afford! If we consider:  
the former blindness and ignorance of our minds,  
the hardness and depravity of our hearts,  
the indifference which we manifested towards the concerns of eternity,  
and the awful danger in which we stood  
—what reason have we to bless our God that he did not take us away in such a state! And, if we can say, as in our text, that "we are come unto the country which the Lord swore unto our fathers to give us," and are "partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus," then have we indeed cause for thankfulness, even such cause, as we may well reflect upon to the last hour of our lives; On these then we should "muse until the fire burn, and we are constrained to speak of them with our tongues."

In the ordinance before us a particular season was appointed for this exercise; and it is well to have seasons fixed upon in our own minds for a more solemn commemoration of the mercies received by us. If the commencement of the new year, for instance, or our birthday, were regularly dedicated to this service, it could not be better spent. But, if our minds are duly impressed with a sense of God's goodness to us, we shall not be satisfied with allotting one particular period to the contemplation of it, but shall be glad to think and speak of it every day we live.

2. To requite our mercies gratefully.

The Israelites were appointed to offer the first-fruits of the earth to God, in token that they acknowledged him as the Proprietor and Giver of all that they possessed. Now it is not necessary that we should present the same specific offerings as they; but we must dedicate to God the first-fruits of our time, and the first-fruits of our property. We should fear the Lord in our youth, and not think it sufficient to give him the gleanings and the dregs of life; and we should "honor him with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase;" "giving liberally, if we have much, and, if we have but little, doing our diligence gladly to give of that little."

But chiefly should we consecrate ourselves to God; for we ourselves are, as the Apostle calls us, "a kind of first-fruits of God's creatures, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18)." Our bodies and our souls, together with all their faculties and powers, are God's, "We are not our own; we are bought with a price; and to honor him is our bounden duty." This is the very intent of God's mercies to us; nor do we ever requite them as we ought, until we "present ourselves to God as living sacrifices," and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his."

This surrender of ourselves to him should be most solemn and devout. The image in our text admirably illustrates it. The priest took the basket that contained the first-fruits, and "set it down before the altar of the Lord his God." Thus should we go into the very presence of our God, and dedicate ourselves to him, as his redeemed people. Rather, if we may so speak, we should put ourselves into the hands of our great High-Priest, that he may "present us holy and unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight."

Such is obviously our duty. We proceed now,

II. To recommend it to your attention.

Persons in general are ready to defer the performance of this duty under an idea that it does not pertain to them, at least not at present, and that an attention to it would deprive them of much happiness; but we must press upon your consciences the observance of it, for it is,

1. Dedication to God is a **universal** duty.

Who is there that has not received innumerable mercies for which he has reason to be thankful? Truly marvelous as are the displays of God's goodness recorded in the Scriptures, there is no man who might not find as wonderful records of it in his own life, if he could trace all the dispensations of Providence towards him, as clearly and minutely as they are marked in the inspired volume towards God's people of old.

But there is one point wherein all mankind are upon a level; we may all look back to the state of Adam after he had fallen, and had reduced himself and all his posterity to eternal ruin. How awful our condition then! Truly we should have been forever like the fallen angels, destitute of all help or hope, if God had not marvelously interposed to rescue us from death and Hell by the sacrifice of his only dear Son! With what emphasis then may every one of us say, "A Syrian ready to perish was our father!" Here all the wonders of redeeming love unfold themselves to our view; and he who has no heart to adore God for them, has no hope of any interest in God's saving mercies.

2. Dedication to God is a **reasonable** duty.

If we have conferred favors on any person for years together, do we not expect our kindness to be acknowledged and requited as opportunities shall occur? Do we not look with abhorrence upon a man that is insensible to all the obligations that can be heaped upon him? But what are the kindnesses which we can show to a fellow-creature in comparison with those which we have received from God? Shall we then expect a tribute of gratitude from him, and think ourselves at liberty to withhold gratitude from our Heavenly Benefactor? Let the world ridicule devotion, if they will, and call love to God enthusiasm; but we will maintain that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and that an entire surrender of ourselves to him is "a reasonable service."

Do we inquire, whence it is that ungodly men regard the sublimer exercises of religion as unnecessary and absurd? We answer, They have never considered what obligations they owe to God. Only let them once become acquainted with "the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ," and they will see, that reason, no less than revelation, demands of us this tribute; and that every enlightened mind must of necessity accord with that of the Psalmist, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me!" "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name!"

3. Dedication to God is a **delightful** duty.

In the passage before us it is associated with joy, verse 11; and indeed, what is such a service but a foretaste of Heaven itself? Did anyone ever engage in it, and not find his soul elevated by it to a joy which nothing else could afford? Let anyone ruminate on earthly things, and his meditations will only augment his cares, or at best inspire him with a very transient joy. Let him dwell upon his own corruptions, and, though they are a proper subject of occasional meditation, they will only weigh down his spirits, and perhaps lead him to desponding fears.

But let the goodness of God, and the wonders of redeeming love, be contemplated by him—and he will soon have his mind raised above earthly things, and fired with a holy ambition to honor and to resemble God. See how the Psalmist expresses his thoughts on such occasions [Psalm 145:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-7); what glorious language! how sublime must have been the feelings of his soul, when uttering it before God! Know then that this is the state to which we would invite you, and that the daily experience of it is the best preparative for the joys above!

#218

COVENANTING WITH GOD EXPLAINED

**[Deuteronomy 26:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.16-19)**

"The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in his ways, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws, and that you will obey him. And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, name and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised."

The covenant which was made with the Jews at Mount Horeb, though materially different from that which exists under the Christian dispensation, was yet intended to shadow forth that which all Christians are called upon to enter into with our God. The Jewish covenant had respect in a great measure to temporal blessings, the bestowment of which was suspended entirely on their performance of certain conditions; whereas ours relates altogether to spiritual blessings; and though it has conditions as well as theirs, it provides strength for the performance of them, and thereby secures from failure all those who cordially embrace it. We may take occasion therefore from the words before us to consider,

I. Our covenant **engagements**.

The Jews were required to avow, or profess openly, their acceptance of God as their God, and their determination to obey his will in all things; and such are the engagements which we also are called to take upon ourselves under the Christian dispensation:

1. To accept God as our God.

The Jews had most satisfactory evidence that Jehovah was the only true God, and that he alone was worthy to be worshiped and adored. But, as great as were the evidences of his kindness towards them, they are nothing in comparison with the demonstrations of his love to us. The gift of his only dear Son to die for us must forever eclipse every other expression of his love, [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.8); and this peculiarly distinguishes the view in which we are to accept him; we must regard him as our incarnate God, as "God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them."

Think a moment what is implied in such an acceptance of God; it supposes:

that we feel our guilty, helpless, and hopeless state by nature;

that we see the suitableness and sufficiency of the provision which God has made for us in the Son of his love;

and that we are determined to have no dependence on anything but on the meritorious death and the all-sufficient grace of the Lord Jesus.

But it is not merely a secret determination which God requires; that determination must be avowed—we must avow him to be the Lord our God. We must not be ashamed of Christ, but must "confess him before men," and be as bold in acknowledging him, as the ungodly are in their allegiance to the god of this world.

2. To act towards God as befits us in that relation.

Universal obedience to his commands was promised by the Jews of old; and the same must be promised by us also. We need not attempt to discriminate between the various terms here used; this we are sure is intended by them: that we are to yield obedience to the whole of his will as far as we know it, neither regarding anything as unworthy of our notice, nor anything as too difficult for us to perform; we must "hearken to his voice," as the angels in Heaven do, [Psalm 103:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.20), with an unwearied solicitude to know more of his will, and an incessant readiness to comply with the first intimations of it.

We must be searching and meditating continually to find out what he speaks to us in his written word; and be listening also attentively to the still small voice of his Spirit, speaking to us in our consciences; and, whatever we ascertain to be his mind and will, that we are to do without hesitation, and without reserve.

Now this we must determine through grace to do. We must not come to God only as a Savior to deliver us, but also as a Lord to govern us; and we must resolve that henceforth "no other Lord shall have dominion over us." Nor must this determination be kept secret; this also must be openly avowed; we must let it be seen "whose we are, and whom we serve;" and must evince a firmness in his service which neither the terrors nor allurements of the world can ever shake.

Precisely corresponding with our engagements are,

II. Our covenant **advantages**.

God affords us ample encouragement to "lay hold on his covenant;" for he avows his determination,

1. To own us as his redeemed people.

The very moment that we look to Christ as "all our salvation and all our desire," God will set his seal upon us as "his special treasure." Just as a person who has bought anything of great value, regards it from that moment as his own property, and uses all proper methods for the securing the full possession of it, so does God, "he sets apart the godly for himself;" he gives "his angels charge over him," and "owns" him from that day to be "his purchased possession." He "owns" it, I say, and makes it manifest both to the man himself and to the world around him.

To the man himself he gives "the Spirit of adoption, enabling him to cry, Abba, Father!" and to ascertain, by "the witness of that Spirit, that he is a child of God, [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-16)." To the world around him also God makes it manifest, by enabling him to "walk as Christ walked," and "to shine as a light in the midst of a dark benighted world."

Instantly does the change in him become apparent, so that his friends and neighbors cannot but confess that he is a new creature; and, though some will ascribe the change to one thing, and some to another, they are constrained to acknowledge, that his new mode of life is such as they cannot attain to, and such as approves itself to be the very work of God himself.

2. To bestow on us blessings worthy of that relation.

The first thing which the child of God desires, is holiness; and behold, as soon as ever he embraces the Christian covenant, God engages to make him holy, and to enable him "to keep all his commandments." This is a peculiar point of difference between the Jewish covenant and ours, as we have already observed; and it is that which is our greatest encouragement under the consciousness we feel of our own weakness. God "will put his Sprit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27)." This is actually a part of his covenant engagements; and must be esteemed by us as our security for the enjoyment of all our other advantages.

Together with this does God undertake to give us the most exalted honor and happiness, "he will make us high above all people in praise, and in name, and in honor." "Behold," says the Apostle, "what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Yes, he "calls us not servants, but friends," yes, "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." For us has he prepared crowns and kingdoms, that we may "sit with him on his throne," and be partakers of his glory forever and ever. This, and infinitely more than language can express, has "God prepared for those who love him," and who embrace "his covenant of life and peace;" and he pledges his truth and faithfulness for the performance of his Word.

O Christian, what advantages are these! What tongue can ever utter them! What imagination can ever conceive of them aright! Know however, that, as unspeakable as they are, they are all your rightful portion, your everlasting inheritance!

APPLICATION.

Twice is the expression used, "this day;" "this day you have avowed;" and "this day God has avowed, etc." Permit me then to ask: Have you ever known such a day as this, a day wherein you have solemnly surrendered yourselves to God as his redeemed people, with a full determination to serve him with your whole hearts; and a day wherein he has "manifested himself to you as he does not unto the world," and "sealed you with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the pledge of your inheritance?"

To those who have known such a day,

perhaps you were brought to it through many and severe afflictions, [Zechariah 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.9); [Ezekiel 20:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.37); but have you ever regretted for a moment the means by which such a blessed end has been accomplished? We say then: Let not the remembrance of that day escape from your minds. You cannot but recollect:  
what a solemn transaction it was between God and your own souls,  
what shame you felt that ever you had alienated yourselves from him,  
what gratitude to him for his gracious acceptance of you,  
what a determination to live entirely to his glory,  
and what a persuasion that you could never be base enough to forget the engagements of that day!

But do you not find that the good impressions have been greatly weakened, and that, while the ardor of your will and affections has cooled—little remains except the convictions of your judgment?

Ah! beware of "leaving your first love," or of resting satisfied with past experiences. Know that it is not on any one day that these transactions must be realized, but every day of your lives. You should be again and again renewing your vows unto the Lord, and be daily occupied in fulfilling them. Look to it then, that:  
neither the cares of the world,  
nor the deceitfulness of riches,  
nor the lusts of the flesh,  
nor the fear of man,  
nor any other thing,  
"choke the good seed within you, or prevent your bringing forth fruit unto perfection."

To those who wish for such a day,

for we trust that such there are among us, who yet cannot speak of such a day as past, we would earnestly suggest some necessary cautions:

Delay not thus to give yourselves up to God; but be particularly on your guard not to do it in a legal, self-righteous, self-dependent mistakes which are very generally spirit. There are two made, which yet are of most fatal consequence:

The first mistake is that our covenant-engagements relate only to the performance of our duties; whereas they relate primarily to our acceptance of God as our reconciled God in Christ Jesus.

The second mistake is that we are to found all our hopes of covenant advantages on our own obedience; whereas we should regard them, not as purchased by us, but as bestowed on us in the covenant, and as secured to us in Christ Jesus. Happy would it be, if this matter were more clearly understood. It lies at the very root of all our comfort, and of all our stability. Until we see all our holiness secured to us as well as required of us, we shall never rely as we ought on the promises of God, or give to him the glory due unto his name.

See how the covenant is expressed by an inspired prophet; not only does it say, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God," but, to secure their part of the covenant as well as God's, God promises "not to turn away from them, or to allow them to turn away from him, [Jeremiah 32:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.38-41)." Thus is "the covenant ordered in all things, and therefore sure;" but it is sure to those alone who lay hold on it with a just apprehension of its nature, and a simple dependence on its provisions.

To those who have no idea of any such day,

may probably be found among us. There are some who seem to take credit to themselves for never having made any profession of religion at all. But can they suppose that this is any excuse for their irreligion, or that it invalidates their obligation to serve the Lord? See the solemn injunction in the text, verse 16; can they make that void? See what is the prophet's description of things under the gospel dispensation, [Jeremiah 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.4-5); there not only are the Lord's people represented as encouraging one another to covenant thus with God, but the state of their minds is accurately delineated, and the whole mode of their proceeding described.

Be it known then that this is the duty of every one among us. If we would have God for our portion in eternity, we must accept him now; and, if we would be his people in a better world, we must give ourselves up to him now. To make excuses is vain. This duty is paramount to every other; and therefore we call upon all of you this day to "avow God for your God," that he, in the day of judgment, may acknowledge you as his redeemed people.

#219

THE EXTENT AND EXCELLENCY OF THE MORAL LAW

**[Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26)**

'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.'

And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

The law here spoken of is the moral law Several particulars of the moral law are enumerated from verse 15 to the end; and here it is mentioned summarily, as comprehending the whole. This every person is bound to keep in its utmost extent. The curse of God is denounced against every violation of it. This sanction, tremendous as it is, should be universally approved. Hence God commanded his people to express their approbation of it. "Amen" in Scripture signifies an affirmation, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3), or a wish, [Matthew 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.13). The adding of "Amen" to the doctrine of the text implies,

I. The adding of "Amen" to the doctrine of the text implies an assent to its truth.

The doctrine is, that the law of God curses us for one offence.

This is often, through ignorance of the Scriptures, denied; but it may be established by a cloud of witnesses.

Death is declared to be the necessary fruit of sin **[James 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.15)**.

Every deviation from the line of duty subjects us to God's wrath, [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18). An idle word is sufficient to condemn us Matthew, 12:36. The most secret thought is punishable by our Judge, [Ecclesiastes 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.14). Omissions of duty will entail on us the same judgments, [Matthew 25:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.30). A violation of the law in one point ensures condemnation as truly, though not as severely, as a rejection of the whole, [James 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10). One single transgression brought misery on the whole world, [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12); [Romans 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.18-19); and this was agreeable to the terms of the Adamic covenant, [Genesis 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.17). Paul speaks of this penalty as still in force, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23). It is not said that death is the wages of much or heinous sin, but of sin—that is of any and every sin. He even cites the very words of the text in proof of the doctrine which we deduce from them, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). Hence the law is called "a ministration of death."

None, however, will cordially assent to the truth of this doctrine until they see ground for,

II. A confession of its reasonableness.

The law, both in its extent and sanctions, is highly reasonable.

We would not be understood to make the doctrine depend on its reasonableness, and much less on our statement of its reasonableness; we only wish to vindicate it from the objections which unhumbled reason would bring against it. If we were not able to urge one reason in its defense, it would be quite sufficient to say, 'God has revealed it, and therefore it must be reasonable;' for nothing can be unreasonable which proceeds from him.

That one sin may reasonably subject us to condemnation appears:

From analogy.

Offences in civil society are rated according to the dignity of the person against whom they are committed. Should we strike an inferior, an equal, a superior, a benefactor, a parent, a sovereign—the offence would proportionally rise; so that, what in one case might be expiated by a small fine, in another would be counted worthy of death.

Now sin is committed against an infinitely great and good God. Hence it contracts an inexpressible malignity. Moreover one act of treason is punished with death. Nor is this judged unreasonable in human governments. Why then may not the death of the soul be annexed to every instance of rebellion against God? Is not God's majesty to be regarded as well as man's? and his government to be supported as well as man's?

From the nature of sin.

Sin:  
dishonors God,  
takes part with Satan,  
and unfits for Heaven!

Are these such light evils, that they not only may, but must be overlooked?

Is God forced to honor those who dishonor him?

Has not He as much right to be our enemy, as we have to be his?

When he sees us destitute of any love to him:  
Is he bound to renew our hearts that we may be capable of enjoying him?  
Is he unjust if he leaves us to eat the fruit of our own way?  
Is it unreasonable that God should vindicate his own honor?

Are we at liberty to insult him, and he not to punish us?

May we be his enemies, and must he treat us as friends?

When our first parents sinned, was God obliged to remedy the evil they had brought upon themselves?

Might he not have left them, as he had already left the fallen angels?

Was there any necessity that God should assume the human nature, and offer himself as a sacrifice for his creatures' sin?

If so, they, even after their fall, might have disdained to ask for Heaven as a gift; they might still have demanded it as a debt. Then God is under a law, and we are free from a law; we are free to live as we please; and he is under a necessity to save us at all events. The absurdity of such positions is obvious!

But an extorted confession of its reasonableness is not sufficient.

God requires of us further,

III. An acknowledgment of its excellency.

The law thus sanctioned is truly excellent; any other would have been less worthy of the great Lawgiver.

Had it required less than perfect obedience, or had the penalty of transgressing it been no more than a temporary punishment, neither his holiness nor his justice would have been so conspicuous.

Any other would have been more ruinous to man.

A permission to violate that law in ever so small a degree would have been a licence to make ourselves miserable. Had death been annexed to many transgressions, and not to one:

We would have been at a loss to know our state.

We would have been with more difficulty drawn from seeking righteousness by our obedience to the law.

We would have seen less evil in transgressing the law.

We would have been less anxious to obtain a saving interest in Christ.

Thus, though mercy is provided, we would have been less likely to obtain it, or to secure its continuance.

Any other would have been less honorable to Christ.

He would have endured less suffering for us. His interposition for us had been less needed; it would have discovered far less love. The obligations conferred by it would have been comparatively small. He would have been less honored by all. Some would have been saved without his aid. Many would, to eternity, have ascribed the honor of their salvation to themselves.

In this view "the ministration of death was glorious, [2 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.7); [2 Corinthians 3:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.9-11)."

Such a discovery of its excellency will immediately produce,

IV. An approbation of it with respect to our own particular case.

A person taught of God will cordially approve of this law; he will love it as the means of humbling him in the dust.

It reveals to him, as in a looking-glass, his manifold transgressions. It convinces him of his desert of punishment. It shows him the impossibility of making reparation to God. It constrains him to cry, "Save me, Lord, or I perish!" And thus it brings him to the state he most desires, [Luke 18:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.13).

He will delight in it as endearing Christ to his soul.

The depth of his disorder makes him value the Physician. He sees his need of one to "bear the iniquity of his holy things, [Exodus 28:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.38)." He finds that Christ is set forth for this very purpose [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4). Hence he rejoices in Christ as his Almighty Savior.

Such an approbation of it was expressed by Jeremiah, [Jeremiah 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 11.3); [Jeremiah 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 11.5). Paul also highly commends it in this view, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12); and every true Christian can adopt his Words, [Romans 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22).

APPLICATION.

Let us study this law as a covenant. Let us acknowledge our condemnation by it. Let it serve as a "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, [Galatians 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.24)." Let that declaration be the ground of our hope, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13).

#220

THE DUTY OF FEARING GOD

**[Deuteronomy 28:58-59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.58-59)**

"If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the LORD your God, then the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses!"

We admire the fidelity of Moses, who "declared to Israel the whole counsel of God," "not withholding from them anything whereby they might be profited." To deliver such warnings as are contained in this chapter, must have been inexpressibly painful to him. But he had no alternative, unless indeed he would subject himself to all the curses here denounced; and involve himself, as well as them, in all the consequences of his unfaithfulness and concealment.

Brethren, the same necessity lies on us also; we must, at the peril of our souls, deliver all that God has commissioned us to declare; and, if we fail to do so, not only will "you perish in your iniquities, but your blood will be required at our hands, [Ezekiel 33:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.8)." Bear with me, then, I beg you, while with becoming fidelity I set before you,

I. What God requires of us.

God is indeed a great and glorious Being, "a God of solemn majesty, [Job 37:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 37.22)," "before whom the pillars of Heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof, [Job 26:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 26.11)." And he requires that "we fear his glorious and fearful name."

1. God requires that we regard him with **reverential awe**.

Truly "he is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." When he came down upon Mount Sinai in the presence of all Israel, not a soul except Moses was allowed to approach him; and, if even a beast had touched the mountain, it must immediately be slain. So great was the terror which his presence inspired, that even "Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake! [Hebrews 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.20-21)." And he is still the same God, though he does not manifest himself in the same way. Yes, under the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, we are taught to bear this in mind, that "our God is a consuming fire, and never to be approached but with reverence and godly fear! [Hebrews 12:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.28-29)."

2. God requires that we regard him with **obediential love**.

This is the point more especially noticed in the passage before us; and wherever the fear of God is, it must of necessity manifest itself in this way. There will be a real desire to please God; and a full conviction that every command of his is "holy, and just, and good." Nothing will be deemed "a hard saying;" nothing will be accounted "grievous." We shall not wish for any limit to our obedience; but shall regard the entire surrender of our souls to him as a reasonable service. This is the conclusion to which Solomon came, after carefully weighing the whole matter, "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty (and end, and happiness) of man! [Ecclesiastes 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.13)."

3. God requires that we regard him with **undivided attachment**.

God will not endure a rival in our affections. He must have the whole heart; and the person who shall dare to offer him "a divided heart, shall surely be found guilty before him! [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2)." It is true, we do not give way to gross idolatry, like those to whom our text was addressed; but if we look into "the chambers of imagery" within us, we shall find as many idols as ever were worshiped in the time of Israel's most determined apostasy! [Ezekiel 8:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 8.9-12).

God is still, as he ever was, a jealous God," who "will not have his glory given to another;" yes, "his very name is, Jealous! [Exodus 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.14)." Know, then, that you must not "set your affections on anything here below," but have them all concentrated on him, fearing nothing, desiring nothing, confiding in nothing, in comparison with him. Father and mother, wife and children, houses and lands—yes, and our own life also, must all be subordinated to him, and sacrificed for him, whenever our duty to him shall call for it. We must love and serve him, him supremely, him only, him exclusively!

Hear, then, I entreat you,

II. What we must expect at his hands, if we do not comply with his requisitions.

The Lord made the plagues of his people truly extraordinary. Never since the world began was any nation visited with such heavy judgments as they, [Lamentations 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 1.12), nor will there ever be the like again, even to the end of time, [Mark 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.19). They are, and were designed to be, "a sign unto us, verse 46." Truly, then, if we do fear not God, "our plagues also shall be extraordinary." They shall be extraordinary,

1. Here.

Look at the different nations of the world, and see what tormentors they are to each other. Behold also the famines, pestilences, earthquakes, which God sends at different times, as "avengers of his quarrel" with those who rebel against him.

See too, the whole frame of society, whether in larger bodies or in private families; and behold what feuds obtain among them, insomuch that there is scarcely a body to be found, the members of which are not arrayed more or less in mutual hostility, and contributing to each other's disquiet.

Take all the different individuals of mankind; there is scarcely one who has attained the age of manhood, or, at all events, been long settled in the world, without having, in some respect or other, his very life embittered to him; so that at times, if there had been no future state of existence, he would have almost wished for death as a release from his troubles.

Mark the tempers which agitate men's minds, and the curse which there is even upon their blessings, insomuch that those who most abound in this world's goods are frequently the most miserable of mankind. Thus, even in this world, does God fulfill his threatening in our text, and "make our plagues extraordinary."

2. Hereafter.

Who can conceive a soul, at its first entrance into the invisible world, beholding all at once the face of an angry and avenging God? How does it startle back from him, and cry to rocks and mountains to hide it from God's presence!

Who can conceive of that soul hearing from its Judge those terrific words, "Depart from Me, you who are accursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!"

Who can conceive of Hell opening for its reception, and the man cast, body and soul, "into the lake of fire and brimstone," "where the worm of an accusing conscience never dies, and the fire is never quenched!"

Who can conceive of the soul's retrospect of the mercies it has despised, and the opportunities it has forever lost?

Above all, who can conceive its prospects of eternity, as the duration of all the misery to which it is consigned?

Say, Beloved, whether then the plagues will not be extraordinary? Now they may be laughed at and despised; but when this cup of God's indignation shall be put into the sinner's hands, and he is left to drink it to the very dregs—then there will be an end of all his laughter, and to all eternity will he be occupied in "weeping and wailing and gnashing his teeth!"

Behold, then:

"I now set life and death before you." Say, which of the two you will choose. If you doubt the fulfillment of God's threatenings, read the sad catalogue of woes that were denounced against the Jews, and tell me if so much as one of them has failed of its accomplishment. Indeed, my brethren, every Jew you see is a witness for God, that His word shall be fulfilled in all its fearful extent.

But, on the other hand, let me say that the converse of our text is also true. Yes, if you fear and obey the Lord, your blessings also shall be extraordinary. Even in this world "the peace of God's obedient people passes all understanding," and their joy is often unspeakable and glorified.

If you could follow a believing soul into the eternal world;  
if you could behold it when first it is introduced into the presence of its God and Savior;  
if you could see it, while the Judge of the living and the dead is pronouncing that laudatory sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!"  
if, further, you could behold it in the very bosom of its God, invested with a happiness which can never be interrupted, and a glory that shall never end  
—then you would say that its blessedness is truly extraordinary!

Why, then, brethren, should you not seek this bliss? Why will you cast it all away, and treasure up for yourselves the sad alternative, even the misery that shall endure for evermore? I beg you, be wise in time; and consider your latter end, before it is too late! And I pray God, that what has been spoken may now be so impressed upon your minds, that that which took place in Jerusalem may never be realized in you, "Her filthiness clung to her skirts; she did not consider her latter end. Her fall was astounding; there was none to comfort her!" [Lamentations 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 1.9)."

#221

MEN'S BLINDNESS IN SPIRITUAL THINGS

**[Deuteronomy 29:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.4)**

"The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, unto this day."

There is nothing more comforting to a minister, than to see "the word of the Lord running and glorified" among the people of his charge. On the other hand, it is extremely painful to him to find that his labors have been in a great measure in vain. Yet such are the reflections which many a faithful minister is led to make, after an attentive survey of his ministrations.

The Prophet Isaiah felt occasion to lament this, in his day; saying, "Who has believed our report? and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1)."

Our blessed Lord had but too much reason to make a similar complaint respecting the outcome of his labors also, [John 12:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.37-38).

Thus we find Moses, after the most indefatigable exertions for the space of forty years, constrained to adopt towards the Jewish people the language of my text, "The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, unto this day."

Would to God that there were not grounds, also, for similar complaint among us, my brethren! But Christian fidelity compels me to declare, that to a most lamentable extent these words are verified in this place.

I. The complaint as uttered by Moses against the people of his charge.

They had "seen" with their bodily eyes all the wonders that had been wrought for them in Egypt and the wilderness. But they had no spiritual perception of them. They did not understand

1. They did not understand the true character of that dispensation.

They viewed the various occurrences as so many separate and detached events; and had no idea of their figurative import, no conception of them as shadows of good things to come. They saw not that more wonderful redemption which was typically exhibited to their view. The paschal lamb led them not to the contemplation of their Messiah, and of the deliverance which he should effect through the shedding, and the sprinkling, of his most precious blood. Their subsistence by manna, and by water from the rock, served not to show them what it was to live by faith on the Son of God, or to experience in their souls the refreshing communications of the Spirit of God.

And though they had already seen a portion of land given to three of their tribes—yet did they not contemplate the outcome of a believer's warfare in the possession of the heavenly Canaan. As for the Law that had been given to them, whether the moral or ceremonial law, they knew not the true intent of either; they had no idea of the one as shutting them up to the only possible way of salvation through faith in their Messiah, or of the other as shadowing forth that Messiah in all his offices. In fact, they had no spiritual discernment of any of these things, but were uninstructed and unedified by all that they had seen and heard All these hints admit of profitable enlargement.

2. They did not understand the obligations which these wonders entailed upon them.

The very first and most obvious effect of all these wonders should have been to bring them to the knowledge of Jehovah as the only true God, and to make them his faithful worshipers and adherents to the last hour of their lives. Yet, behold! they had not been delivered from Egypt three months, before they made and worshiped the golden calf; yes, and all the way through the wilderness they "took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of their God Remphan—figures which they made as objects of their worship, [Acts 7:41-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.41-43)," in preference to Jehovah, whom thus they provoked to jealousy, until he was constrained to pour forth his wrath upon them to their destruction. It might well be expected, too, that they would yield up themselves to God in a willing obedience to his Law, and live altogether devoted to his service.

But they were "a rebellious and stiff-necked people," from first to last. The mercies of God could not win them to obedience, nor his judgments deter them from disobedience. The present and future gratification of their senses was all that they desired; and, if only they had their enjoyments, they cared not whether God was glorified or not.

We say not that this was the character of all that people; but when we recollect, that of that whole nation only two, of all the men that came out of Egypt, were allowed to enter into Canaan, we cannot but fear that the exceptions were very few, and the great mass of the people were of the very description represented in our text.

As humiliating as this complaint is, we must also consider it,

II. The complaint as uttered by Moses applicable to ourselves at this day.

Infinitely greater have our advantages been than those enjoyed by the Jewish people. They had the shadow only, but we the substance. The whole of redemption has been set before us; yet we, for the most part, have but a very faint and inadequate conception of it.

1. By the great mass of nominal Christians, the nature of the Gospel is very indistinctly seen.

A mere general notion of salvation by Christ may be entertained; but of the grace of the Gospel, its freeness, its fullness, its suitableness—how little is seen! How far are we from "comprehending the length and breadth, and depth and height of the love of Christ" contained in it! How few among us have any just views of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and of all the divine perfections, as united, and harmonizing, and glorified, in this stupendous mystery! The various offices of the sacred Three, all sustained and executed for us, how little of them is known! Indeed, indeed, the generality of those who call themselves Christians are as dark with respect to the excellency and glory of the Gospel, as the Jews themselves were of the scope and character of their Law.

2. By the great mass of nominal Christians, the effects of the gospel are very poorly experienced.

What might we expect from those who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, and renewed in their souls by the operation of his blessed Spirit?

Should we not be full of admiring and adoring thoughts of God?

Should we not be enrapt, even to the third Heaven, in love to Christ?

Should we not be "yielding up both our bodies and our souls to God, as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to him as our reasonable service?"

And to what an extent should we be sanctified, in all our tempers, dispositions, and actions—if we were duly influenced by the principles of the Gospel! In a word, if we felt as we ought, methinks our every feeling would be love, and our every word be praise.

But look at the great majority of those to whom the Gospel has been ministered, and say whether any measure of these effects are visible upon them? Alas! it is as true of us as of the Jews, that "God has not given us a heart to perceive, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, unto this day."

Let me then address myself:

1. To those who are altogether blind.

Perhaps you will be disposed to say, "If God has not given me this discernment, the fault is not mine." But this is a fatal error; for the fault is altogether yours. Had you sought of God the illuminating influences of his Spirit—then he would have opened your blind eyes, and unstopped your deaf ears, and renewed you in the spirit of your mind; no earthly parent would so readily bestow bread on his famished child, as God would have given to you his Holy Spirit in answer to your prayers. If, then, you "perish for lack of knowledge," it must be ascribed to your own obstinate neglect of those means which God has appointed for the attainment of spiritual instruction.

2. To those who think they see.

Multitudes, like the Pharisees of old, are ready to ask with confidence, "Are we blind also?" To these we reply, Let your lives declare; let the fruit determine the quality of the tree. Yes, brethren, "if you were indeed blind, you would comparatively have no sin; but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains! [John 9:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.40-41)." Your conceit and self-sufficiency render your blindness tenfold more odious, more incurable, and more fatal.

3. To those whose eyes God has genuinely opened.

Truly, the mercy given to you is great beyond measure or conception. You doubtless feel what a blessing the gift of reason is, which so elevates you above the beasts; but far richer is the gift of spiritual discernment, which enables you to see "the things of the Spirit," and elevates you above your fellow-men, even above the wisest and greatest of the human race! Compare the Apostles with the philosophers of Greece and Rome. Mark, not merely their intellectual powers, but their moral habits and their spiritual attainments; then will you have some conception of the mercies given to you, and will appreciate, in some poor measure, the obligations conferred upon you.

#222

DANGER OF CARNAL SECURITY

**[Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20)**

When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." This will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry. The LORD will never be willing to forgive him; his wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under Heaven.

God has declared that he "desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" and this is abundantly evident from the forbearance which he exercises towards sinners, and from the means he has used for their restoration to his favor. When he brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he entered into covenant with them on Mount Horeb; and when that whole generation had perished in consequence of their violations of his covenant, he was graciously pleased to renew the covenant with their children in the land of Moab; and the reason he gives for that condescending kindness is, lest they should presumptuously sin, and miserably perish, after the example of their fathers. See verses 1, 15, 18-20.

In the words which we have just read, he intimates,

I. The astonishing delusion of sinners.

That the greatest part of mankind are walking after the imaginations of their own hearts, is evident; and that God denounces his vengeance against them, is equally evident; yet on every side we behold,

1. Their fearlessness.

God speaks to them in the plainest terms, that "the soul that sins shall die," and that "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, even all the people that forget God." They themselves too cannot but acknowledge, that "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Yet they hear the denunciations of God's wrath with perfect indifference; they account them not worth the smallest consideration; yes, to use the expressive language of the Psalmist, "they puff at them, [Psalm 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.5)." What though they do "set at nothing God's law, and walk rather after the imagination of their own hearts?" What though they do "add drunkenness to thirst." "Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, [Isaiah 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.18)," adding fresh materials continually, and drawing it out without any intermission to an indefinite length, will God regard such trifling matters? No! He does not see them, or deem them worthy of his notice! [Psalm 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.11) and [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14). God does indeed threaten to punish these things; but he will never execute his threatenings.'

If any mere men threaten their temporal welfare, they are open enough to the impressions of fear, and anxious enough to escape the danger; but if God threatens them with his everlasting displeasure, they regard it as an empty sound. Thus do they cast off all fear of God, and treat both him and his Word with the utmost contempt! [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13).

2. Their self-delight.

They can see no evil in sin; they are sensible that they do not conform to God's law; nor indeed have they any wish to do so. Yet they imagine that though their actions are not correct, their hearts are good; they mean no harm; and that, in their estimation, comprehends all that is required of them. It is truly astonishing to see how, in the midst of all their iniquities, men will "bless themselves in their hearts," as much as if there were nothing amiss in their conduct at all.

They quite resent the idea of being sinners, and of deserving God's wrath and indignation. They conceive that they are very good sort of people (as the expression is), and deserving of God's favor. Thus it was with the Jews of old, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these! [Jeremiah 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.4);" they thought that no expressions were too strong to characterize their goodness.

And thus do sinners in this day boast of their goodness; yes, not only the moral and sober do so, but even the drunken, the sensual, the profane—all are ready to think themselves as good as they need to be, and to answer, like the young man in the Gospel, "What do I still lack?" So blinded are they by Satan, and hardened through the deceitfulness of their own hearts!

3. Their confidence.

They entertain no doubts or fears; they think that all go to Heaven, and that they must of necessity be happy when they die. "I shall have peace," is the bold assertion of every one among them; nor will they allow the safety of their state to be once questioned. On some occasions perhaps a suspicion arises in their minds that it is not quite so well with them as they imagine; but in general they go on as assured of happiness as if all the promises of the Gospel were on their side!

Nor is this only in the thoughtlessness of youth; their confidence increases with their age; and even in death they frequently retain it to such a degree as to feel no fear of death; and this delusion of theirs is considered by the survivors as an evidence of their final acceptance. Well does the prophet say of them, "A deceived heart has turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say: Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

But God views them with other eyes, and denounces,

II. Their awful doom.

The terms in which this is declared are sufficient to alarm the most careless sinner. The wrath of God is here denounced against him. This must be his portion:

1. Their awful doom is **infallibly certain**.

Sinners imagine that God cannot inflict punishment; they suppose that if not inconsistent with his justice, it would at least be contrary to his acknowledged goodness and benignity. They think that, when the time comes, that God will relent, and spare them. But, in our text, he meets that error, and declares, "The Lord will not spare him." "I have spared him long enough," the Lord will say, "I bore with all his wickedness for many years;" "I waited long to be gracious to him;" "I called to him, but he would not hear; I entreated him, but he refused to hearken; and therefore he now may call, and I will not hear; I will even laugh at his calamity, and mock when his fear is come."

Now God would "turn from the evil which he has thought to bring" on any sinner—if that sinner sincerely repents. But how inflexible God will be in that day, the prophet has abundantly declared, [Ezekiel 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 8.18); [Ezekiel 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 24.14). The sinner may "knock at the door which is shut against him, saying: Lord, Lord, open to me; but I will say, Depart from me, I never knew you, you worker of iniquity."

2. Their doom is **inexpressibly severe**.

What must it be to have "the anger and the jealousy of Almighty God" incensed, and so incensed, as to be, as it were, "smoking against us?" But, to form a just idea of the sinner's doom, we must take all the most terrific passages of the Word of God, and contemplate all the images contained in them, and then conceive of all of them combined to fill up the measure of his misery. Oh, if we think of "that lake that burns with fire and brimstone," "where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched," where there is nothing but "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," and "the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever!" What an idea does it all give us of the judgments that await the impenitent transgressor! Yet these, yes and "all the curses that are written in the sacred volume" from one end of it even to the other, shall come upon him, and shall "lie and abide upon him forever and ever!"

Once, if he had sought for mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, he would have been blessedly saved. But now "God will blot out his name from under Heaven," and it shall be found registered only with those of the devil and his angels!

We are well aware that these truths are unwelcome to the generality of men; but it is infinitely better to contemplate them in time, than to be left to experience them in eternity.

Let us learn then from this subject,

1. To have **compassion** on the ungodly world.

Were we to see men in danger of perishing in the sea, the most hardened among us would be moved to compassion. Why then do we not pity those who are ready every moment to sink into the flames of Hell? That they themselves are not alarmed is rather the reason why we should feel the more alarmed; because their foot will infallibly "slide in due time," and "the wrath of God will come upon them to the uttermost." Let "our eyes then run down with tears for them," and "our head be a fountain of tears to weep for them day and night." Let our efforts too be exerted to awaken them to a timely care of their own souls.

2. To be on our **guard** against being influenced by their advice.

Those who see not their own danger, will be equally secure respecting us, [Ezekiel 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.22), and will endeavor to lull us asleep by their confident assertions. But, if their presumption will not benefit themselves, it will assuredly not benefit us.

The antediluvian world, and the inhabitants of Sodom, despised the warnings given them, and accounted them as idle tales; but the threatened judgments came at last, and the deceivers and deceived perished in one indiscriminate mass! So will it be at the end of the world, [2 Peter 2:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4-9). Every tittle of God's Word shall be fulfilled; and therefore let those who would draw you back to the world be disregarded by you, [Ephesians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.6). "Let God be true, but every man a liar!"

3. To be **thankful** if God has made us to differ from them.

What reason had Noah and Lot to be thankful that they were enabled to believe the divine testimony! And truly, if we are enabled to come forth from an ungodly world, and to enter into the true Ark, the Lord Jesus Christ—we have no less reason to be thankful than they. It is no less the fruit of God's sovereign grace, than was the mercy given to them. Let us then be increasingly watchful against presumptuous confidence, and all the delusions of our own hearts; and, in an unreserved attention to all God's commands, let us "keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life!"

#223

SECRET THINGS BELONG TO GOD

**[Deuteronomy 29:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.29)**

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this Law."

Never were mercies granted to any people, so rich as those which were given to Israel; nor were there ever judgments so signally, through successive ages, inflicted on any other nation, as on them. And all this was in accordance with prophecy, even with the prophecies which Moses himself delivered to them previous to their entrance into Canaan. All was known by God; and was foretold also, with sufficient clearness, if they would but learn to act in obedience to the divine warnings. To inquire into the reasons of God's dealings with them, and especially to sit in judgment upon God as though he dealt harshly with them, would be to no purpose. The reasons of his determinations were hidden in his own bosom; and his determinations themselves were made known to them for their benefit; and God expected that they should make a suitable improvement of all the information which he had given them. This seems to be the general import of our text; from whence I shall take occasion to show,

I. The proper limit for our inquiries into the things of God.

God has been pleased to reveal much to us respecting his nature, his dealings, his purposes; but there is infinitely more which he has not seen fit to communicate; and which, if communicated, we would be no more able to comprehend, than a child could comprehend the deepest discoveries of philosophy. Even what we do know, we know only in part; in fact, our knowledge of everything is so superficial, that it scarcely deserves to be called knowledge; and, therefore, in relation to everything the utmost possible humility befits us. For, after all:

1. What do we know of **God's nature**?

We are informed that "God is Spirit;" that he is, from all eternity, a self-existent Being; that "the Heaven of heavens cannot contain him." But what idea have we of Spirit? What notion can we form of eternity and omnipresence? The greatest philosopher in the universe has not a whit more adequate conceptions of these things than a little infant. Nor do we, in reality, know anything more of the moral perfections of the Deity, than we do of those which we call natural. We speak of his holiness, and justice, and mercy, and truth; but our knowledge of these things is altogether negative; we merely know that he is not unholy, or unjust, or unmerciful, or untrue; and that is all.

And what shall I say to his subsistence in Three Persons, each possessing all the attributes of Deity, while yet there is but One God? We know:  
that the Father is spoken of as the Fountain from whence all proceeds;  
that the Son also is spoken of as executing all which the Father had ordained for the redemption of the world;  
and that the Holy Spirit also is spoken of as applying to men all that the Son has purchased, and the Father ordained.

But of these things we know nothing beyond what God has told us in his Word; and if we attempt to descant upon them, "we only darken counsel by words without knowledge."

In the contemplation of such mysteries, it befits us to bear in mind the pointed interrogations of Zophar, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?

They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know? [Job 11:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.7-8)."

2. What do we know of **God's Providence**?

We know that God orders everything both in Heaven and earth; and that without him "not a sparrow falls to the ground," nor "a hair from our heads." But will anyone inform us how God overrules the minds of voluntary agents, so as infallibly to accomplish his own will, and yet not participate in the evils which they commit? Our blessed Lord was put to death "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God;" and yet, throughout the whole of that scene, the agents followed altogether the dictates of their own hearts, and "with wicked hands crucified and slew him!" And will anyone inform us how this was done?

And if we know so little of God's Providence, who shall declare to us the wonders of his Grace? Will anyone tell us why the world was left four thousand years before the Savior was sent to redeem it? Or why Abraham was chosen in preference to all other people upon earth, that the Savior should descend from him, and that it should be in the line of Isaac and Jacob, rather than through the line of Ishmael and Esau?

Will anyone tell us how the Spirit of God acts upon the souls of some, to quicken, sanctify, and save them; while others never experience these operations; or experience his influence only in such a degree as ultimately to aggravate their eternal condemnation? Let anyone only explain how the mind operates upon matter in any one motion of his own body—and if he cannot explain this, then how shall he presume to judge of God, "whose ways are in the great deep, and his paths past finding out?"

3. What do we know of **God's purposes**?

We are assured that "God does everything according to the counsel of his own will; and that none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What are you doing?" But who has searched the records of Heaven, so as to tell us what shall come to pass, either in reference to nations, or to any solitary individual? Our blessed Lord repeatedly checked all presumptuous inquiries into these things. When his disciples asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority, [Acts 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.6-7)." And when Peter inquired of him respecting John, "Lord, what shall this man do? our Lord replied, If I will that he tarry until I come, what is that to you?"

In truth, we know nothing of God; nothing of what he is, or does, or will do, any further than he has been pleased to reveal himself to us; and all our inquiries respecting him should issue in that profound adoring exclamation, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

Instead of complaining that our knowledge is so circumscribed, we should be thankful that it extends so far; for if there is little communicated to gratify a foolish curiosity, there is everything made known to us that can conduce to our present and eternal welfare.

This idea points out to us,

II. The proper use to be made of all the Scriptural knowledge we obtain.

Everything that God has revealed is intended to have a practical effect on us; and everything contained in Holy Writ has a direct tendency to convey some spiritual benefit to our souls. Let us briefly trace this in:

1. What is revealed concerning **God and his perfections**.

All that is spoken in Scripture upon this sublime subject, tends to fill us with holy fear, and love, and confidence; and to bring us to God, as his obedient subjects and servants.

2. What is revealed concerning **Christ and his offices**.

There is no way to the Father but through the Son. When, therefore, we read of him as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his people, we are of necessity taugt to look to him for:  
the illumination of our minds,  
the pardon of our sins,  
the subjugation of all our spiritual enemies.

We are taught to "live altogether by faith in him, who has loved us, and given himself for us!"

3. What is revealed concerning **the Holy Spirit and his operations**.

If we can come to God only through the Son, so neither have we any access to him but by the Spirit, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18). Hence, in desiring his gracious influences, we should seek to have the whole work of grace wrought within us, and to be "transformed into the divine image," and be "made fit for our eternal inheritance."

4. What is revealed concerning **the Gospel with all its promises and precepts**.

Nothing of this is to he contemplated as a mere matter of speculation; but the whole Gospel is to be embraced as a remedy, as a remedy suited to our wants and sufficient for our necessities. Every promise of it is to be embraced as a ground of hope; and every precept in it is to be obeyed as an evidence of our faith and love.

5. What is revealed concerning **the realities of the eternal world**.

No one ever came from Heaven or from Hell to inform us what those states were, or what was the full import of those terms under which those states are displayed. Nor is it of importance to us to know more of them in this world. We already know enough to call forth into activity our hopes and our fears; and our wisdom is so to improve our knowledge of them, as to "flee from the wrath to come," and to "lay hold on eternal life!"

In a word, "whatever is revealed belongs to us and to our children forever, that in all succeeding ages we should follow all the words of God's Law," and approve ourselves to him as a faithful and obedient people.

Hence, then, we may see:

1. What answer we should make to the proud objector.

People will sit in judgment upon God and his revealed will, as if they were capable of determining, by their own wisdom, what was fitting for him to reveal or do; and they will decide with confidence on all which they either see or hear, precisely as if they were competent to weigh in a balance all the mysteries of divine wisdom. With what impious boldness will many revile the mystery of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead; the incarnation of Christ, and his sin-atoning sacrifice; and the influences of the Holy Spirit. But to all such proud objectors I will say, with Paul, "Nay but, O man! who are you that replies against God? [Romans 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.20)." You mistake utterly the province of reason, if you think that she is to sit in judgment upon such mysteries as these. She is to judge whether the book which we call the Bible, is of divine inspiration; but when that is once admitted, then she must give way to faith, whose office it is to embrace all that God has revealed, and to make use of it for the ends and purposes for which he has revealed it. And if you will presume to "reprove God, you shall surely answer for it, [Job 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2);" for "he gives no account to man of any of his matters, [Job 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.13)."

2. What direction we should give to the humble inquirer.

There may be many things brought to your ears which are above your comprehension, and which you may find it difficult to receive. But there is a standard to which every sentiment may be referred, and a touchstone by which every doctrine may be tried. Our blessed Lord said to those who doubted the propriety of his instructions, "Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me! [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39)." And the Prophet Isaiah told his hearers to bring everything to this test, "To the Law, and to the testimony—if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no truth in them, [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20)." All that is needful for you to know, is contained in God's Word.

Whatever agrees with God's Word, is true.

Whatever is contrary to God's Word, is false.

And whatever cannot be determined by God's Word, may well be left among those "secret things which belong to God alone."

3. What encouragement we are to afford to the true believer.

"The secret of the Lord," we are told, "is with those who fear him; and he will show them his covenant, [Psalm 25:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.14)." Yes, this is indeed a most encouraging truth. Not that we are to suppose that God will give any new revelation to his people—we have no reason whatever to expect that. But he will shine upon his revealed truth, so that they shall have a perception of it which others have not.

I need not tell you how much clearer anything is discerned when the sun shines upon it; or how much more accurately it is seen when the eye is fixed more intently on it; or how things most minute or distant are rendered distinctly visible by glasses suited to our organs of sight.

Now, in all these ways will God reveal his secrets to the believing soul. He will, by his Spirit, cast a flood of light upon the Word; and make the soul most eager to apprehend his truth; and by the medium of faith bring that truth directly upon the tablet of the mind; and thus fulfill that promise, "All your people shall be taught of God, [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45)." Yes, "he will guide the meek in judgment; he will teach the meek his way, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9)."

#224

THE RESTORATION AND CONVERSION OF THE JEWS

**[Deuteronomy 30:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.4-6)**

"Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live!"

In interpreting the Holy Scriptures, it is common with many to dwell almost exclusively upon the literal or historical sense of them, and to confine their meaning to the people to whom the verses were immediately addressed, or of whom they spoke. But this limits the use of the sacred volume in such a manner, as to render it of little service to us. By supposing that it related only to other people and other times, we void its authority over us, destroy its power over our conscience, and learn to set aside every doctrine which we are not willing to receive, and every precept which we do not choose to practice.

But there is an opposite error, against which also we ought to be on our guard. Some are so intent on the spiritual sense of Scripture, as almost entirely to overlook the literal. But the primary meaning is often as replete with instruction as any that can be affixed to the words, and incomparably more satisfactory to a well-informed mind.

For instance, if we should take occasion from our text to speak of the nature and effects of true conversion, in bringing us to God and renovating our souls—we might speak what was good and useful; but the primary sense of the passage leads us to another subject, which ought to be of equal importance in our eyes, namely: The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews.

In discoursing then on the words before us, we shall notice,

I. The events to which these words relate:

That which first demands our attention is **the restoration of the Jews**.

Very much is spoken, in the prophets on this subject; and though a great part of their declarations respecting it may be considered as having received their accomplishment in the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, there are some which evidently refer to a period yet future. The Prophet Ezekiel associates it with their acknowledgment of one Prince, whom he calls David, [Ezekiel 37:21-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.21-25). But there was not any prince after the captivity to whom that name can with any propriety be applied in such a view; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ is often spoken of under that name; and therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the restoration spoken of must take place after the establishment of Christianity in the world.

Indeed so strong are the declarations of Scripture upon this subject, that an expectation of the event universally obtains throughout the Christian world. What the precise time will be, we cannot absolutely fix; but we believe that they will be gathered from all quarters of the earth, and possess again their own land, agreeably to the literal expressions of our text; and it is highly probable that the time is not far distant.

As for the objections arising from the difficulty of carrying such a measure into execution, or from the barrenness of the land of Canaan, they vanish the very moment we open the Scriptures, and see what God did for them in former times. If God has ordained it, every mountain will become a plain.

Nearly connected with this is the conversion of the Jews to Christianity.

If we suppose a doubt to arise respecting the former, there exists not even a shadow of a doubt respecting this. The Apostle Paul represents it as assuredly determined in the divine counsels, and infallibly to be accomplished in due season. The people of God in every age may be regarded as one tree, of which Abraham may be considered as the root. The Jews after a time were broken off, as fruitless branches; and the Gentiles were grafted on their stock; and, when the appointed season shall arrive, God will again engraft the Jews upon their own stock, and make both Jews and Gentiles one tree that shall fill the whole earth. It is by this latter measure that God's designs of love and mercy to the Gentiles also shall be perfected; for the conversion of the Jews will awaken the attention of the unconverted Gentiles, and be the means of bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles, [Romans 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.12); [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.15); [Romans 11:23-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.23-29).

The change that will be wrought upon them will not be merely outward, or consisting in speculative opinions; it will reach to their inmost souls; it will produce in them a circumcision of the heart, an utter abhorrence of all sin, and a fervent love to God, as their reconciled God in Christ Jesus; they will "love him," I say, "with all their heart, and with all their soul."

True indeed it is that they are very far from this state of mind at present; but so were the murderers of the Lord Jesus on the day of Pentecost; and yet in one hour were converted unto God. So shall it be in the day of God's power, "a nation shall be born in a day;" "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; the Lord will hasten it in his time."

Such being the prophetic import of the words, let us proceed to notice,

II. The reflections which these words naturally suggest.

The present dispersed state of the Jews from which they are in due time to be recovered, is a most instructive subject. We cannot but see,

1. What witnesses the Jews are for God.

The very person who brought them out of Egypt was inspired to foretell both their present dispersion, and their future restoration. The event has come to pass; and now for nearly eighteen hundred years have this people been scattered over the face of the whole earth, and are preserved as a distinct people in every place. The treatment they should meet with was most circumstantially foretold:  
the hardships they would undergo [Deuteronomy 28:53-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.53-57);  
the oppression they would endure [Deuteronomy 28:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.29);  
the contempt in which they would be held [Deuteronomy 28:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.37);  
the conviction which they themselves, in common with all mankind, would feel, that their sufferings were inflicted by God himself on account of their iniquities [Deuteronomy 29:21-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.21-28).

All, I say, was foretold; and all is come to pass; and they are living witnesses of the truth of God and of the divine authority of that book which they profess to have been inspired by him.

They may be even said to be witnesses also of the truth of Christianity, which is founded on the Jewish Scriptures, and is altogether the completion of them. What therefore God said to them in the days of old, may with yet augmented force be applied to them at this time, "You are my witnesses, that I am God, [Isaiah 43:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.12)."

2. What warnings the Jews are to us.

Who that sees the present state of the Jews, and compares it with the predictions concerning them—must acknowledge that God abhors iniquity, and will surely punish it even in his most highly favored people! Methinks the sight of a Jew should produce this reflection in every mind. The Jews, because they were descended from the loins of Abraham, and had been distinguished by God above all the nations upon earth, imagined themselves to be safe; but when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities in the murder of their Messiah, the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost!

Let not Christians therefore imagine that the name and profession of Christianity will screen them from the wrath of God. The sentence of exclusion from the heavenly Canaan is gone forth against all who reject the Lord Jesus Christ; and it will assuredly be executed upon them in due time; for "how shall they escape, if they neglect so great a salvation?" Our inquiry must be, not: Am I instructed in some particular tenets, or observant of some particular forms? But: Am I "circumcised in heart, so as to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart, and with all my soul?" This is the point to be ascertained; for "if any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be Anathema Maranatha;" he will be accursed; and God himself will forever inflict the curse upon him.

3. What encouragement we have to seek the welfare of the Jews.

Notwithstanding God has given so many promises respecting them, the Christian world for many hundreds of years has scarcely thought them worthy of the smallest attention. Christians have been anxious for the welfare of heathens, and have sent missionaries into every quarter of the world to instruct them; but for the Jews they have felt no interest whatever; they have left them to perish without so much as an attempt for their conversion.

But what base ingratitude is this!

To whom are we ourselves indebted for all our privileges, but to Jews?

Who wrote, and preserved with such wonderful care, the Scriptures of the Old Testament?

Who wrote the New Testament, but Jews?

Who died to redeem our souls from death and Hell? A Jew.

Who at this moment makes intercession for us at the right hand of God? A Jew.

Who manages everything in Heaven and earth for our good, and is a fountain of all spiritual good to our souls? A Jew.

Of whom were the whole primitive Church composed for the first six or seven years? Jews.

Who went forth with their lives in their hands, to convert the Gentiles; and to whom are we indebted for all the light that we enjoy? They were Jews.

Have we then no debt of gratitude to them? And have we not reason to blush when we reflect on the manner in which we have requited them? Blessed be God! there are at last some stirred up to seek their welfare. [This sermon was preached in 1810] Let us unite with heart and hand, to help forward the blessed work. From what we see of their blindness and obduracy, we are apt to despond; but "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save;" he can as easily engraft the Jews in again upon their own stock, as he could engraft us Gentiles upon it; and he has therefore engrafted us upon it, that we might exert ourselves in their favor, and be instrumental in restoring them to the blessings they have lost, [Romans 11:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.30-31). Let us at least do what we can, and leave the outcome of our labors unto God.

#225

THE WAY OF SALVATION PLAIN AND EASY

**[Deuteronomy 30:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.11-14)**

"Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in Heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into Heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."

It is a very prevalent idea in the world, that all people shall be saved by the law under which they live; so that Jews, Turks, and heathen of every description, have as good a prospect of salvation, as those who enjoy the light of the Gospel. But there has been only one way of salvation from the fall of Adam to the present moment. How far God may be pleased to extend mercy for Christ's sake to some who have not had an opportunity of hearing the Gospel, we cannot presume to say; but to those who have the Scriptures in their hands we are sure that there is no hope of acceptance, but through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the way of salvation revealed to Adam, confirmed to Abraham, and more fully opened in the Mosaic law. It was of this that Moses spoke in the words before us; to elucidate which, we shall inquire,

I. What is the commandment here spoken of?

What it was may be seen by consulting,

1. The testimony of Moses himself.

It was not the moral law that was given on Mount Sinai, but "the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb, [Deuteronomy 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.1)."

The law given on Mount Sinai, of which Horeb was a part, was strictly a covenant of works; but that which was given in the land of Moab, was a covenant of grace.

That law on Mount Sinai made no provision for the smallest transgression; it simply said, Do this, and live.

That law in the land of Moab was accompanied with the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifices both on the altar and on the people, [Exodus 24:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.3-8); and intimated, that through the blood of the great Sacrifice, that their iniquities, if truly repented of, might be forgiven. This distinction is very carefully noticed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Paul, mentioning some particulars not related by Moses, declares, that, by the covenant thus ratified, remission of sins was provided for, and might be obtained by all who sought it in the appointed way.

2. An inspired exposition of the passage, **[Romans 10:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.5-10)**.

The apostle Paul is expressly contrasting the nature of the two covenants; the Law, he tells us, required perfect obedience, and said, "He that does these things shall live by them, [Leviticus 18:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 18.5) and [Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26)." But the Gospel, that is, "the righteousness which is of faith, speaks in this way;" and then he quotes the words before us, and explains them as referring to the Gospel. Some have thought that he quoted these words only in a way of accommodation; but it is plain that he understood them as strictly applicable to his point. Speaking of the righteousness which is of faith, he says, "But what does it say?" He then, quoting the very words of Moses, answers, "The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart;" and then he adds, "This is the word of faith which we preach."

If then the Apostle was inspired by the Holy Spirit, the matter is clear; and the Gospel was the commandment of which Moses spoke.

It is worthy of observation, that Christ and his Apostles speak of it under very similar terms. Our Lord says, "This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent;" by which he means, that it is the work which God requires of us, [John 6:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.28-29). Paul calls the Gospel, "the law of faith, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27)." John says, "This is his commandment, that you believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23)." And "obeying the Gospel" is the common term used for believing in Christ, [Romans 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.15); [Romans 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.26); [2 Thessalonians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.8); [1 Peter 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17).

3. The particular characters by which this covenant in Moab is distinguished.

Moses speaks of it as plainly revealed, and as easily understood. Now this representation accords with that dispensation of the Gospel which was given to the Jews; they had no necessity for anyone to ascend up to Heaven, or to go over the sea, to bring them information about the way of life; for God had already revealed it to them from Heaven; he had shown them by the moral law that they were all in a state of guilt and condemnation; and he had shown them by the ceremonial law that they were to be saved by means of a sacrifice, which should in due time be offered. And though that revelation was comparatively obscure—yet any Jew with pious dispositions might understand it sufficiently to obtain salvation by it.

But these characters in the fullest sense agree with the Gospel as it is made known to us. We are not left to inquire whether there is a Savior or not? Whether Christ has come down from above? Or whether he has been raised up again from the dead? We know that he has come into the world; that he has "died for our sins, and has risen again for our justification." We know that he has done everything that is necessary for our reconciliation with God, and will do everything that can be necessary for the carrying on and perfecting the salvation of our souls.

There is no uncertainty about any point that is of importance to us to know. Nor indeed is there any difficulty in understanding what he has revealed. All that is required, is, a simple, humble, teachable spirit; and to such a one, however ignorant he is in other respects, every part of the Gospel is dear.

The humble Christian "has within himself the witness" of all the fundamental truths of the Gospel. What doubt can he have that he is a guilty and condemned creature; or that he needs an atonement for his sins, and a better righteousness than his own for his justification before God? What doubt can he have that he needs the influences of the Holy Spirit to renew him after the divine image, and to render him fit for Heaven?

"If the Gospel is hidden from any, it is because the god of this world has blinded their eyes;" it is not the intricacy or obscurity of the Gospel that makes it unintelligible to them, but the simplicity and brightness of it, "they love darkness rather than light;" and complain of the Gospel, when the fault is only in themselves. As revealed to us, the Gospel is not obscure; as revealed in us, it is bright as the meridian sun.

Such then "is the commandment which God commands us this day." We proceed to consider,

II. What is the obedience which this covenant at Moab requires.

1. This covenant at Moab demands from us **an inward approbation of the heart**.

Without this, all the knowledge of men or angels would be of little use. On this our salvation altogether depends. Moses says, "The word is in your heart;" and Paul's exposition of it is, "If you shall believe in your heart that God has raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, you shall be saved." Thus a mere rational assent to divine truth is particularly excluded from the office of saving; and salvation is annexed to that faith only which calls forth all the affections of the soul, "a faith which works by love."

As "a commandment," it is to have all the force of a law within us, "casting down imaginations with every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God," and "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." It is not sufficient that we merely acknowledge the death and resurrection of Christ as parts of our creed; we must see and feel the necessity of them in order to the deliverance of our souls from death and Hell; and we must also glory in them, as the infinitely wise, gracious, and all-sufficient means of our redemption. We must have such a view of these truths, as makes us to "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of them! [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8)." This was insisted on as necessary to the admission of converts into the Christian Church. And it is the experience of all who truly belong to Christ, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17).

2. This covenant at Moab demands from us an outward confession of them with the mouth.

It is curious to observe what minute attention the Apostle paid to the words of Moses, and what emphasis he has laid upon them. Moses had transiently observed, "The word is in your mouth and in your heart;" but the Apostle amplifies the idea, and shows repeatedly that the confessing of Christ with the mouth is quite as necessary as the believing on him with the heart; by the latter indeed we obtain "righteousness;" but by the former we obtain complete "salvation, [Romans 10:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.9-10)."

In that age, to confess Christ before men was to subject oneself to persecutions and death in their most cruel forms; but our Lord would not acknowledge anyone as his disciple, who would neglect to do it; he warned his disciples that such cowardice would infallibly exclude them from the kingdom of Heaven.

How necessary then and indispensable, must a confession of Christ in this age be, when we have nothing to fear but the loss of some temporal interest, and the being stigmatized with some ignominious name! Truly, if we are ashamed to confess him, we may well be banished from his presence as the weakest and most contemptible of the human race! [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38).

Let this then be considered by all who would secure the salvation of their souls; they must openly confess their attachment to Christ, and must "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach." A public acknowledging of him indeed will not supersede the necessity of internal piety; nor will the piety of the heart supersede the necessity of honoring Christ by an open profession of our faith; both are necessary in their place; and both must be combined by those who would derive any benefit from either.

Learn then from hence,

1. To value aright the privileges you enjoy.

The Jews were far exalted above the heathen; but we are no less exalted above them; for we have the substance, of which the Jews had only the shadow. But even among Christians also there is a great difference; some having the Gospel more fully and clearly opened to them than others. We pray God that the light which you enjoy may be improved by you; else it will leave you in a more deplorable state than Sodom and Gomorrah!

2. To guard against entertaining discouraging thoughts about the salvation of your souls.

Moses tells you that you have no occasion for such thoughts; and Paul guards you against the admission of them into your minds, "Say not in your heart," who shall do such and such things for me? It is very common for people to think their salvation on one account or other is unattainable. But "what could God have done for us that he has not done?" or what provision do we need which he has not laid up in store for us? To say, 'This salvation is not for me,' is to contradict the Scriptures, and to "make God a liar." Repeatedly is it said, that "whoever believes in Christ, and whoever shall call on his name—shall be saved." It matters not whether he is a Jew or a Gentile, a greater sinner or a lesser sinner; for "God is rich unto all that call upon him," whatever guilt they may have contracted, or whatever discouragements they may labor under, [Romans 10:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.11-13).

Put away then all unbelieving fears, and know, that, as the Gospel is revealed for the benefit of all, so it shall be effectual for all who believe and obey it!

#226

THE GOSPEL CLEARLY CONTAINED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

[The author's First Address to the Jews at Catharine Cree, London. The preceding discourse on the same text was written many years before, for Gentiles; this was written in 1818, for Jews.]

**[Deuteronomy 30:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.11-14)**

"Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in Heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into Heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."

The Old Testament is a rich mine of spiritual knowledge, and reflects as much light upon the New Testament as itself receives from this fuller revelation of God's will. Each is necessary to the understanding of the other; in that is the model of the edifice, which, under the Christian dispensation, has been erected; and, if it were duly attended to, it would prove sufficient to convince the whole world, that Christianity is Judaism perfected and completed; perfected in all its types, and completed in all its prophecies.

To this effect Moses spoke in the words before us. "The commandment" which he mentions, is not to be understood, as many Jews imagine, of the law given upon Mount Sinai, but of another covenant which God entered into with his people in the land of Moab; and which was, in fact, the covenant of grace. It is by Moses himself distinguished from the covenant of works [Deuteronomy 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.1); and that distinction is confirmed by the account which he gives of it elsewhere.

The law, as published on Horeb or Mount Sinai, made no provision for the pardon of any sin whatever; it simply said, "Do this and you shall live;" but the covenant made afterwards in the land of Moab, was ratified with the blood of sacrifices; which blood was sprinkled upon the altar, the book, and all the people, [Exodus 24:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.3-8); and therefore sprinkled, that they might know how to seek the remission of their sins, as often as occasion for it should arise.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who was so deeply conversant with the whole of the Mosaic law, refers to this very covenant in this precise point of view. [Hebrews 9:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.19-20).

In this act the gospel way of salvation was set before them; so that they needed not henceforth to be looking for anyone to come down from Heaven, like Moses, or from the depths of the sea, like Jonah, to proclaim it, seeing that it was "very near unto them" already, even "in their mouth," which approved of the law, and "in their heart," which loved the law.

The things which the Gospel more particularly inculcates, are, Repentance, Faith, and Obedience; and these are almost as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as in the New.

To show this to the Jewish people is, I conceive, the very first step towards bringing them to Christianity. The Apostles, when preaching to the Jews, always appealed to the Old Testament in confirmation of all that they delivered; and I also, after their example, will endeavor to show you, my Jewish brethren, that your own Scriptures declare in the plainest terms:

I. That you are guilty and condemned by the moral law.

The law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God; and it requires of every human being an obedience to all its commands. For one single transgression it utterly and eternally condemns us; nay more, it requires every individual to express his assent to this as true, and his approbation of it as right and good, "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

[Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26)." But of the impossibility of coming to God by the law, we have a most striking illustration in the conduct of your forefathers at the very time that the law was given; they were so terrified by all that they saw and heard, that they repeatedly declared, that, if the same scenes should pass again, "they would die;" they entreated that God would no more speak to them himself, but give them a Mediator, through whom they might receive his law in a mitigated form, and divested of those terrors which they were not able to endure. And of this request God expressed the highest approbation, saying, "They have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such a heart in them, [Deuteronomy 5:22-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.22-29)."

In this matter, dearly beloved, my heart responds to the wish of your Almighty Lawgiver, 'O that there were in you such a heart!' Could we but once see you thoroughly convinced of your guilt and condemnation by the law, we would have no fear of your speedily and thankfully embracing the salvation offered to you in the Gospel. The great obstacle to your reception of the Gospel is, that instead of regarding the law as a ministration of death and of condemnation, you are looking for life from obedience to it. It is true that temporal blessings were promised to obedience; and that eternal blessings also were promised to those who would "lay hold on God's covenant," and keep his commandments. But the covenant on which they were to lay hold, was that which had been made with their father Abraham; and which never was, nor could be, disannulled by the law. The law, as published on Mount Sinai, was intended to shut them up to this covenant, by making known to them the impossibility of being saved in any other way than by the promised Seed. And, when once you understand and feel this, you will not be far from the kingdom of God.

This conviction would also prepare you for another lesson taught to you by Moses; namely,

II. That you must be saved altogether by a sin-atoning sacrifice.

This was taught to you throughout the whole ceremonial law; the daily and annual sacrifices proclaimed it to your whole nation. Nor was this merely taught in theory; it was required of every offender, whatever his sin might be, to bring his sacrifice in order that it might be put to death in his stead, and deliver him from the condemnation which his sin had merited. Even for sins of ignorance this was required; and the offender, whether he were a priest, or an elder, or a ruler, or one of the common people—was required to put his hands on the head of his sacrifice, and thus, by the most significant of all actions, to transfer to it his sins, [Leviticus 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.4); [Leviticus 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.15); [Leviticus 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.24); [Leviticus 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.29). What an instructive ordinance was this!

Yet the ordinance of the scape-goat was, if possible, still more instructive. On the great day of annual expiation, the high-priest, after killing the goat on which the Lord's lot had fallen, was to put his hands on the head of the scape-goat, and to confess over him all the sins of all the children of Israel; and then the goat was led into the wilderness from before them all, never more to be seen; so that the removal of their sins might be made visible, as it were, to their bodily eyes, [Leviticus 16:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.20-22).

Yet, while this glorious truth was thus plainly declared, the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices, and the necessity of a better sacrifice, was proclaimed also. For these very sacrifices were to be repeated from year to year; which showed that the guilt expiated by them was not fully removed. Hence the very sacrifices were, in fact, no other than an annual remembrance of sins, not finally forgiven. In this light they were viewed by those of your forefathers whom you cannot but venerate, and whom I believe to have been inspired of God, the Apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. See [Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-4).

The same thing was intimated by the very partial appointment of sacrifices. There were many sins, as adultery and murder, for which no sacrifice was appointed. Indeed, presumptuous sins, of whatever land they were, if remission was to be obtained by sacrifices, could never be forgiven; because no sacrifice was appointed for them. Nor, in truth, was any man made perfect as pertaining to the conscience by any of the sacrifices; because every man had a secret suspicion at least, if not conviction, that the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin! See [Hebrews 10:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-4).

Still, however, the great end was answered of directing the eyes of all to the appointed sacrifices, and through them to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great sacrifice, whose blood alone can cleanse from sin, and who is "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world."

Dear brethren, it was to this better sacrifice that David looked, when, after the commission of adultery and murder, he prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7)." Let your eyes be directed to the same sacrifice, even to your Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Prophet Isaiah says, "He was wounded for our transgressions;" and again, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all." This is He whom your forefathers pierced, and nailed to the cross; and through whom thousands of those who crucified him, found peace with God; and, if you also could now be persuaded to look unto him for salvation, then you would immediately experience the effect produced by the bronze serpent in the wilderness, and be healed every one of you. O that you would obey the direction given you in the writings of your own prophets, "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth." You would no longer continue strangers to peace and joy; for strangers you must be to these divine sensations, while you are condemned by the law, and ignorant of the way in which your guilt is to be removed. On the contrary, your "peace would flow as a river," and, as "children of Zion, you would be joyful in your King."

But further, it is declared in your law,

III. That all who are thus saved, must be holy in heart and life.

God, as you know, requires you to be "holy as he is holy;" and to be "a peculiar people unto him above all the people upon earth." I rather bring this to your minds, because you are ready to think that we wish to proselyte you to Christianity, that we may have to glory in such an accession to our cause. But I beg permission to assure you, that I would not move a finger to proselyte your whole nation to our religion, if I did not at the same time raise them to be better men, fitter to serve their God on earth, and fitter to enjoy him forever in Heaven. And this I entreat you to bear in mind. It is to the divine image that we wish to bring you, and to the full possession of that blessing promised to you by Jehovah himself, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27)." This is necessary for you, as it is also for us; nor have we ourselves any other rule of conduct than that which was prescribed to you in the Ten Commandments.

The advantage we have in the New Testament is not that new things are revealed to us, but that the things originally revealed to you are made more clear and intelligible. Not that in your Scriptures there is any obscurity in relation to this matter; we may truly say, "It is not far off, nor is it hidden from you; but it is very near unto you, even in your hands and in your mouth;" I pray God we may be able to add, as Moses did in my text, that it is "in your heart" also!

And now permit me to address a few words to you, my **Jewish** brethren.

It is to your own Scriptures that I wish in the first instance to direct your attention; for you yourselves know that they testify of your Messiah, and are intended to direct you to him. It is greatly to be lamented, that they are not studied among you as they ought to be; and that your Rabbis for the most part pay more deference to the voluminous commentaries with which your Scriptures are obscured, than to the Scriptures themselves. But let it not be so with you. Begin to search the Scriptures for yourselves; search them as for hidden treasures; and pray to God to give you his Holy Spirit, to instruct you, and to guide you into all truth. When you take the blessed book of God into your hands, lift up your heart to God, and say with David, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!" Then compare your Scriptures with ours, the Old Testament with the New; and mark how exactly they correspond with each other, even as the vessel with the mold, or the wax with the seal. Then I fear not but that you will soon acknowledge Him of whom the Law and the Prophets do speak, even Jesus of Nazareth, to be the true Messiah, the Savior of the world. Yes, he whom you have hitherto rejected will become precious to your souls; and you will, in a far higher sense than you have ever yet been, become the children of Abraham, and the sons of God.

To the **Christian** part of this auditory I will also beg permission to address a few words.

You have seen that with care and labor I have endeavored to establish the true import of my text from the writings of Moses himself. But, if I had been speaking to you alone, I might have spared that trouble, having the text already explained by God himself. Paul tells us, that the commandment which was near to the Jews, was the Gospel itself, even that word of faith which declares, that whoever with the heart believes in Christ, and with the mouth confesses him, shall assuredly be saved, [Romans 10:5-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.5-13).

How thankful should we be for such a light! and having been favored with it, shall we conceal it from our Jewish brethren, from whom, under God, we have received it? What would you think of a man, who, being stationed in a light-house for the purpose of warning ships in its vicinity to avoid some rocks, and of directing them into a safe harbor, should, when he saw a whole fleet approaching, conceal the lights, and leave the whole fleet to perish on the rocks; and, when called to an account for his conduct, should say, 'I did not think it right to create any alarm among the crews and their passengers?' Would you think his excuse valid? Would you approve of his pretended benevolence? Would you not rather be filled with indignation against him, and say, that the blood of all who perished should be required at his hands?

Do not then act in a way, which, under other circumstances, you would so severely condemn; but, as God has given you a light, improve it carefully for your Jewish brethren. This is what their fathers did for you, when you were bowing down to stocks and stones. Do it then for them, if perhaps you may be the means of enlightening some among them, and of saving their souls from eternal death.

At the same time remember, that Paul applies the passage unto you; and tells you from it, that you must believe in Christ with your hearts, and confess him openly with your mouths. The word is, in the strictest sense, "very near unto you;" read it then, and ponder it in your hearts, and treasure it up in your minds, and live upon it, and glory in it; so shall it be a light to your paths, and make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

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A FAITHFUL MINISTER'S APPEAL

**[Deuteronomy 30:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.19)**

"This day I call Heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live!"

However long a minister may continue with his people, he must part from them at last, and be summoned to give up his account of all his ministrations to them. Moses had now presided over Israel for the space of forty years; and the time was come that he must die, [Deuteronomy 31:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.2). But before his death, he warned them with all fidelity, setting life and death before them; and, in the words which I have just read, he appealed to them, that he had discharged his duty towards them fully in these respects; and urged them to improve the privileges which they had so long enjoyed.

Let me call your attention to,

I. Moses' appeal.

It is justly said of him, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, that "he was faithful in all his house, [Numbers 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 12.7); [Hebrews 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.2)." And, indeed, not even Paul himself labored under greater disadvantages, or persevered with more unwearied diligence than he. The whole of God's laws, moral, ceremonial, judicial, did he make known to the people, enforcing the strict observance of them all (whether "commandments, statutes, or judgments") on the penalty of death. The violating of anyone of them willfully and presumptuously, was declared to be such an act of rebellion against God, that nothing less than utter destruction was the punishment annexed to it, [Numbers 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.30). On the other hand, he promised to them, that, if they were observant of God's blessed will, they should live, and long enjoy their promised inheritance, verse 16-18. And so uniformly had he devoted all his time and strength to their service, that he could call both Heaven and earth to testify of his fidelity in executing the office that had been assigned him.

Let it not be thought that we would presume to institute a comparison between that holy man and ourselves. We well know how infinitely short of him we have come, in the whole of our personal and official character. Yet we do hope that we can so far adopt his Words, as to appeal both to God and man, that, during the years that we have ministered among you, we have faithfully, according to our ability, "set life and death before you."

1. We have ministered the same truths unto you.

[In a young minister this kind of address would be inexpedient; but in an aged minister, who had spent his whole official life in superintending one congregation, it would be thought quite in character.]

In the preceding verses, Moses speaks particularly respecting the Gospel, which he had made known unto the people, "Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in Heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into Heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction!" [Deuteronomy 30:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.11-15)

The exposition of these words is given to us by Paul, who tells us, that in them Moses spoke, not of the righteousness of the Law, but of the righteousness which is of faith, even of that very faith which Paul himself preached, [Romans 10:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.5-9)."

And what has been the subject of our ministrations? You yourselves will bear me witness, that, from the very first hour that I came among you, "I determined to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified, 1 Corinthians 2:2." What Moses preached in types and shadows, I have declared in the plainest terms; showing, at all times, that "the moral law was a schoolmaster to bring you to Christ, [Galatians 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.24);" and that the ceremonial law, in all its ordinances, held forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the great sacrifice, that takes away the sins of the world, [Hebrews 10:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-10). Never, at any period, have we attempted to lay any other foundation than this, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11); nor have we ever hesitated to affirm the sufficiency of this to bear the weight of the whole world, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)."

2. We have too, according to our ability, ministered with the same fidelity.

We hope we may, without presumption, appeal to you, as the Apostle Paul did to the elders of Ephesus, not only that "We have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," but that "we have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God; and are therefore, as far as relates to that, we are free, not from your blood only, but from the blood of all men! [Acts 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.20); [Acts 20:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.26-27)."

You yourselves will bear me witness, that, notwithstanding "the offence of the cross, which neither is ceased, nor can cease, [Galatians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.11)," I have at all times gloried in it, and exalted it as the only means of our reconciliation with God, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14). Nor have I ever amused you with speculative theories. No, I have preached the Gospel practically; and not in a cold and formal manner, but as a matter of life and death. I have never ceased to exhibit it with all its solemn sanctions; assuring you of life, if you would believe in Christ; and denouncing the wrath of God against all who would not obey the Gospel; executing in this respect the commission given to me to preach the Gospel to every creature, saying, "He who believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he who believes not shall be damned! [Mark 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15-16)."

Never, at any time, have I dissembled these truths, "I have never daubed the wall of God's sanctuary with untempered mortar," nor "sewed pillows to the armholes of my people," to let them find ease in sin; never have I "spoken peace to you, when there was no peace," or "promised life" in any other way than a total surrender of yourselves to God, [Ezekiel 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.10); [Ezekiel 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.18); [Ezekiel 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.22).

And here I will mention one point, which, from the beginning, I have kept in mind without turning to the right hand or to the left. I have never perverted one passage of Scripture to make it speak the language of human systems. I have been anxious to set before you the "unadulterated word" of God, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2) and [2 Corinthians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.17); and to let it speak for itself, without ever concerning myself what human system it either countenanced or opposed; having been "allowed by God to be put in trust with the Gospel, I have spoken, not as pleasing men, but God, who tests our hearts, 1 Thessalonians 2:4-5;" and with the "utmost plainness" also, [2 Corinthians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.12), "not with enticing words of man's wisdom," "lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect, [1 Corinthians 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.17); [1 Corinthians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.4-5)."

While, however, "we call Heaven and earth to record this day" respecting these things, let it not be supposed that we are not conscious of innumerable shortcomings and defects in our ministrations; for we are filled with nothing but shame and confusion of face in the review of them, God knows. But as far as respects the fidelity of them, we can, and do, appeal both to God and man, that, like Moses, we have faithfully and invariably "set before you life and death, blessing and cursing," according as they are revealed in the Gospel, and as they shall be awarded to those who receive or reject the Gospel.

And now let me call your attention to,

II. The advice Moses founds upon it.

"Now choose life!"

A free choice is given to every one among you.

The Gospel is freely preached to you all; and you are all at liberty to embrace or to reject it. Almighty God is sincere when he says, that "he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, 1 Timothy 2:4 and [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9)." Never did he reprobate any man, until that man had brought that sentence upon himself by his own willful obduracy. The whole Scripture bears testimony to this truth. If this is not true, how can we ever explain that solemn oath of Jehovah, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel? [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11)."

There is not a human being that is excepted from the invitations of the Gospel, or from its blessings, if he accepts them. "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth! for I am God; and there is none else! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)." And "him who comes unto me, (whoever he is, or whatever he may have done,) I will never cast out! [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)." Moreover, the fault of rejecting these overtures is always imputed to the sinner himself, "You will not come unto me, that you might have life, [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40)." If any could have been supposed to have been reprobated from all eternity, it was the people who were given up to reject their Messiah, and to crucify the Lord of glory; yet over them did our blessed Lord mourn, saying, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not! [Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37)."

That all have a bias towards sin, is certain; but there is no compulsion. That Satan also is permitted to tempt us, is certain; but he cannot compel any man. We are perfectly free agents in all that we do, whether it is good or evil. If it is said, that God "draws men," it is true; but he "draws them with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love, [Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.4)." And, if he prevails over the reluctance of their hearts, it is not by the exercise of an overpowering force, but by "making them willing in the day of his power, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)." If he "works in them to do," it is by "working in them to will, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)."

I will appeal to every living man, whether he ever did good or evil by compulsion against his will? That he has acted against his judgment and his conscience, is true enough, and that in ten thousand instances; but against his will he never did. God sets good before us; and Satan evil; and, whichever we prefer, that we choose, and that we do.

Exercise, then, your choice with true wisdom.

The generality of people, in spite of all that we can say, will choose evil. It is in vain that we endeavor to allure them by the offer of "life," or to alarm them with the threatening of "death;" they prefer evil with all its consequences; and therefore they do it; as God has said, "He who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death [Proverbs 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.36)." But do not act thus. "Choose good;" "choose life; that both you and your seed may live."

Of the beneficial consequences to yourselves you cannot doubt; for, who ever sought the Lord, and was rejected? "Who ever truly believed in Christ, and was confounded? [1 Peter 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.6)." Who ever "chose the good part, and had it violently taken away from him? [Luke 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.42)."

Choose God for your Father; and he will acknowledge you as his children.

Choose Christ as your Savior; and "he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

Choose the Holy Spirit as your Sanctifier; and "he will perfect that which concerns you," and "complete in you the work he has begun."

Choose Heaven for your inheritance; and sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than you be permitted to come short of it.

The very choice you make will evince that you yourselves have been chosen by your God, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16) and [1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.19); and "his gifts and calling are without repentance, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29)."

And shall not this tend to the benefit of "your seed" also? Is it not a part of God's covenant, that "he will put his fear in our hearts, for the good of us, and of our children after us, [Jeremiah 32:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.39)." What is there so likely to benefit the rising generation as the piety of their parents? The force of good instruction is great; but when enforced by good example, it is almost irresistible. Children of pious parents, who have diligently instructed them, and "labored earnestly and constantly in prayer to God for them," cannot sin so easily as others; or if, through the power of temptation, they are drawn aside after wickedness, they will, it is hoped, feel the remonstrances of conscience in seasons of sickness and reflection, and be brought home at last with penitential sorrow to their God. At all events, we have encouragement to hope, that "our labor for them shall not be in vain in the Lord;" and that, though in some instances we would fail, it shall be found generally true, that, if we "bring up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it."

That I may enforce the counsel in my text, I would beg you to consider,

1. The alternative that is here offered to you.

It is not "life" or annihilation; but "life or death!"

It is not "a blessing, or a mere privation of good;" but "a blessing, or a curse."

And have you ever thought what that "death" is, and what that "curse?" is? Oh! who shall declare what that "second death" is, in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? Or what that "curse," which shall be there endured? Were annihilation, or eternal sleep, the alternative—you would at least have the consolation of knowing, that you would be unconscious of your loss; but, as you must live forever, either in Heaven or in Hell, I entreat you to "choose that life," which shall be "at God's right hand, in pleasures for evermore! [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11)."

2. The responsibility attaching to you for the privileges you enjoy.

Our blessed Lord said respecting his hearers, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22)." And may I not say the same to you? Doubtless, if you had the Gospel ministered unto you with less clearness and fidelity, you would have less to answer for, even as Sodom and Gomorrah had on this very account a lighter condemnation than Bethsaida and Capernaum, [Matthew 11:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.20-24).

It is certainly a great comfort to a minister to know that "he has delivered his own soul, [Ezekiel 33:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.8-9)." But it is a painful reflection to think, that the very means he has used for the salvation of his people, will in many cases only increase their guilt; and the word he has spoken to them, instead of being to them a savor of life, will only be a savor of death to their more aggravated condemnation!

Beloved, let me not have to appear in that day as "a swift witness against you," but rather have to present you to God as my children, [Isaiah 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.18), and possess you as "my joy and crown of rejoicing for evermore! 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20."

3. The nearness of the final outcome.

Moses had ministered to his people for forty years; and it is now just about that time that I have ministered to you. How much longer God may be pleased to continue my labors among you, he alone knows; but, according to the course of nature, it cannot be long. Be in earnest, then, to improve the light while you have it, [John 12:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.36).

Many who are gone to judgment would be glad enough if they could come back again to hear the invitations and warnings which they once slighted. And it is possible, that, when the present ordinances shall have come to an end, and the tongue that has so often warned you lies silent in the grave, you may wish that you had "known the day of your visitation," and improved the privileges you once enjoyed.

Let us all "work while it is day; for the night comes, when neither your minister can work for you, nor you for yourselves." May the Lord grant, that, while we are continued together, I may so preach the word, and you receive it, that we may stand with boldness before God, and obtain his plaudit in the day of judgment!

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MOSES' ENCOURAGING ADDRESS TO ISRAEL

**[Deuteronomy 31:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.6)**

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

The application of passages in the Old Testament to Christians at this time is thought by many to be an unwarrantable liberty, especially if those passages referred to any particular occasion, and still more if they primarily related to any particular individual. We are far from saying that great caution is not requisite on this head; but we feel no hesitation in affirming that passages in the Old Testament, whether general or particular in their primary import, are applicable to Christians in all ages, as far as the situations and circumstances of Christians resemble that in former times. Nay, we go further still, and affirm that passages, which in their primary sense related only to temporal concerns—may fitly be applied at this time in a spiritual sense, as far as there exists a just analogy between the cases.

We cannot have a stronger proof of this than in the words before us. They were first addressed by Moses generally to all Israel, when they were about to invade the land of Canaan. They were then addressed particularly to Joshua in the sight of all Israel verse 8, 23; and they were afterwards again addressed to Joshua by God himself, [Joshua 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.5); [Joshua 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.9).

Now it might be asked, Have we any right to apply these words to Christians at this time? And may any Christian consider them as addressed personally and particularly to himself? We answer, Yes; he may; and moreover may found upon them precisely the same conclusions as Israel of old did. For this we have the authority of an inspired Apostle; who, having quoted the words in reference to the whole Christian Church, adds, "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; and I will not fear what man shall do unto me, [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6)."

Thus then are we warranted to address the words to you in relation to that warfare which you are to maintain against all the enemies of your salvation; and this we will proceed to do.

Brethren, we suppose you now in the state of Israel when addressed by Moses. And if, like Moses, we knew that the superintendence of your spiritual concerns was speedily to be devolved to another, and that this was the last time that we would ever address you, we could not do better than amplify and expand his ideas, contained in the words before us.

You, brethren, are about to engage in a most arduous warfare.

The enemies of Israel were numerous and very powerful; they were men of gigantic stature, and they "dwelt in cities walled up to Heaven." There were no less than "seven nations greater and mightier than Israel," and all these were confederate together for the defense of Canaan. But these were weak, in comparison with the Christian's enemies.

You, brethren, have to conflict with the world and all its vanities, the flesh and all its corruptions, the devil and all his wiles. There is not anything you see around you, which is not armed for your destruction; nor is there anything within you which does not watch for an opportunity to betray your soul, and to inflict on it the most deadly wounds. Yet these enemies, notwithstanding their number and power, are quite overlooked by Paul, and counted as nothing, in comparison with those mighty adversaries, the principalities and powers of Hell, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12). Their inconceivable subtlety, their invisible combination, their pre-eminent strength, their inveterate malignity, together with the easiness of their access to us at all times, render them formidable beyond measure; insomuch that if you had not an Almighty Friend to espouse your cause, you might well sit down in despair!

In the prospect of this contest, you are apt to indulge desponding thoughts.

Forty years before, the Israelites had refused to encounter their enemies, from an apprehension that these enemies were invincible; and it is probable that they were not without their fears at this time. And what is it that at the present day deters multitudes from engaging in the spiritual warfare? Is it not a fear that they shall not succeed? When we tell them that they must overcome the world, and mortify the flesh, and resist the devil, they reply, that these things are impossible; and that it is in vain to make such an impracticable attempt, [Jeremiah 18:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.12). Even those who have fought well on particular occasions, are apt to faint, when their trials press upon them with more than usual weight. David himself yielded to unbelieving fears, [Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-10), and exclaimed in his haste, "All men are liars, [Psalm 116:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.11) with 73:13."

Perhaps there is not one among us whose "hands have not sometimes hung down, and his knees been weary, and his heart faint;" not one who has not needed, like Paul himself, some peculiar manifestations of God for his support, [Acts 23:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.11).

But there is no real cause for discouragement to any of you.

It is alleged perhaps, that your enemies are mighty; but "your Redeemer also is mighty;" and "if he is for you, who can be against you?" If it be your own weakness that depresses you, only view it in a right light, and the most consolatory considerations will spring from it; for "when you are weak, then are you strong;" and the more sensible you are of your own insufficiency for any good thing, the more will God magnify his own power towards you, and "perfect his own strength in your weakness." The peculiar compatibility of our text to all such cases is evident from the repeated application of it to people under discouragement, and the blessed effects produced by it.

We have already supposed the discouragement to arise from a view of duties impracticable, or of difficulties insurmountable; but, in the former case, David consoled Solomon, [1 Chronicles 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.20), and, in the latter case, Hezekiah comforted the Jews, [2 Chronicles 32:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.6-8), with the very address which we are now considering; a sure proof, that it contains a sufficient antidote against all disquieting fears, of whatever kind they may be, and to whatever extent they may prevail.

God promises his **presence**and **aid**to his people.

If he refused to go forth with you, you might well say with Moses, "If your presence go not with us, carry us not up hence! [Exodus 33:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.15)." Even if he offered to send an angel with you, it would not be sufficient, [Exodus 33:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.2). But he has promised to be with you himself, and to exercise all his glorious perfections in your behalf. As in the days of Joshua he sent his Son to be "the Captain of the Lord's host, [Joshua 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.13-14)," so has he given him to be "a Leader and Commander unto" you, [Isaiah 55:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.4); by whom he says to you at this hour, "Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Having then his wisdom to guide you, his arm to strengthen you, his power to protect you—then what ground can you have for discouragement? "If he is for you—then who can be against you? [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)."

God promises that he will never fail you or forsake you.

There may be times and seasons when he may allow you to be assaulted with more than usual violence; but he will never give you up into the hands of your enemy, or "allow you to be tempted above your strength." Or if for gracious purposes he see fit to withdraw himself, it shall only be "for a little moment," that he may afterwards the more visibly show himself in your deliverance. Respecting this he engages in the strongest manner; and refers us to the rainbow in the heavens as an infallible pledge of his faithfulness and truth, [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10). Creature helps may fail us; but our God never will! [2 Timothy 4:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16-17). You may "be confident that, having begun a good work in you, he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." The manner in which the Apostle quotes the words of our text, abundantly shows how assured he was that it should be fulfilled; for he uses no less than five negatives to express the idea with the utmost possible force, and then "boldly" draws the inference for us, that we have nothing to fear from our most inveterate enemies! [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6).

Let these considerations then inspire you with confidence and joy.

Hear the animated exhortation which God himself gives you by the Prophet Isaiah, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God! I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10)."

If you reply, that there are mountains of difficulty before you, and you are but as a worm to contend with them; then God says, "Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you," declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. "See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel! [Isaiah 41:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-16)."

"Who then are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be as grass, and forget the Lord your Maker? [Isaiah 51:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12); Isaiah 13." All that you have to do is to wait upon your God; and then, in spite of all your apprehensions of failure, or even of occasional defeats—you shall rise superior to your enemies, and be triumphant over them at last! [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-31). I say then to you in the words of our great Captain, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom! [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)."

Let the captives of Satan arise and assert their liberty.

Behold the kingdom of Heaven is before you, "that good land flowing with milk and honey;" and will you be content that your great adversary shall rob you of it without a struggle? Know that there is armor provided for you; and that if you go forth against him clad with it, you cannot but conquer. O enlist under the banners of the Lord Jesus, and go forth in his strength! fight a good fight; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong; and be assured, "your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Let the **timid**take courage, and return to the charge.

Think not of your own weakness, but of the Lord's strength. Remember what he has done for his people in old time. Did not the walls of Jericho fall at the sound of rams' horns? Was not Midian vanquished by a few lamps and broken pitchers? Did not Goliath fall by a sling and a stone? Ah! know that your enemies shall be like them, if only you will take courage. "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you." See what Joshua did to the five confederate kings, [Joshua 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.24-25); thus shall you also do in due season; for the true Joshua has promised that "he will bruise Satan under your feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

Let the **strong**remember in whom their strength is.

Let not any think themselves so strong, but that they still need, even as Joshua himself did, a word of exhortation and encouragement. Be not self-confident even for a moment, lest God leaves you to yourselves, and you "be crushed before a moth." Peter will remind you how weak you are, if not upheld by God; and what Satan can accomplish, if permitted to sift you as wheat. "Be not high-minded then, but fear;" yet fear not others, but yourselves only. Be weak in yourselves, and strong in the Lord; and then you may dismiss every other fear, and already begin the shout of victory!

#229

THE APPROACH OF DEATH

**[Deuteronomy 31:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.14)**

"The LORD said to Moses: Now the day of your death is near!"

[Hebrews 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.27) "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment!"

To every man, there is an appointed time upon earth. But the precise measure of our days is in mercy, hidden from us. On some occasions, however, God has been pleased to make it known, and to declare with precision the near approach of death, so that the people whose fate was made known might employ their remaining hours in perfecting the work which he had given them to do.

The intimation here given to Moses, we shall consider,

I. As addressed to Moses in particular.

In this view, it comes with peculiar weight to those churches which have been long under the superintendence of an aged minister.

Moses had long watched over Israel.

For the sake of Israel, he had renounced all that the world could give him, and subjected himself to many trials, and exposed himself to many dangers, "He had refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," and abandoned all the pleasures and honors of a court, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt."

From a regard for them, he had braved all the wrath of Pharaoh in his most infuriated state; and had led them forth, unarmed and unprovided, in the hope of bringing them to a land flowing with milk and honey. As God's appointed instrument, he had made known to them the will of God; and had shown them, by a great variety of ordinances, the means which God had provided for their acceptance with him. He had for the space of forty years together fed them with bread from Heaven and with water out of the stony rock. Times without number had he interceded for them, when if his hands had hung down, and his heart had fainted—their ruin would inevitably have ensued. In a word, he had lived only for them.

In all that space of time, not a day had occurred which he had not occupied in their service; and could he but see them happy, nothing that he could forego, nothing that he could do, nothing that he could suffer—was regarded by him as worthy of a thought; so entirely were his interests and happiness bound up in theirs.

But now his care over them must cease.

God had determined that he should not go over the Jordan river, verse 2. This was in part the punishment of his sin at Meribah, when, instead of sanctifying the Lord in the eyes of all Israel by a believing expectation of water from the rock in answer to his Word, he struck the rock, yes, struck it twice, with an unhallowed irritation of mind, See [Numbers 20:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.7-12). But, in part, this exclusion was intended to shadow forth the nature of that dispensation; and to show, that one violation of the law was sufficient to exclude a soul from Canaan; and that all who would obtain an entrance into the promised land, must turn from Moses to Joshua (the Lord Jesus Christ), who alone can save any man.

Moses was now a hundred and twenty years of age; but he was still, as far as natural strength was required, as competent as ever to watch over the people, and to discharge his duty to them. But his time had arrived; and he must transfer his office to another. Happily for him, and for all Israel, there was a Joshua ready to fill his place; and God had ordained him to occupy the vacant post, and to take on him the oversight of this bereaved people.

Just so, could we but see that the charge we vacate would be so supplied, truly, a summons into the eternal world would be a source of unqualified joy. The most painful thought in the separation of aged ministers from their people is, that they know not on whom the care of them shall devolve, whether on one who will watch for their souls—or on one, who, content with a mere routine of duties, will leave them to be scattered by every wolf that shall choose to invade the fold.

However this is, a time of separation must come; the pastor who has fed you more than forty years must be taken from you; and how soon, who can tell? It may be, yes, it is highly probable, that this year will be his last. Certain it is, that "his days approach," and very rapidly too, "when he must die;" and when the connection that has subsisted between you and him must forever cease.

To God he must give account of his ministry among you; as must all of you, also, in due season, of the improvement made of it. And it is a solemn thought, that your blood will be required at his hand—as will all his labors for your good be required at yours. The Lord grant, that when we shall meet around the judgment-seat of Christ, we may all "give up our account with joy, and not with grief!"

But let us turn from the particular instance, and consider the intimation,

II. As applicable to every man

It is true respecting every man; for we no sooner begin to breathe than we begin to die; and the life, even of the oldest person, is "but as a span long." "Our time passes away like a shadow;" and death, to whoever it may come, involves in it:

1. A dissolution of all earthly ties.

The husband and wife, however long they may have been bound together in love, and however averse they may be to separate, must be rent asunder; and, while one is taken to his long home, the other must be left to bewail his sad bereavement with unavailing sorrow.

Perhaps there was a growing family that needed their united care, and that must be deprived of innumerable blessings, which, according to the course of nature, they were entitled to expect. But the hand of death cannot be arrested by the cries of parental anxiety or of filial love; it seizes with irresistible force its destined objects; and transmits them to Him whose commission it has executed, and whose will it has fulfilled. Methinks it were well for those who stand in any one of these relations, to bear in mind how soon they may be bereaved, and how speedily what has been only committed to them as a loan, may be demanded at their hands.

2. A termination of all earthly labors.

We may have many plans, either in hand or in prospect; but death, the instant it arrives, puts an end to all! We may have even formed purposes in relation to our souls: we may have determined that we will, before long, abandon some evil habits in which we have lived, or fulfill some duties which we have hitherto neglected. We may have thought that to repent of our sins, and to seek for mercy through Christ, and to give all diligence to the concerns of our souls—was the path which true wisdom dictated; and that we would speedily commence that beneficial course. But death, having once received its commission to transmit us to the presence of our God—can take no cognizance of any good intentions; it executes its office without favor to any; and, in the instant that he inflicts the stroke, his victim, whoever he may be, dies, "his breath goes forth, and he returns to his earth; and in that very day all his plans come to nothing! [Psalm 146:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.4)."

3. A fixing of our eternal doom.

Whatever be the state of our souls in the instant of death—that it will continue to all eternity, "As the tree falls, so it must lie!" If we have lived a life of penitence and faith, and devoted ourselves truly unto God—it is well; death will be to us only like "falling asleep" in the bosom of our Lord. But, if we have neglected these great concerns, or not so far prosecuted them as to have found favor with God—then death will be to us only like the opening of our prison-doors, in order to the execution of eternal vengeance on our souls! Prepared or unprepared, we must go into the presence of our God, and receive at his hands our eternal doom. Oh, fearful thought!

But so it must be; and, the instant that the soul is separated from the body, it will be transmitted either to the paradise of God, or to the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The day of judgment will make no difference, except that the body will then be made to participate in the doom of the soul; and the justice and righteousness of God, in the sentence awarded, will be displayed to the admiration of the whole assembled universe.

Let this subject be improved by us:

1. For the humbling of our souls in reference to the past.

We have known the uncertainty of life; and have seen, in the mortality of those around us, the approach of death; but how astonishing is it, that these sights have produced such little effect upon our souls! Truly, if we did not know the insensibility of man under circumstances of such infinite consequence, we should scarcely be able to believe what both our observation and experience so fully attest.

2. For the quickening of our souls in reference to the future.

That "the day of death approaches" we are sure; at what precise distance it is, we know not. But should not this thought stimulate us to improve our every remaining hour? Yes, truly; we should turn unto God without delay; and "apply our hearts to wisdom" with all diligence; and so "watch for the coming of our Lord, that, at whatever hour it may be, we may be found ready." "What I say therefore to one, I say unto all, Watch!"

#230

THE SONG OF MOSES A WITNESS AGAINST THE JEWS

**[Deuteronomy 31:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.19)**

"Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them!"

In order that Moses in his own person should exemplify the nature of that law which he had given, it was appointed by God that he should die for one offence, and not have the honor of leading the people of Israel into Canaan. The time of his departure was now near at hand; and God said to him, "Behold, your days approach that you must die." Little remained for him to do. He had written the whole of his law, and had "delivered it unto the priests," that they might "put it in the ark of the covenant of the Lord their God."

But God would have a song composed, which would contain a brief summary of his dealings with his people, and which should be committed by them to memory, as "a witness for him against themselves." This song we now propose to consider; and we shall open to you:

I. The subject-matter of this song.

As being an summary of all their past history, and of God's dispensations towards them to the end of time, its contents are various:

1. This song was **commemorative**.

It records God's sovereign mercy to that people in the original designation of the land of Canaan to them, even from the first distribution of mankind over the face of the earth. When the sons of Adam and of Noah multiplied in the earth, he so ordered and overruled their motions, that the descendants of wicked Canaan should occupy that land, and prepare it, as it were, for Israel; and that the Israelites should be just ready to possess it when the inhabitants would have filled up the measure of their iniquities, and become ripe for the execution of the curse of God upon them. It was in reference to the children of Israel that "the Most High God divided to the nations their inheritance," and set the bounds of each peculiar people, [Deuteronomy 32:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.8).

The manner also in which God had brought them to it is particularly specified. He had brought them through a waste howling wilderness, where he had preserved them by an uninterrupted series of miracles, and had instructed them in the knowledge of his will, and had kept them as the apple of his eye, and had made them the objects of his tenderest solicitude, like the mother eagle fostering, instructing, and protecting her helpless offspring, [Deuteronomy 32:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.10-12).

The richness of the provision which he had made for them is also described in animated and appropriate terms. The fertility of the land, the stores administered even by its barren rocks, the countless multitudes of its flocks and herds, together with the abundance of its produce in grain and wine—all are set forth, in order that the nation even to their latest posterity might know how to appreciate the goodness of God to them, and be suitably impressed with a sense of their unbounded obligations, [Deuteronomy 32:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.13-14).

2. This song was **prophetic**.

God had before declared what the ultimate fate of that nation would be; but here he states it in a compendious way. He foretells both their sins, and their punishment. Notwithstanding all that he had done for them, they would soon forget him, and would stupidly worship the idols of the heathen, which had not been able to protect their own votaries. Thus would they entirely cast off their allegiance to him, and provoke him to execute upon them his heaviest judgments, [Deuteronomy 32:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.15-20); [Deuteronomy 32:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.22-25).

Even for their past abominations he would have cast them off, if he had not been apprehensive that their enemies would have exulted, and taken occasion from it to harden themselves in their atheistic impiety. But by effecting his purposes in the first instance, and delaying his judgments to a future and distant period, he would cut off all occasion for such vain triumphs, and should display at once his mercy and forbearance, his power and justice, his holiness and truth, [Deuteronomy 32:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.26-27).

The terms in which his judgments are predicted necessarily carry our minds forward to the times of the present dispersion.

As awful as was their punishment in Babylon, it fell short of these threats, which were only to receive their full accomplishment, when they should have filled up the measure of their iniquities in the murder of their Messiah! This is evident from that part of the song which is:

3. This song was **promissory**.

Fixed as was God's determination to inflict "vengeance" upon them "in due time"—he revealed also his determination not to cast them off forever, but in their lowest extremity to remember and restore them, [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36). He would indeed banish them from that good land, and admit the Gentiles into fellowship with him as his peculiar people in their stead; but, while he calls on "the Gentiles to rejoice" on this account, he calls on the Jews also to participate in their joy; for though they should be long oppressed by cruel enemies, God would appear again for them, "avenging the blood of his servants, and rendering vengeance to his adversaries," and would again "be merciful unto his land, and to his once most highly-favored people." [Deuteronomy 32:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.43) with [Romans 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.10).

These promises shall in due time be fulfilled; and we trust that the time for their accomplishment is not now far distant. "The root of Jesse now stands for an ensign to the nations;" and while "the Gentiles are seeking to it," we hope that God will speedily set it up also as an ensign to the Jews, and "assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth," [Isaiah 11:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.10-12); [Isaiah 11:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.15-16).

These things were comprehended in "a song, which was to be taught to the children of Israel." We proceed to consider,

II. The peculiar use of this song.

It was "to be a witness for God against the children of Israel," and was for this end to be transmitted to their last posterity. It was intended in this view:

1. To justify God.

When God should have inflicted all these judgments upon his people, they might be ready to reflect on him as variable in his purposes, and cruel in his dispensations. But he here tells them beforehand what he would do, and for what reason he would do it. The change that was to take place, would not be in him, but in them. The very change of his dispensations would prove to them the unchangeableness of his nature. It was for the wickedness of the Canaanites that he was about to cast them out; and for the same reason he would cast out the Israelites also, when they should have provoked him to anger, by sinning in a far more grievous manner, against clearer light and knowledge, and against infinitely greater obligations than they. Of this he forewarned them; and the fault, as well as misery, would be all their own. "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he! [Deuteronomy 32:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.4)."

2. To humble them.

The Jews were at all times a stiff-necked people, "a perverse and crooked generation." The best period of their history was from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua; yet God testified respecting them even then, that they manifested all those evil dispositions, which in process of time would be matured, and grow up into an abundant harvest, "I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore, verse 21." Hence every Jew must see, that as his forefathers were not put into possession of that land for their righteousness—so he, and all his whole nation, are banished from it for their iniquities. And oh, how humiliating the comparison between their present and their former state! Once the glory of the whole world, and now "an astonishment, and a proverb, and a by-word in every nation where they dwell." They need only repeat this song, and they have enough to show them how low they are fallen, and enough to humble them in dust and ashes.

3. To prepare them for his promised blessings.

The promise of a future restoration would of itself be sufficient to stimulate their desires after it. But it is worthy of observation that the very judgments which God here denounces against them are as strongly expressive of his gracious intentions towards them, and as encouraging to their minds, as the promise itself, "I will hide my face from them," he said, "and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful. They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding!" [Deuteronomy 32:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.21) with [Romans 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.19)."

Thus while he transferred the blessings of salvation to the Gentiles, he did it no less for the good of his own rebellious and apostate people the Jews, than for the Gentiles themselves; hoping thereby to stir them up to seek a participation of those privileges, which, when exclusively enjoyed by them, they had despised, [Romans 11:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.11-14). This idea, the moment it shall enter into their minds, will afford them rich encouragement; and we are persuaded, that, if the Christian world evinced a just sense of the mercies they enjoy, and walked worthy of them, the Jews would soon be stirred up to seek those blessings, in the contempt of which they are hardened by Christians themselves.

Let us learn then from hence,

1. To cultivate a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures ourselves.

To us also are they a witness, as they were to the Jews of old, and are at this day. Only they testify for God and against us in a thousand-fold greater degree. Hear what our blessed Lord himself affirms, "Search the Scriptures; for they are they which testify of me!"

O what mysteries of love and mercy do the New Testament Scriptures attest! The incarnation, the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus Christ; his supremacy over all things in Heaven and earth; together with all the wonders of redeeming love. How loudly do they testify for Christ; and how awfully will they testify against us, if we neglect them! If God commanded that the Jews, "men, women and children, and the strangers within their gates, should at stated times be gathered together to hear the law, and learn to fear the Lord and to do his commandments," and that every individual among them in all successive ages should learn this song; then much more ought we to assemble ourselves together for public instruction, and to commit to memory select portions of Scripture, and to teach them diligently to our children, in order to obtain for ourselves, and to transmit to others, the knowledge of God's will as it is revealed to us in the Gospel, verse 12, 13.

We call upon all of you then to study the Holy Scriptures in private; to teach them to your children; to be useful, where you can, in reading them to your poorer neighbors, who through ignorance are unable to read them for themselves, or through sickness are incapacitated from attending the public ordinances. To be active also in the conducting of Sunday schools, is a service most beneficial to man, and most acceptable to God.

2. To impart the knowledge of them to the Jewish nation.

They, alas! have almost universally forgotten this song; but we have it in our hands, and profess to reverence it as the Word of God. Ought we not then to concur with God in that which was his special design in transmitting it to us? Ought we not to use it as the means of conviction to the Jews; and as the means of consolation to them also? Ought we not to seek that they may be partakers of our joy, and be again engrafted on their own olive-tree?

Yet, strange as it may appear, not only have mere nominal Christians neglected them, but even the godly themselves have for the most part overlooked them, as much as if they were in no danger, or as if their conversion were a hopeless attempt. But we need not occupy your time in proving the danger of their state; for if they were not perishing, why did Christ and his Apostles make such efforts to save them? Nor need we labor to prove their conversion practical, when God has declared it to be certain. Let then our compassion yearn over them; let us grieve to see them perishing in the midst of mercy; let us unite our endeavors to draw their attention to the Holy Scriptures, and to the Messiah, whom they have so long continued to reject. Let us constrain them to see what blessings they despise; what holiness and happiness we ourselves have derived from the Lord Jesus, and what they lose by not believing in him.

In this way let us endeavor to provoke them to jealousy. Then may we hope to see the veil taken from their hearts, and to have them associated with us in adoring the once crucified Jesus, and in singing to all eternity "the song of Moses and the Lamb!"

#231

THE CHARACTER OF JEHOVAH

**[Deuteronomy 32:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.1-4)**

"Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants. I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he."

In this chapter is contained the song which Moses wrote for the conviction of the Jews in all future ages, especially in that period when they should have provoked God to scatter them over the face of the whole earth. Its general contents have been before considered. See discourse on [Deuteronomy 31:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.19). At present we shall confine ourselves only to its exordium, in which Moses addresses the whole creation, and then describes the character of the Creator.

An invocation of "the heavens and the earth" is not uncommon in the Scriptures; it is used in order to impress men with a deeper sense of the importance of the subject, and to convey an idea, that even the inanimate creation will rise up in judgment against men, if they should disregard the voice of their Creator.

After requesting their attention, he declares that the whole tendency of his discourse, and especially of that part which exhibits the character of the Deity, is to comfort and enrich the souls of men.

As the dew and rain descend gently and silently upon the earth, softening the parched ground, refreshing and invigorating the drooping plants, and administering nourishment to the whole vegetable creation—so was his Word intended to administer blessings to mankind:

quickening the most dead,

softening the most obdurate,

comforting the most disconsolate, and

fertilizing the most barren, among them all.

We are aware that a directly opposite effect is in general ascribed to a faithful ministration of the word; it is in general supposed, that a scriptural representation of the divine character must of necessity alarm and terrify mankind; but, whatever effect it may produce on them that are determined to hold fast their sins, it cannot fail to comfort all whose minds are duly prepared to receive it, and to operate on their souls as rain upon the new-mown grass. This will appear, while we:

I. Illustrate the representation here given of God.

The description which Moses gives of Jehovah is short, but comprehensive; it sets forth:

1. His **personal majesty**.

The term "Rock" is often used in reference to the Deity; and intimates to us both what he is in himself, and what he is to us. In himself he is the great unchangeable Jehovah; and to his people he is a safe and everlasting Refuge. Whether it be from the storms of temptation or the heat of persecution, he affords protection to all who flee unto him, [Isaiah 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.2); and, to those who build upon him, he is an immovable foundation; nothing shall ever shake them; nothing shall ever disappoint them of their hopes, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17).

2. His **providential government**.

Deep and mysterious are his ways—yet are they all ordered in perfect wisdom and goodness. In the world, in the Church, and in our own individual cases, there are many things which we cannot account for; yet if we imagine that any one of them could have been more wisely appointed, we only betray our own ignorance and presumption.

We cannot tell why God confined the revelation of his will to one single family for so many ages, or why it is still known to so small a part of the world; but in due time God will make it evident that such a mode of dispensing mercy was most conducive to his own glory.

When a persecution arose in the Church about Stephen, and the saints, driven from Jerusalem, were scattered over the face of the earth, it probably appeared to them an inexplicable dispensation; but the benefit of it soon appeared, because the banished Christians propagated the Gospel wherever they came, [Acts 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.1); [Acts 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.4).

When Paul was confined in prison two years, it might be thought a most calamitous event; yet does he himself tell us, that it tended "rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel, [Philippians 1:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12-14)."

Thus, in innumerable instances, we are ready to say, like Jacob, "All these things are against us," when in fact they are "all working together for our good, "and we are constrained after a season to acknowledge that our greatest crosses were only blessings in disguise! [Psalm 97:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.2).

3. His **moral perfections**.

Justice, holiness, and truth, are inseparable from the Deity, "He is a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." The present state of things indeed does not afford us a just criterion whereby to judge of these perfections, because eternity is not open to our view. But the brightest display of these perfections that can be exhibited to mortal eyes, is seen in the great work of redemption; for God has determined not to pardon any of the human race (at least, not any to whom the light of revelation comes,) except in a way that shall magnify these perfections; nor will he condemn any, without making them witnesses for him, that he is holy, and just, and true.

It is for this very end that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world; for, by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, Jesus has made a complete satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and opened a way for the exercise of mercy in perfect consistency with all the other attributes of the Deity.

The true believer makes an open confession of this, and acknowledges, that all his hopes are founded on the sacrifice of Christ. The unbeliever experiences in his own person the weight of that justice, which he would not honor in the person of his surety; so that all in Heaven, and all in Hell too, are constrained to say, "Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, O King of saints! [Revelation 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 15.3)."

That we may make a practical use of the Divine character we shall,

II. Show how to make it a source of comfort to the soul.

If the Deity is an object of terror to any, it must arise either from an erroneous idea of his character—or from an opposition of mind to it. In order then to derive comfort from it:

1. We must get a just and comprehensive view of the Divine perfections.

If, as is too often the case, we paint to ourselves a God of all mercy, who will never vindicate the honor of his law, nor ever fulfill his threatenings against sin or sinners—then we may allay our fears for the present, but we can never bring peace or comfort into the soul; for, as we have no foundation for such an idea of the Deity, we never can divest ourselves of the apprehension that we may be mistaken, and that we may find him at last such a Being as the Scriptures represent him.

On the other hand, if we view nothing but God's justice—then He must of necessity appear terrible in our eyes, because we cannot but know that we are transgressors of his law.

But if we regard him as he is set forth in his Word, and particularly as he appears in the person of Christ—then do we find in him all that is great and good; yes all that our souls can wish for, or our necessities require!

2. We must get our own hearts suitably affected with the Divine perfections.

While the majesty of God should fill us with holy awe, and his power make us fearful of incurring his displeasure—these exalted perfections should encourage a trust in him, as an almighty Helper, and an all-sufficient Protector. His very sovereignty should lead us to apply to him for mercy, because he will be most glorified in showing mercy to the chief of sinners. Of course, a view of his love, his mercy, and his truth—must inspire us with holy confidence, and dispel all the fears which conscious unworthiness must create; we should therefore contemplate them with unceasing care, as the grounds of our hope, and the sources of our eternal welfare.

Nor is it of small consequence to have our minds impressed with a sense of his wisdom and goodness in all his providential dealings. It is by that that we shall have our minds composed under all the most afflictive dispensations, and encouraged to expect a happy outcome out of the most calamitous events. In a word, the representations which God has given of himself will then be most delightful to us, when our hearts are most filled with humility and love!

APPLICATION.

"Hear now, O heavens! and give ear, O earth!" say whether these views of the Deity do not tend to the happiness of man. O that God would "shine into all our hearts, to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ!" then would our "meditation of him be sweet," and our fruits abound to the praise and glory of his grace!

#232

GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS PEOPLE

**[Deuteronomy 32:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9-12)**

"For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him."

The declarations of God in his Word are the principal source from whence we derive our knowledge of the Deity. But much may be learned also from the dispensations of his providence, both from those which are recorded in the inspired volume, and those which pass daily before our eyes. Nor can we more profitably employ our thoughts than in meditating on his dealings towards the Church in general, and ourselves in particular.

This Moses recommended to the Israelites just before his final departure from them. He assured them that God, as far back as the Deluge, had appointed the boundaries of the different kingdoms, with an express reference to the children of Israel; and that he had assigned to Canaan, that accursed son of Noah, and to his posterity, the land which he had marked out for his chosen people, and which the Israelites, in pursuance of his will, were now about to possess, verses 7-8. And, with respect to the Israelites in particular, he had conducted them with astonishing kindness and condescension from their first entrance into the wilderness to that present moment.

His words on that occasion will naturally lead us to consider,

I. God's special interest in his people.

God regarded his ancient people as his portion and inheritance.

When he brought his people into Canaan, he divided the land among the twelve tribes, assigning to each by lot their destined inheritance. Thus among all the people upon the face of the earth he chose, as it were by lot, ("the whole disposal whereof is of the Lord,") the descendants of Abraham as his portion. Even among these he selected only a part, adopting Isaac, and not Ishmael, and still further limiting his choice to Jacob and his posterity, while he withheld this privilege from Esau.

These he chose, not because they were either more numerous or more holy than other people; for "they were the fewest of all people," and "a stiff-necked generation from first to last." "He loved them purely because he would love them, [Deuteronomy 7:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6-8)," and, having "set them apart for himself," he ordained them to be his own portion and his own inheritance.

In precisely the same view, he regards his chosen people at this day.

He has a people still, whom "he chose from before the foundation of the world, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3); [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)," and "predestined to the adoption of children to himself, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)," and accounts as "his peculiar treasure above all people upon the face of the earth, [Exodus 19:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.5)." Respecting all who truly believe in Christ it is said, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people! [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9);" and from these, as from an inheritance, does God expect "a revenue of praise" and glory, such as he receives not from the whole world besides, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9).

It is "of his own purpose and grace alone that he has called them to this honor," without being influenced by any goodness in them, [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). His choice of them was wholly irrespective of their works, past, present, or future, [Titus 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.5). "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins! [1 John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.10)." "You did not choose me, but I chose you . . . [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16)." For his own sake, and not theirs, he has given to them his grace, that to all eternity they may be monuments of his sovereign love and mercy! [Isaiah 43:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.21).

But that which our text chiefly leads us to consider, is,

II. His tender care over them.

His care towards his ancient people is illustrated both by an appeal to fact, and by an apt and beautiful similitude.

It was in the wilderness that he first formed them into a peculiar people for himself. There he took the entire charge of them, leading them in all their way, and supplying their every need. There he instructed them both by his providence and grace; showing them by all his diversified dispensations the extreme depravity of their own hearts, and the marvelous patience and long-suffering of their God, [Deuteronomy 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.15-16); [Nehemiah 9:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.19-21). Had he even for a few days intermitted his care over them, they must all have perished; being in the midst of perils on every side, and incapable of protecting themselves against any of the dangers to which they were exposed. But "he kept them even as the apple of his eye," so that no evil whatever, except what he himself sent for their correction, could assail them.

A mother eagle is very careful of its young; and when she judges that her young are prepared to fly, will "flutter over them, and spread abroad her wings, and stir up her nest," that one or another of her offspring may test their powers. And with such tenderness does she watch the attempt, that, if the scarcely fledged young one prove incapable of stretching its flight so as to return to its nest, she will, with incredible swiftness and skill, fly to its support, and on her own wings bear it back in safety to its usual home.

Thus did God encourage his ancient people to soar towards Heaven, and support them effectually in every hour of need. And in all this he acted "alone, there being no strange god with him," nor any that could claim the smallest measure of honor from their success.

The passage of the Red Sea,  
the bread from Heaven,  
the water from the rock,  
the passage of the Jordan river,  
and the fall of Jericho,  
with a thousand other events,  
clearly showed that all that was effected for them was done by him alone.

And is he not alike attentive to his redeemed people at present?

Where did he "find any of us," my brethren, but "in a waste howling wilderness," where we must have inevitably perished if he of his own sovereign grace and mercy had not come to our relief! And how has he "led us about" even to the present hour, not in the way that would have been most pleasing to flesh and blood, but in the way which he knew would be most conducive to our good, and to the glory of his own name! In this way he has conveyed to our minds such instruction as we could not by any means have so well received in any other way.

By his Word and by his Spirit he has imparted to us much knowledge of himself; but by his various dispensations, and especially those of a more afflictive nature—he has led us into discoveries of his perfections, which we could never otherwise have obtained.

Oh! what views has he given us of our own deserts and of his own tender mercy towards us! In fact, we may, in his dealings with his people in the wilderness, see as in a looking-glass, all that is passing in our own hearts! Our heavenly rest will be infinitely the more endeared to us from our recollection of all our troubles along the way, and of the infinite wisdom and power and love by which we have been led in safety through them.

Think then brethren! What should be our regard towards this Almighty Savior!

Who was it that led his people through the wilderness in the days of old? It was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Angel of the covenant; for he it was whom they tempted, [Exodus 23:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.20); [1 Corinthians 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.9), and he it was "whose reproach Moses counted to be of more value than all the treasures of Egypt! [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26)." That same Jesus is still "Head over all things to his Church, [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23)." He "guides all his chosen people by his counsel, until he brings them safely to his glory."

I ask then with confidence:

Should we not love him with most intense affection?

Should we not trust in him with unshaken affiance?

Should we not serve him with all the powers of our souls?

Methinks there should be no bounds to our love and gratitude, nor any limit to our zeal in his service! [Deuteronomy 10:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.14-15); 1 Samuel 12:24.

We all see and acknowledge this in reference to the Jews, who were favored with his viable interposition; and how much more is it all due from us who enjoy the substance, of which they had but the shadow! I call you then, everyone of you, to show forth your sense of the obligations conferred upon you, and, if possible, to be as zealous in his service as he has been is in yours.

#233

THE JEWS MOVED TO JEALOUSY BY THE GENTILES

**[Deuteronomy 32:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.21)**

"They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding."

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Moses informs us, that, in the very first distribution of men over the face of the earth, God had an especial respect to those, who, at a remote period, would spring from the loins of Abraham; and that he assigned to the descendants of cursed Ham that portion of the globe which, in due time, would be delivered into the hands of Israel, cultivated in every respect, and fit for the accommodation and support of the Jewish nation, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to (or, in reference to) the number of the children of Israel, verse 8. Yet at the very time when God carried this decree into execution, at the time when the nation of Israel were, by the discipline of forty years in the wilderness, brought to a state of faith and piety that was never equaled at any subsequent period of their history, even then, I say, did God foresee their declension from his ways, and inspire Moses to predict the wickedness which they would commit, and the chastisements which should be inflicted upon them on account of it; he even instructed Moses to record the whole beforehand in a song, which was, in all succeeding ages, to be committed to memory by the children of Israel, and to be a witness for God against them.

It was probable that, when God would change his conduct towards them, they would reflect on him either as mutable in his purposes, or as unable to execute his promises towards them; but this song would completely vindicate him from all such aspersions, and be a standing proof to them, that their miseries were the result of their own incorrigible perverseness.

"Now," says God, "write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath, [Deuteronomy 31:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.19-21)."

In this song are foretold the awful apostasies of the Jewish nation, together with all the judgments that would be inflicted on them, from that time even to the period of their future restoration.

The words which I have chosen for my text, contain the sum and substance of the whole; they specify the ground of God's displeasure against his people, and the way in which he would manifest that displeasure; and they particularly mark the correspondence which there should be between their sin and their punishment, "They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding."

In discoursing on these words, there are two things to be considered;

I. The import of this prophecy respecting the Jews.

The general facts relating to it are so well known, that it will not be necessary to enter very minutely into them. Every one knows how highly favored a people the Jewish nation have been; how exalted and privileged above all other people upon earth. The manner also in which they requited the kindness of their God, is well known. We are not disposed to think that human nature is worse in them than in others; the reason that it appears so is, that God's conduct towards them, and theirs towards him, is all exhibited to view, and forms the most humiliating contrast that can be imagined.

On some particular occasions they seem to have been penetrated with a befitting sense of the mercies given unto them; but these impressions were of very short duration; within the space of a few days only, they forgot that wonderful deliverance which had been wrought for them at the Red Sea; as it is said, "They remembered not the multitude of his mercies, but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea." Every fresh difficulty, instead of leading them to God in earnest supplication and humble affiance, only irritated their rebellious spirits, and excited their murmurs against God and his servant Moses. Scarcely had three months elapsed, when, while God was graciously revealing to Moses that law by which the people were to be governed, they actually cast off God; and, because Moses had protracted his stay in the holy mount beyond what they thought a reasonable time, they would wait for him no longer; but determined to have other gods in the place of Jehovah, and another guide in the place of Moses, "Up," they said to Aaron, "make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him." Immediately "they made a golden calf (in imitation of an Egyptian idol), and worshiped it, and sacrificed to it, and said: These are your gods, O Israel, which have brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

Thus early did they show that propensity which was so fatal to them in after ages. In process of time they degenerated so far as to adopt all the gods of the heathen for their gods; even those gods who could not protect their own votaries, did this rebellious people worship, in preference to Jehovah who had done so great things for them, "they worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites, and Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites." Yes, "they made their children to pass through the fire unto Moloch," and "sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto demons, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood."

Even in the very house of God itself did they place their idols; as though they were determined to provoke the Lord to jealousy beyond a possibility of endurance; nor were there any rites too base, too impure, or too bloody for them to practice in the worship of them. Many times did God punish them for these great iniquities, by delivering them into the hands of their enemies; and as often, in answer to their prayers, did he rescue them again from their oppressors. But at last, as he tells us by the prophet, he was even "broken with their whorish heart;" and, as they would persist in their idolatries notwithstanding all the warnings which from time to time he had sent them by his prophets, he was constrained to execute upon them the judgment threatened in our text.

This is the account given us by the inspired historian in [2 Chronicles 36:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.14-17): "Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar."

In confirmation of this exposition of our text, the Jewish writers refer to a passage in the Prophet Isaiah, [Isaiah 23:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 23.13). The Chaldeans were but very recently risen into power; for, many hundred years after the Jews were established in the land of Canaan, the very name of Babylon was not at all formidable to Israel, or perhaps scarcely known. It was originally owing to the Assyrians that Babylon was exalted into so great and powerful a state; as, says the prophet, in the passage referred to, "Behold, the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not until the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness; they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof." Now to be vanquished by such a people, and to be carried captive to such a place, appeared a peculiar degradation; which may be supposed to be in part an accomplishment of those words, "I will move them to jealousy with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

But that there was to be a further accomplishment of those words, we cannot doubt. Indeed, the Jews themselves acknowledge, that their present dispersion through the world is a continuation of those very judgments which were denounced against them by Moses. Not only the learned among them acknowledge this, but, as Moses himself foretold, even the most ignorant of the Jews are well aware of it. Moses says, in [Deuteronomy 31:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.17-18), "On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, 'Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?' And I will certainly hide my face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods."

Now "the Jews themselves take notice that these words have been fulfilled by the many calamities which have befallen them since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This appears from Schebet Jehuda, where Solomon Virgœ quotes this very verse, to prove that their present sufferings proceed not from nature, but from an angry God, more powerful than nature. Section 13."

The truth is, that this prophecy received but a very partial accomplishment at that time; for there were but two tribes sent to Babylon; the other ten were carried captive to Assyria. Now the idea of "provoking them to jealousy by those who were not a people," could have no place in reference to the ten tribes, because Assyria was an empire almost thirteen hundred years before Israel was conquered by them; and to the other two tribes, provided they were to be carried captive at all, it could make but little difference whether the nation that subdued them was of greater or less antiquity. For the full accomplishment of the prophecy, therefore, we must undoubtedly look to the times subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

And here is a matter for the consideration of every Jew, that wishes to form a correct judgment of the main point that is at issue between the Jews and Christians.

The miseries inflicted on the Jewish nation by the Romans, both in the siege of Jerusalem and in their subsequent dispersion throughout the world, have been incomparably more grievous than any that ever were inflicted on them by the Chaldeans. I would ask then of the Jew, What has been the cause of this severe chastisement? What has your nation done to provoke God in so extraordinary a degree? There must be some particular crime that they have committed; what is it? God is too righteous, and too merciful, to afflict them without a cause. I ask: Are any of your Rabbis able to assign an adequate reason for these severe judgments? Your former idolatries were punished in the Babylonish captivity; and you repented of those sins; insomuch that from the time of your return to your own land, to the destruction of your nation by the Romans, you not only never relapsed into idolatry, but you withstood every attempt to ensnare or to compel you to it. Yet, as your sufferings since that period have been so heavy and protracted, it must be supposed that your fathers committed some crime of deeper die, or at least some that was of equal enormity with your former idolatries.

I ask then again: What crime is it? for there is not one of you that will venture to say, that God punishes you without a cause. If you cannot tell me, I will tell you what that crime is: it is the crucifying of your Messiah. You know, and your Rabbis all know, that there was a very general expectation of your Messiah at the precise time that Jesus came into the world. You know that Jesus professed himself to be the Messiah; you know also that he wrought innumerable miracles in confirmation of his claim; you know that he appealed to Moses and the prophets as bearing witness of him; you know that he foretold all that he should suffer; and showed, that in all those sufferings the prophecies concerning him would be fulfilled; you know also, that the crucifying of him was a national act, in which all ranks and orders of your countrymen concurred; and that when Pilate wished to free himself from the guilt of shedding innocent blood, they all cried, "His blood be on us, and on our children!" You know, moreover, that Jesus foretold the destruction of your city and nation by the Romans, together with your present desolate condition, as the punishment that should be inflicted on you for your murder of him; nay more, that these things should befall your nation before that generation should pass away.

You know also, that, agreeably to his predictions, they did come to pass about forty years after his death, and that these judgments have been upon you from that time to the present hour. If you say, that only two of the tribes were thus guilty of putting him to death; I answer, that every Jew in the universe approves and applauds that act; and that therefore the judgments are inflicted on them all, and will continue to be inflicted, until they repent of it. All preceding judgments were removed, when your fathers repented of the crimes on account of which they had been inflicted; and the reason that your present judgments are not removed, is that your enmity against the Lord Jesus is at this hour as strong as ever; and, if he were to put himself in your power again, you would conspire against him as before, and crucify him again!

Yet, if He was not the Messiah, then your Messiah has not come; and, consequently, those prophecies in your inspired volume which foretold his advent at that time, are falsified. Your Messiah was to come before the scepter should finally depart from Judah, and while the second temple was yet standing, and about the time that the seventy weeks of Daniel should expire; but the scepter is departed, and the temple is destroyed; and Daniel's weeks are expired; and nearly eighteen hundred years have elapsed, since the period fixed by these prophecies for his appearance!

It is evident therefore that all these prophecies have failed of their accomplishment, if your Messiah is not yet come. As for saying, that the coming of the Messiah was deferred by God for the wickedness of your nation, what proof have you of it? Where has God threatened that, as a consequence of your wickedness? No; your Messiah has come; and has been treated in the manner which your own prophecies foretold, and as Jesus himself foretold; and though you, like your forefathers, in order to set aside the testimony of his resurrection, have recourse to that self-destructive falsehood of his being taken away by his own disciples, while a whole guard of Roman soldiers were asleep, you know that his disciples did at the very next festival, on the day of Pentecost, attest that he was risen, and attest it too in the very presence of the people who had put him to death, no less than three thousand of whom were converted to him on that very day. You know too, that in a short time myriads of Jews believed in Jesus; and that his Gospel continued to prevail throughout the known world, until the judgments threatened against your nation for destroying their Messiah came upon them.

Now by this act, the crucifying of your Messiah, you provoked God to jealousy to a greater degree than by any of your former crimes; for God sent you his co-equal, co-eternal Son; he sent you that Divine Person, who was "David's Lord," as well as "David's Son." The learned men of his own day acknowledged that the names, Son of man, and Son of God, were of the same import; and that, as assumed by Jesus, both the one and the other amounted to an assertion that he was equal with God. You know also that his claiming these titles was the ground on which they accused him of blasphemy, and demanded sentence against him as a blasphemer. Thus according to your own acknowledgment, supposing him to have been the person foretold by the prophets as the Messiah, you have "crucified the Lord of Glory."

Moreover, about the time that your fathers crucified him, they were ready to follow every impostor that assumed to himself the title of Messiah. "Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin, a doctor of law, a man who was in high repute among all the Jews," acknowledged this readiness of the people to run after impostors; he mentions a person by the name of Theudas, who, with four hundred adherents, was slain. And after him one Judas of Galilee, who drew away much people after him, and perished [Acts 5:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.34-37). We are informed also that Simon Magus, by his enchantments, seduced all the people of Samaria, from the least to the greatest, and persuaded them that "He was the great power of God! [Acts 8:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.9-11)." Your own historian Josephus bears ample testimony to these facts.

Here then you can see how you have provoked God to jealousy, in that you have destroyed his own Son, who came down from Heaven to instruct and save you. Yes, though he brought with him the most unquestionable credentials, and supported his claim by the most satisfactory evidences, you rejected him with all imaginable contempt, while you readily adhered to any vile impostor who chose to arrogate to himself the title of Messiah.

Your former idolatries, though sinful in the extreme, were less heinous than this, inasmuch as the manifestations of God's love were far brighter in the gift of his Son, than in all the other dispensations of his grace from the foundation of the world; and the opposition of your fathers to him was attended with aggravations, such as never did, or could, exist in any other crime that ever was committed.

Here then we are arrived at the true reason of the judgments which are at this time inflicted on you.

Now let us investigate the judgments themselves; and you will see that they also are such as were evidently predicted in our text.

You are cut off from being the people of the Lord, and are absolutely incapacitated for serving him in the way of his appointments. On the other hand, God has chosen to himself a people from among the Gentiles, from "those who were not a people," and were justly considered by you as "a foolish nation," because they were altogether without light and understanding as it respected God and his ways. This you know to have been predicted by all your prophets, insomuch that your fathers, who looked for a temporal Messiah, expected that he would bring the Gentiles into subjection to himself, and extend his empire over the face of the whole earth. This the Lord Jesus has done; he has taken a people from among the Gentiles, who are become his willing subjects. Now this rejection of the Jews from the Church of God, and this gathering of a Church from among the Gentiles, is the very thing which in all ages has most angered you, and provoked you to jealousy.

When Jesus himself merely brought to the remembrance of your fathers, that God had, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, shown distinguished mercy to a Sidonian widow, and Naaman the Syrian; they were filled with such indignation, that, notwithstanding they greatly admired all the former part of his discourse, they would have instantly cast him down a precipice, if he had not escaped from their hands! [Luke 4:22-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.22-30).

When, on another occasion, he spoke a parable to the chief priests and elders, and asked them "what they conceived the lord of the vineyard would do to those gardeners who beat all his servants, and then murdered his Son in order to retain for themselves the possession of his inheritance, they were constrained to acknowledge, that he would destroy those murderers, and rent his vineyard to others who should render him the fruits in their season;" and on his confirming this melancholy truth with respect to them, they exclaimed, "God forbid! [Matthew 21:33-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.33-41) and [Luke 20:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.14-16)." When the Apostles of Jesus afterwards preached to the Gentiles, the Jews could not contain themselves; the very mention of the name Gentiles, irritated them to madness, [Acts 13:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.44-45); [1 Thessalonians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.15), [16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thessalonians 2.16)." So indignant were they at the thought of having their privileges transferred to others, whom they so despised. And thus it has been ever since.

Nothing is so offensive to a Jew at this day, as the idea of Christians arrogating to themselves the title of God's peculiar people. The present attempts to bring the Jews into the Church of Christ are most displeasing to them; they regard us as modern Balaam's, rising up to bring a curse upon their nation; and when any are converted from among them to the faith of Christ, the old enmity still rises in the hearts of their unbelieving brethren; who are kept only by the powerful arm of our law from manifesting their displeasure, as they were accustomed to do in the days of old, [Acts 23:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.21-22).

Here then you see the text fulfilled in its utmost extent; here also you see that perfect correspondence between the guilt and the punishment of the Jewish nation, which was predicted; they have provoked God to jealousy by following vile impostors and rejecting his Son; and He has provoked them to jealousy by rejecting them, and receiving into his Church the ignorant and despised Gentiles.

And now let me ask: Is this exposition of the text novel? No, it is that which is sanctioned by your own prophets, supported by our Apostles, and confirmed by actual experience.

Look at the prophets; do they not declare the call of the Gentiles into the Church, saying, "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and His rest shall be glorious, [Isaiah 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.10)." The Prophet Hosea's language, though primarily applicable to the ten tribes, is certainly to be understood in reference to the Gentiles also, "I will have mercy upon her that has not obtained mercy; and I will say to those who were not my people, You are my people; and they shall say, You are my God, [Hosea 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.23)." And again, "It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, You are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, You are the sons of the living God, [Hosea 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 1.10) with [Romans 9:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.24-26)."

But the Prophet Isaiah points directly to the Gentiles, when he says, "I am sought by those who asked not for me. I am found by those who sought me not. I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that wets not called by my name." I say he points to the Gentiles there; for he immediately contrasts with them the state of his own people, saying, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walks in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts, [Isaiah 65:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.1-2) with [Romans 10:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.20-21)."

If you turn to the New Testament, you will find there the very words of our text quoted, not merely to prove that the Gentiles were to be brought into the Church of God, but that Israel was apprised of God's intentions, and that, however averse they were to that measure, they could not but know that Moses himself had taught them to expect it. "Did not Israel know?" says the Apostle: did they not know that "there was to be no difference between the Jew and the Greek; and that the same Lord is rich unto all that call upon him?" Yes! for Moses says: I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you, [Romans 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.19).

If we look to matter of fact, we find that there are, in every quarter of the globe, thousands and millions of Gentiles who are serving and honoring Jehovah, precisely as Abraham himself did; they are believing in the same God, and walking in the same steps; and the only difference between him and them, is that he looked to that blessed seed of his who would come; and they look to that blessed seed of his who has come, even Jesus, in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed.

It is time that we now inquire,

II. What use is to be made of this prophecy by us Gentiles?

If ever there was a dispensation calculated to instruct mankind, it is that which is predicted in the words before us. I will mention three lessons in particular which it ought to teach us; and the Lord grant, that they may be engraved in all our hearts!

First, it should lead us to adore the mysterious providence of God. Let us take a view of God's dealings with that peculiar people, the Jews. When, the whole earth was lying in gross darkness, he was pleased to choose Abraham out of an idolatrous nation and family, and to reveal himself to him. To him he promised a seed, whom he would take as a peculiar people above all the people upon earth. These descendants he promised to multiply as the stars of Heaven, and as the sands upon the sea-shore; and in due time to give them the land of Canaan for their inheritance. After he had in a most wonderful manner fulfilled all his promises to them, they rebelled against him, and served other gods, and provoked him to bring upon them many successive troubles, and at last to send them into captivity into Babylon. But during this whole time he still consulted their best interests; and even in the last and heaviest of these judgments, "he sent them into Babylon for their good, [Jeremiah 24:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 24.5)." Afflictive as that dispensation was, it was the most profitable to them of all the mercies and judgments that they ever experienced; for by means of it they were cured of their idolatrous propensities; and never have yielded to them any more, even to the present hour.

After seventy years God delivered them from thence also, as he had before delivered them from Egypt; and re-established them, to a certain degree, in their former prosperity. In the fullness of time, he, according to his promise, sent them his only-begotten Son, to establish among them that kingdom of righteousness and peace, which had been shadowed forth among them from the time that they became a nation. But on their destroying him, he determined to cast them off; and accordingly he gave them into the hands of the Romans, who executed upon them such judgments as never had been inflicted on any nation under Heaven. But neither was this dispensation unmixed with mercy; for, blinded as they were by prejudice, they never would have renounced their errors, or embraced the Gospel, if they had been able still to satisfy their minds with the rites and ceremonies of their own Church. But as God drove our first parents from Paradise, and precluded them from all access to the tree of life, which was no more to be a sacramental pledge of life to them now in their fallen state; and as he thereby prevented them from deluding their souls with false hopes, and shut them up unto that mercy which he had revealed to them through the seed of the woman; so now has he cut off the Jews from all possibility of observing the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, in order that they may be constrained to seek for mercy through the Messiah whom they have crucified.

At the same time that God has ordered this dispensation with an ultimate view to the good of his once-favored people, he has consulted in it the good of the whole world; for, when he cut them off from the stock on which they grew, he took a people from among the Gentiles, and engrafted them as scions upon the Jewish stock, and made them "partakers of the root and fatness of the olive-tree" which his own right hand had planted.

What he might have done for the Gentiles, if the Jews had not provoked him to cut them off—we cannot say; but the Apostle, speaking on this subject, says, that "they became enemies for our sakes," and "were broken off that we might be engrafted in." Doubtless, the stock was sufficient to bear both them and us; for the time is coming when the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, shall grow together upon it, seeing that it is God's intention to engraft on it again the natural branches, which for the present he has broken off; but so has he ordained that the Jews should be cast out of his Church, and we Gentiles be introduced into it, and that the one event should be preparatory to the other; so that the fall and ruin of the Jews should be the riches and salvation of the Gentile world, [Romans 11:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.11-12); [Romans 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.15).

And it is plain, that this appointment of his is carried into effect; for they are broken off, and are no longer his Church, since there is not one among them that either does, or can, serve God according to their law; and we, on the contrary, are his Church; and millions of us, through the world, are rendering to him the service he requires; and, if we are not his Church, then God has not at this hour, nor has he had for above seventeen hundred years, a Church upon earth.

God, however, has not cast off his people fully or finally; not fully, for he brought multitudes of them into his Church in the apostolic age; nor finally; for though, through the shameful remissness of the Christian world, he has done but little for the Jews in these latter ages—yet is he, we trust, showing mercy to them now, and sowing seeds among them, which shall one day bring forth a glorious harvest!

Moreover as, by breaking off the Jews, God made room for the Gentiles—so has he ordained, that the bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles shall contribute to the restoration of the Jews themselves; and that, at last, the whole collective body of mankind shall be "one fold under one Shepherd!" What a stupendous mystery is this! Well might Paul, in the contemplation of it, exclaim, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Truly, this mystery is by no means sufficiently considered among us; though it is so great, that not even the Apostles themselves, for six years after the day of Pentecost, could see into it; and even then it was only by a miraculous interference that God prevailed upon them to receive it; it was by repeated visions to Peter and Cornelius, that he induced Peter to preach the Gospel to Cornelius; and it was by the effusion of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his family, that he induced the other Apostles to acquiesce in what Peter had done; and, even to the last, it was with reluctance they confessed, "Then has God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life! Acts 10; [Acts 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.1); [Acts 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.18)."

Let me recommend to you then, my brethren, to turn your attention to this mystery more than you have ever yet done; and never imagine that you have attained just views of it, until you are transported with wonder at the wisdom displayed in it, [Ephesians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.6); [Ephesians 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.9-10), and filled with gratitude for the mercies it conveys.

A second improvement we should make of this subject, is to be afraid of provoking God to jealousy against us also. We have seen that it was the idolatry of the Jews that chiefly provoked God to jealousy against them. But is there not a spiritual idolatry, as well as that which consisted in the worship of graven images? And is it not equally offensive to a jealous God? When his people of old placed idols in their secret chambers, his chief complaint was, that "they set idols up in their hearts! [Ezekiel 14:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.3-4); [Ezekiel 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.7). And has he not told us, that "covetousness is idolatry;" and that we may "make a God of our belly?" What then is this but to say, that 'the loving and serving the creature more than the Creator,' whatever that creature is, is idolatry? We know full well, that gods of wood and of stone were "vanities." But are not pleasure, and riches, and honor, "vanities" when put in competition with our God? And does not the inordinate pursuit of them provoke him to jealousy, as much as the bowing down to stocks and stones ever did? And if the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was that crime which filled up the measure of their iniquities, and brought the wrath of God upon them to the uttermost; shall not "the crucifying of the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame," as Christians do by their iniquities, be also considered as provoking the Most High God?

Let us not think then that the Jews alone can provoke God to anger, or that they alone can ever be cast off for their wickedness; for he has expressly warned us by his Apostle, that he will cast us off, even as he did them, if we provoke him to jealousy by placing on the creature the affections that are due to him alone! Hear what Paul says, "Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed, lest he also spare not you! [Romans 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.21)."

My brethren, you cannot but see how grievously God is dishonored by the Christian world; truly, "he is provoked by us every day;" and we, no less than the Jews, are "a rebellious and stiff-necked people." Look at all ranks and orders of men among professing Christians, and see whether there is not a lamentable departure from primitive Christianity? Compare the lives of the generality of professing Christians with the examples of Christ and his Apostles—and see, not merely how short they come of the pattern set before them, (for that the best among us do,) but how opposite they are in their conduct; insomuch that, if they did not call themselves Christians, no one would ever think of calling them so, from their christless lives.

Those who are in earnest about the salvation of their souls, are still "as men wondered at" among us; so that instead of pointing at an unhappy few as exceptions to the Christian character, no one can tread in the steps of Christ and his Apostles, without becoming "a sign and a wonder" among his neighbors! This you cannot but know; what then must we expect, but that God will punish us precisely as he has done the Jews, and provoke us to jealousy, by others whom we despise?

The fact is, that God is already dealing with us in this manner. The rich, the great, the noble are, for the most part, so occupied with "vanities," as to forget the services which they owe to God. The consequence is, that God overlooks them, and transfers the blessings of his Gospel to the poor. At this day it is true, no less than in the days of the Apostles, that "not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble are called," but "God has chosen the weak, and base, and foolish things of the world; yes, and things which are not—to bring to nothing things which are; that no flesh should glory in his presence!" This very circumstance does move the rich to anger, precisely as it did in the days of old, "Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? As for these poor contemptible people that make such a noise about religion, they are cursed!"

But I must go further, and say, that God is dealing in this very way even with those who profess themselves his peculiar people. Who are the happy Christians? Who have the richest enjoyment of the Gospel, or most adorn it in their life and conversation? Are they the richer professors, whose hearts are set on "vanities," or who are laboring night and day to procure them? Are they not rather the poor and the destitute, who, having but little of this world, are more anxious to enjoy their God? We say not indeed that this is universally the case; but it is a general truth; nay more, among Indians and Hottentots there is often found a more lively and realizing sense of the divine presence, than among the worldly-minded professors of our own day!

I must entreat you therefore, brethren, to reflect, that if we do not, as a people, turn more heartily unto the Lord—we have reason to fear, lest "the lampstand should be removed from us," and be transferred to a people who shall walk more worthy of it.

Lastly, we should be stirred up by this subject to concur with God in his gracious intentions towards the Jews. In the song before us, there are repeated intimations that God will once more restore to his favor his now degenerate and afflicted people. In verse 36, it is said, "The Lord will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he sees that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left."

The song concludes with these remarkable words, "Rejoice, O nations! with his people; for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and unto his people." Here then, you see, that there is mercy in reserve for the Jewish people, and that the Gentiles also shall be partakers of their joy. But in our text there is a hint of a very peculiar nature, namely, not merely that God will grant mercy to them, in the midst of their present chastisement, but that he will render those very chastisements subservient to his gracious designs. He intimates that he is even now provoking the Jews to jealousy, by the mercies he bestows on us Gentiles; that is, that he is even now endeavoring to inflame them with a holy desire to regain his favor.

It is precisely in this sense that Paul uses the same expression; indeed, Paul tells us, that he himself used the very same means for the same end, "Through the fall of the Jews (says he) has salvation come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. Now I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify my office; if by any means I may provoke to jealousy, [Romans 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.11); [Romans 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.14); those who are of my flesh, and might save some of them." This then is the work in which we are to co-operate with God; and, truly, if we were all in earnest about it, we might, with God's help, do great things.

The Jews behold us professing ourselves to be the peculiar people of God; and, if they saw so great a difference between themselves and us as they ought to see, truly they would begin to envy us, and to wish to be partakers of our blessings. But, if they see that we are as covetous and worldly-minded, as lewd and sensual, as proud and vindictive, and, in short, as corrupt in all respects as the very heathen—then shall we not prove a stumbling-block, rather than a help, to them?

And what if, while we ought all to be uniting with one heart and one soul in the blessed work of leading them to Christ, they should find among us an utter indifference to their salvation? Yes, what if they behold among us some (some too of whom we might hope better things) to whom the exertions of their brethren are rather a matter of offence than of joy; some whose endeavor is rather to frustrate, than advance, our benevolent labors? What if they behold some who, instead of laboring with us to provoke them to jealousy, are themselves provoked to an ungodly jealousy against us, on account of our exertions; and who, like Tobiah and Sanballat of old, "are grieved that we have undertaken to seek the welfare of Israel, [Nehemiah 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.10)."

Will not our Jewish brethren take advantage of this? Will they not impute this to our religion? If they see us thus worldly, or thus malignant, will they not judge of our principles by our practice; and, instead of envying us our privileges and attainments, will they not be ready to glory over us, and to thank God they are not Christians?

Oh, brethren! we little think what guilt we contract, while practicing such abominations! It is said of many, that they are no one's enemy but their own; but this is not true; they are enemies to all around them, whom they vitiate by their example; they are enemies to the Jews, whom they harden in their infidelity; and they are enemies to the heathen, whom they teach to abhor the Christian name.

But let it not be so among us; let us remember that to us is committed the blessed task of bringing back to God's fold his wandering—yet beloved, people. Nor let us despair of success, "for, if we were cut out of the olive-tree which is wild by nature, and were engrafted contrary to nature into a good olive-tree; how much more shall these, who are the natural branches, be engrafted into their own olive-tree? If they abide not in unbelief, they shall be grafted in; for, though we are unable, God is able to engraft them in again, [Romans 11:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.23-24)." But then, how is this to be accomplished? it is to be by our means; ("as for the times and the seasons, we say nothing; God has reserved them in his own power;") God has appointed us to seek the salvation of his people; and has communicated his blessings to us on purpose that we may be his depository to keep them, and his channel to convey them, for their benefit. Hear his own words, "As you in times past have not believed God—yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy, [Romans 11:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.30-31)."

Let us then address ourselves to the blessed work that God has assigned to us. Let us, as God's chosen instruments, endeavor to interest ourselves with him to reinstate them in his favor, and interest ourselves with them to return unto him. Let us make a conscience effort of praying for them in secret; let us devise plans for furthering the communication of divine knowledge among them; let us not shrink from labor, or trouble, or expense; let us not be deterred by any difficulties, or discouraged by any disappointments. But let us labor for them, as their forefathers did for us; let us tread in the steps of the holy Apostles, and be ready to sacrifice time, and interest, and liberty, and life itself, in their service; and account the saving of their souls the richest recompense that God himself can give us.

And that we may the more effectually provoke them to jealousy, let us show them that God has done for us as much as he ever did for the patriarchs of old, giving us as intimate an access to him, as firm a confidence in him, and as assured prospects of an everlasting acceptance with him, as ever Abraham himself enjoyed.

They are apt to think that, in exalting Jesus, we dishonor Jehovah; but let us show them by our lives, that we render to Jehovah all the love, and honor, and service, that were ever rendered to him by his most eminent saints; and that there is no principle whatever so operative and powerful as the love of our adorable Redeemer.

Let us show them, that communion with the Son has the same effect on us, that communion with the Father had on Moses; that it assimilates us unto God, and constrains all who behold us to acknowledge that we have been with God. Their eyes are now upon us; upon us especially, who are endeavoring to convert them to the faith of Christ; let them therefore see in us the influence of Christian principles; let them see that, while we speak of enjoying peace through the blood of our great Sacrifice, and of having the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and Sanctifier, we live as none others can live, exhibiting in our conduct:  
the faith of Abraham,  
the meekness of Moses,  
the patience of Job,  
the piety of David,  
and the fidelity of Daniel.

In a word, let them see in us an assemblage of all the brightest virtues of their most renowned progenitors. O! would to God that there were in all of us such a heart! Would to God that the Holy Spirit might be poured out upon us for this end, and work in us so effectually, that the very sight of us should be sufficient to carry conviction to their minds; so that our Jewish brethren, beholding "the exceeding grace of God in us," might be constrained to take hold of our skirt, and say, "We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you in truth! [Zechariah 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.23)."

#234

THE EXCELLENCY OF JEHOVAH

**[Deuteronomy 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.31)**

"For their rock is not like our Rock, as even our enemies concede."

It is not a little to the honor of those who serve God, that the more fully their principles are investigated, the more just will they appear, and worthy to be adopted by all the world. Those principles embraced by ungodly men are often such as scarcely to be vindicated by their most partial friends; but those principles which the children of God profess, will stand the test of examination from their bitterest enemies. To this effect Moses speaks in the words before us; from which we shall,

I. Point out the superiority of Jehovah above all other objects of confidence.

Neither the idols of heathens, nor any other objects of confidence, can in any point of view be put in competition with Jehovah.

Consider His **power**.

There is nothing which he is not able to effect, "He does according to his will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." But what created being can claim this prerogative?

Consider His **love**.

Incomprehensible are the heights and depths of the Father's love, revealed in sending his own Son to die for us! Nor less the love of Christ in giving himself a sacrifice for our sins. Is there any other Being that ever has expressed, or ever can, such love as this?

Consider His **faithfulness**.

God has given to us exceeding great and precious promises, suited to every need we can possibly experience. And has one jot or tittle of his Word ever failed? But where shall we find a creature that has not, in some respect or other, disappointed the expectations of those who trusted in him?

So indisputable is the point before us, that we may even,

II. Appeal to the very enemies of Jehovah in confirmation of our assertions.

We might with propriety appeal to his friends, since they, by their knowledge of him, and their experience of the vanity of earthly confidences, are best qualified to judge. But, waving this just advantage:

1. We will appeal to God's enemies of **former times**.

In the contest with the worshipers of Baal, this matter was brought to a trial; and what was the result? The very idolaters themselves exclaimed, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God! [1 Kings 18:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.39)." Nebuchadnezzar was in like manner forced to acknowledge the vanity of the idol he had set up, and to confess that no other God could effect such a deliverance for his votaries, as Jehovah had wrought for the Hebrew youths. [Daniel 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.29).

2. We will appeal to God's **at this day**.

There are many who are ready to think that too much honor is ascribed to God, when the weakness of all created confidences is exposed. But we will appeal to their judgment, whether they do not think that an omniscient and omnipotent Being, whose providence and grace have been so marvelously displayed, be not more worthy of our trust than an arm of flesh? We appeal also to their experience; for though, through their ignorance of Jehovah, they cannot declare what he is—they do know, and must confess, that the creature, when confided in as a source of true happiness, invariably shows itself to be "vanity and vexation of spirit!"

ADDRESS.

1. Let those who have undervalued our Rock, repent of their folly.

Not idolaters alone, but all who do not supremely love and adore the Savior, must be considered as undervaluing this our Rock; and, if they do not repent of their conduct now, they will bewail it before long with endless and unavailing sorrow. Let them then consider, that, with respect to temporal things, there is none other that can deliver them from trouble, or support them under it; and that, with respect to spiritual things, there is no wisdom, strength, or righteousness, but in Him alone.

Let them consider, that "in Him all fullness dwells;" and that, if they trust in him, he will give them all that is needful for body and soul, for time and eternity. O that they were wise and would turn unto him, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart!

2. Let those who trust in Jesus, glory in him as an all-sufficient portion!

Those who build on this Rock need never fear; however high their expectations are raised, they shall never be disappointed of their hope. They may enlarge their desires, even as Hell itself that is never satisfied; they may ask all that God himself can bestow; and, provided it is good for them, they shall possess it all. However "wide they open their mouth, God will fill it." In vain shall either men or devils seek to injure them; for "one of them should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, verse 30." Let them then consider what an almighty Friend they have; and endeavor to walk worthy of Him who has called them to his kingdom and glory!

#235

JUDGMENT NEAR AT HAND

**[Deuteronomy 32:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.32-35)**

"Their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are filled with poison, and their clusters with bitterness. Their wine is the venom of serpents, the deadly poison of cobras. "Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in My vaults? It is Mine to avenge! I will repay! In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them!"

Tenderness and fidelity are by no means incompatible. Nothing could exceed the tenderness of our blessed Lord, who wept over those who were just about to imbrue their hands in his blood. Yet, when occasion called for it, he spoke with great severity, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the damnation of Hell! [Matthew 23:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.33)."

In like manner, Jehovah, in the chapter before us, while he declares that "a fire was kindled in his anger against his people, and that it should burn to the lowest Hell, verse 22," takes up this lamentation over them, "If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be, verse 29."

But as, notwithstanding all his remonstrances, they still continued to bring forth nothing but "grapes of gall and clusters of Gomorrah," he warns them, that their iniquities were remembered by him in order to a future judgment, and that their merited calamities were near at hand.

But to us, also, are the words no less applicable than to them; for we, also, are a disobedient people, and have but too much reason to expect the judgments of God upon us. I observe, then,

I. That our sins are treasured up before God in order to a future judgment.

This is stated to us in way of appeal, "Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults? [Deuteronomy 32:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.34)." We cannot doubt but that God notes all our wickedness, and "records it in the book of his remembrance, [Malachi 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16)." Of this Job was well convinced, when he said, "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and you sew up my iniquity, [Job 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.17)." Alas, what a mass of iniquity is there contained!

Call to mind the sins of early infancy—for not one of them is overlooked by God.

Then view the evils of childhood and of youth; alas, how numerous—even as the sands upon the sea-shore for multitude!

Then go on to the period of maturer age, when, instead of improving our enlarged faculties in the service of our God, we have debased them the more in the service of sin and Satan.

Go on to the present hour. Take all the actions, words, and thoughts of every successive day, and test them by the standard of God's holy Law; and then see what loads of guilt we have contracted, and what volumes of indictment are ready at any hour to be brought forth against us; especially if we bear in remembrance our impenitence, which so greatly provokes God to anger; and our contempt of his Gospel—that stupendous effort of his love and mercy for the saving of our souls from death!

If we reflect on these, I say, we cannot but see what a fearful account we have to give to our offended God. How soon we shall have "filled up the measure of our iniquities," God alone knows. But this accumulation of our guilt none of us can deny; and this certainty of retribution none of us can doubt.

In addition to this, I must say,

II. That the appointed time for giving up our account is hastening on apace.

"Our foot," we are told, "shall slide in due time, and the day of our calamity is at hand!" Truly "we are set in slippery places; and are liable to be cast down into destruction in a moment! [Psalm 73:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.18-19)." Persons walking upon the ice, or on the glaciers of mountainous countries, feel the force of this observation, and endeavor to guard with all possible care against their danger. But we do not see our danger, notwithstanding it is in fact not less imminent than theirs!

Millions of dangers encompass us around; and numerous instances occur of people summoned into eternity without a moment's warning! The time for every man's death is fixed by God; and how near it may be at hand, no one can reckon. But the instant it is arrived, whether we are prepared or unprepared, away we are hurried to the judgment-seat of Christ; and, if unprepared, we are cast into the very depths of Hell!

I know that people are ready to say, "But God is merciful." True, but I answer, that "To him belongs vengeance also;" yes, and this is as essential to his character as mercy. Hence, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, my text is cited with peculiar emphasis, "We know him who has said: Vengeance belongs unto me; I will recompense! says the Lord." And to this it is added, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! [Hebrews 10:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.30-31)."

Now, I ask: Shall this perfection of the Deity be dispensed with, in order to give us safety in our sins? It cannot be! A hatred of sin, and a determination to punish it, are essential to the nature of Jehovah; and he can as soon cease to exist, as he can cease to act worthy of his proper character.

You cannot but know, brethren, that multitudes are hurried daily into the presence of their God, without any regard to their state of preparation to meet him; and there is no reason why you should not be taken just as they were. "They were saying, 'Peace and safety!' And then came sudden destruction upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, [1 Thessalonians 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.3)." And the more secure you are in your own apprehension, the more reason there is to fear that you shall be called away in like manner, and that, "that solemn day shall overtake you" as a thief! [1 Thessalonians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.4)."

This consideration is very particularly urged upon you by the Prophet Hosea, "The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sins are kept on record. Pains as of a woman in childbirth come to him!

[Hosea 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.12)." It matters not whether you are young or old, or whether in health or sickness, "the Judge stands at the door!" and at the instant ordained by him, into his presence must you go, to "give an account of all that you have ever done, whether it is good or evil."

And truth compels me to declare,

III. That it is owing to the forbearance of God alone that every one of us has not long since fallen into Hell!

Who among us has not deserved the wrath of God? Who among us may not call to mind some moment, when God, so to speak, might have cut us off to display in us his righteous indignation? And if he had summoned us hence, who could have withstood his mandate, or prolonged his life one single hour? We have been in the hands of God, hanging, as it were, over the bottomless pit, and suspended only by a single thread, which, if let loose or cut, would have conveyed us at once to everlasting misery! And many times has God been tempted, so to speak, to let go of his hold; but our blessed Savior has interceded for us, and prevailed to obtain for us a respite from our destined misery, if by any means we might be led to avert it by penitence and faith in him. All has been ready for our ruin long ago: "Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze! [Isaiah 30:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.33)." Yes, the unquenchable fire has long since been kindled, and nothing has prevented our ruin but the forbearance of our God, who, in the midst of all our provocations, has yet waited to be gracious unto us! It is to his sovereign grace alone we owe it, that we are not at this instant in the condition of millions, who never lived so long as we, or sinned so much against God as we, and were altogether as likely to live as we. But "others have been taken—and we are left," if perhaps we may yet repent of our sins, and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us.

I cannot **conclude** this solemn subject without addressing a few words,

1. To those who are yet indulging in carnal security.

What have you been doing all your days, but "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath! [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)." You do not plan to go to Hell, I know. Neither did those who are already in Hell! They planned, each in his own way, to do something that might bring them to Heaven. One intended to repent, another to amend, another perhaps to embrace the Gospel. But death seized them before they had found time to carry their designs into effect.

Just so, you also design to get into the way that leads to Heaven. But tell me: When did you form this plan? Long ago it floated carelessly upon your mind; and here have you been, years and years, without ever carrying it into effect. Tell me, then, I beg you, when do you intend to carry it into effect? As to any serious purpose and endeavor, it is still as far off as at any period of your lives; and therefore there is reason to fear that your good designs will terminate, as those of millions do, in utter miscarriage; and that in you will be verified what the Psalmist has said, "Upon the wicked, God will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup! [Psalm 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.6)."

You may be assured that God will not always bear with you; that, on the contrary, "your judgment lingers not, and your damnation slumbers not! 2 Peter 2:3." "The axe at this very moment lies at the root of the tree," ready to cut you down! [Luke 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.9); and God alone knows whether another offer of mercy shall be ever made to you. "O that you may know, every one of you, in this your day, the things that belong unto your peace! [Luke 19:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.42)." "Today, brethren, while it is called today, harden not your hearts;" but "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near, [Isaiah 55:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.6)." "This day, for every one of you, may be the day of salvation! [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.2);" what tomorrow may be, none can tell. I pray God, it may not prove to you, as no doubt it will to many, "the day of wrath," the day of everlasting damnation!

2. To those who are desirous of preparing for death and judgment.

I am happy to declare unto you, that, however numerous or heinous your sins may have been, they may all this very day be "blotted out of the book of God's remembrance!" Yes, be "blotted out as a morning cloud! [Isaiah 43:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.25)," never more to be seen, never to be remembered against you in judgment, [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12). "The blood of Jesus Christ, we are told, will cleanse from all sin, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" so that "though your sins have been as scarlet or as crimson, they shall in one instant become as white as snow! [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18)."

Yes, brethren, if "vengeance belongs unto God," so does mercy also. "With the LORD is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins!

[Psalm 130:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.7-8)." Take courage, then; and from the very forbearance you have already experienced, assure yourselves that "God is full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great kindness;" and that if only you come to him in his Son's name, you shall never perish, but shall have eternal life!

#236

OUR EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

**[Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36)**

"The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free."

It is a certain truth that God is immutable in his purposes, whether of judgment or of mercy. In the execution of either, there may be long delays; but neither the one nor the other shall fail.

The sins of the impenitent are "kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults? Verse 34" and however secure the ungodly may imagine themselves, they shall give up their account to him, "to whom belongs vengeance and recompense." Yes, they may stand fast in their own apprehension; but "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them!" verse 35." Or, to use the energetic language of Peter, "Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping! [2 Peter 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.3)."

In like manner, are the mercies of God reserved for his chosen people; and though he may, for wise and gracious purposes, allow them to be reduced to the greatest extremities, as he did his people in Babylon, See [Micah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.10), yet will he interpose effectually for them in due season, "and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone."

In confirmation of this truth I propose to show,

I. To what a tried state God's people may be reduced.

God's ways and thoughts are far different from ours. We should be ready to suppose that he would preserve his people from any great calamities, and interpose for their deliverance at the very commencement of their trials. But this is not the way in which he proceeds.

1. He permits his people to be severely tried by **temporal** afflictions.

To these is the primary reference in the text. Compare [Judges 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.14-15); [Judges 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.18) with [2 Kings 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 14.26). The whole of God's dispensations towards his people, in Egypt and the wilderness, evince the truth of it. Nor is it the wicked only whom he permits to be visited with severe afflictions; the righteous in every age have drunk deep of the cup of sorrow which has been put into their hands, [Hebrews 11:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.37-38); [Acts 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.3-4). God has seen it "needful that they should be in heaviness through manifold trials, [1 Peter 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.6);" and has taught them to regard their lot, not as a mark of his displeasure, but rather as a token of his love, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6).

2. He permits his people to be severely tried by **spiritual** trouble.

Many, previous to their finding peace with God, are brought into the deepest distress on account of their iniquities, and from an apprehension of God's heavy displeasure, [Psalm 6:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.1-7); [Psalm 38:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.1-8). And many too after that they have obtained mercy, may yet be greatly tried by reason of the hidings of God's face, [Psalm 22:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.1-2); [Psalm 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.6); Psalms 7, and the delays of his promised blessings, [Psalm 77:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.1-9); [Psalm 88:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14-16); [Psalm 102:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.1-11). Greater distress than this cannot be imagined; yet was it the lot of him who was "the man after God's own heart."

But let us contemplate,

II. The seasonable interpositions which God's people may hope for.

"The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants," when he sees them reduced to such a state as this.

He has done this in instances without number.

The whole history of the Bible is replete with instances; yes, on numberless occasions have his interpositions been so signal, that his most inveterate enemies have been constrained to acknowledge his hand, and his most unbelieving people to sing his praise. The hundred and seventh Psalm is in fact an epitome of God's dealings with his people from the beginning of the world to this present moment; and there is not anyone among ourselves, who, if he have been at all observant of the ways of Providence, must not acknowledge, that he has both seen in others, and experienced in himself, many merciful interpositions in the hour of need.

He will do it to the end of time.

The words before us are in the form of a promise; and we may rely upon them as sure and faithful. They shall be fulfilled to us under temporal distresses, [Psalm 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.18-19); and under spiritual trouble also will God surely remember them for our good. Where can we find a more disconsolate state than that depicted by the Prophet Isaiah? Yet sooner will God work for us the most stupendous miracles, than leave us destitute of the desired aid, [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18).

The frequency of such interpositions leads me to point out,

III. The reason why God permits such trials previous to the bestowment of his promised blessings.

Among many other reasons, he does it,

1. For the making of us more sensible of our dependence upon him.

While, in theory, we acknowledge God as "the Author and Giver of all good," there is no sentiment further from our minds than this in practice. It is only in straits and difficulties that we think of looking unto God. But such atheism is most displeasing to the Governor of the universe; and on this account he allows us to fall into divers trials, that we may know from whence all our blessings have flowed, and on whose providence we depend.

Paul assigns this as one very important reason why God permitted such trials to come upon him in Asia, that he was driven to utter despair, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, [2 Corinthians 1:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.8-10)."

Just so, every affliction that brings us to a more simple life of faith in God, we may justly welcome as a blessing in disguise.

2. For the greater magnifying his own glorious perfections.

We scarcely notice God at all in his common mercies; it is only when we are delivered by some signal interposition of his providence or grace, that we become sensible of our obligations to him. Then we say, The Lord has done this; and we feel disposed, for a time at least, to give him the glory due unto his name. It was for this reason that Jesus came not to restore Lazarus, until he had been dead four days, [John 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.4); [John 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.6); [John 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.15); [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40). Under such circumstances we admire his goodness, and adore his love; and confess him to be a faithful God, who has never failed in the execution of any promise to his believing people.

The song of Moses is sung by us again, "Who is like unto you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders! [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11)." Conviction flashes on our minds with tenfold energy; and we exclaim with the convinced worshipers of Baal, "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!"

3. For the rendering of his mercies more influential on our minds.

When God's mercies have been heaped upon us in an unusual degree, then we feel disposed to ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?"

Behold David after some great deliverance, whereby "his soul was brought out of a horrible pit, and set, as it were, upon a rock;" "what songs were put into his mouth;" and with what ardor does he exclaim, "Blessed is the man that makes the Lord his trust! [Psalm 40:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-4)."

Paul had been brought to similar distress by reason of the thorn in his flesh; yet, when once assured that "the grace of Christ should be sufficient for him," how does he immediately take pleasure and glory in his thorn in the flesh, [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-10). And thus will it be with all, in proportion as they are sensible of the mercies conferred upon them; they will present their whole selves a living sacrifice unto their God, as a reasonable and delightful service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

ADDRESS.

1. To those who are under any **temporal** affliction.

Say not, that "the Lord has forsaken and forgotten you [Isaiah 49:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14);" but wait his appointed time, and assure yourselves that "all is working for your good." It was by a circuitous path that he led Israel to the promised land; but "he led them by the right way;" and you also shall see, in due season, that though "clouds and darkness have been round about him, righteousness and judgment have been the basis of his throne."

2. To those whose trials are of a **spiritual** nature.

These are the heavier of the two; for "a wounded spirit who can bear?" But "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Only wait the appointed time, and "the vision shall come, and not tarry, [Habakkuk 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.2)." "In the evening time it shall be light, [Zechariah 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.7)." In the mean while follow the direction which the Lord himself gives you: "Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10)."

#237

OUR SOVEREIGN GOD

**[Deuteronomy 32:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.39)**

"See now that I myself am He!  
There is no god besides Me.  
I put to death and I bring to life,  
I have wounded and I will heal,  
and no one can deliver out of My hand!"

The Jews, from the time that they became a nation, turned aside from the living God to the worship of idols; on which account, God, in righteous indignation, refused them, on some occasions, the aid which he alone could bestow; and referred them to their idols, in whom they trusted, that they might obtain from them those things of which they stood in need, "Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, which ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings? Let them rise up and help you, and be your protection."

But to us is the same reproach most justly due; for though we do not, like them, bow down to sticks and stones, we are far from realizing in our minds the exclusive agency of Jehovah. To us, therefore, no less than to them, may be addressed the solemn admonition before us, "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand!"

Let me now entreat your attention to,

I. God's own description of his own character.

Agreeably to what is here spoken, we see, that,

1. His agency is universal.

There is nothing done, but he is the doer of it.

[Isaiah 45:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.5-7), "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things!"

[Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.6), "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?"

There is nothing so great, or so small, but it must be traced to God as its proper source and author, even to the falling of a sparrow, or the falling of a hair from our heads! [Matthew 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.29-30). And God is desirous that this should be known and duly considered by us. To reveal this to his ancient people, was one great reason for his marvelous interpositions for them, [Deuteronomy 4:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.34-35), and of the no less marvelous forbearance which he exercised towards them, verse 27. And we, also, must bear in mind, that "whether he kills or makes alive, whether he wounds or heals—it is He alone that does it, and there is no god with him."

2. His decrees are sovereign.

The whole Scripture bears testimony that "God works all things after the counsel of his own will."

He does so in relation to all temporal matters, "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor! [1 Samuel 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.6-8)."

In relation to spiritual matters, also, he exercises no less a sovereign control, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden! [Romans 9:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18)." This was viewed by Paul in so important a light, that when he had once touched upon it, he did not know how to relinquish the subject, but insisted on it with every diversity of expression that language could furnish—and yet with such repetitions as appeared almost to be endless.

Having said that God had blessed us with all spiritual blessings, he traces the gift to this as its true source, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory! [Ephesians 1:3-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.3-14)"

We have often read this passage, but with so little care, as scarcely to get a glimpse of its true import; but, the more minutely and attentively we consider it—the more shall we see the amazing importance of the subject contained in it, and of the character of God as a mighty Sovereign, who does what he will, and "gives no account to us of any of his matters! [Job 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.13)."

3. His power is irresistible.

Forcible is that appeal of Elihu, "When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hides his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation or a man only [Job 34:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.29)." "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy! [James 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.12)."

Hear Jehovah's own declaration respecting this, "I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?" [Isaiah 43:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.11); [Isaiah 43:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.13)."

Does he plan vengeance? This is his own awful asseveration, in the words immediately following my text, "I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood, while my sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, the heads of the enemy leaders, [Deuteronomy 32:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.40-42)"

On the other hand, does he contemplate the exercise of mercy? This is the assurance that he gives his people, "For I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you," declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. "See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the LORD and glory in the Holy One of Israel! [Isaiah 41:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.13-16)."

In a word, He is a Potter, and we are the clay; and whether he is pleased to make or mar the vessel—none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What are You doing? [Jeremiah 18:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.3-6) with [Romans 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.20-21).

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. His solemn call to consider his majestic character.

"See now," says he, "that this is my unquestionable, and unchangeable character;" and you are called to contemplate it:

1. That you may give him the glory of all that you have received.

My brethren, God is a holy and a jealous God, "his very name is Jealous, [Exodus 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.14);" and "his glory he will not give to another, [Isaiah 42:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.8)." How fearfully he will resent any interference with him in this respect, may be seen in the case of Herod, who, when he was applauded for his eloquence, did not give God the glory; and God, in righteous displeasure, caused him to be "eaten up of worms, until he died! [Acts 12:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.21-23)."

But more especially is God jealous in relation to spiritual blessings, which must be ascribed to him alone. Indeed, he has so constituted the whole work of man's salvation, that no particle of honor should be assumed by man—but all glory should be given to him, as "the author and the finisher of our faith." "He has treasured up for us everything in Christ Jesus, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19);" and ordained, that we should "receive everything out of his fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)," looking to him as our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption, "that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that all should glory in him alone! [1 Corinthians 1:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.29-31)."

Let this lesson, then, be learned by us, that God may receive from us all the glory of all that we possess; since "if we differ from others in any respect, it is he who has made us to differ; and we possess nothing which we have not gratuitously received from him, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)."

2. That you may depend on him for all that you ever hope to receive.

Here, also, God asserts his claim to our entire dependence, "Cursed be the man who trusts in man, and who makes flesh his arm; and whose heart departs from the Lord his God [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-8)." Especially in reference to everything that concerns our salvation, does God require our undivided trust, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth! for I am God; and there is none else, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)." Every man, whatever he may possess, must rely on Christ alone, saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength. In the Lord alone shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25)." To this has God a very especial respect in the words of my text.

If we look to the creature, or place any dependence on an arm of flesh, we must take the consequences verse 37, 38, 39. As to the idols on which the Jews were disposed to place their confidence, God says to them, "You are of nothing, and your work of nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you! [Isaiah 41:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.23-24)." So must it be said of everything on which we are accustomed to rely, "It is a broken reed, which will only pierce the hand that rests on it! [2 Kings 18:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 18.21)." Trust then, in the Lord, and in him alone; yes, "trust in him forever; for with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength! [Isaiah 26:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.4)."

This subject, methinks, speaks,

1. Comfort to the true Christian.

Respecting this glorious Being who is here described, it is your privilege to say that "he is your God." In truth, whatever you want, he describes himself as a God of that very thing, of "love," of "mercy," of "peace," of "strength," of "comfort," of "all grace;" and in relation to that very thing will he "be a God unto you! [Hebrews 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10)." Seek him, then, in Christ Jesus; and glory in him as "your God and portion forever!"

2. Terror to those who have any other god.

Who is that God that shall save you in the hour of your extremity? Where will you flee for support in the day of judgment? Indeed, indeed, there is no refuge for you, but in Christ; nor "any other name given under Heaven but his, whereby you can be saved! [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12)."

#238

A MINISTER'S DYING CHARGE TO HIS PEOPLE

**[Deuteronomy 32:45-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.45-47)**

"When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them: "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

This song was composed in order "to be a witness for God against the children of Israel" to the remotest ages, [Deuteronomy 31:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.19). It contains a summary of God's dealings with them, and of the provocations whereby they constrained him at last to visit them with his heavy displeasure. At the same time, it gives an intimation of his mercies, which he has yet in reserve for them, when they and the Gentiles shall be incorporated into one Church, and become one fold under one Shepherd, verse 43. Having recited this song in the ears of all the Elders of Israel, he entreats them to treasure it up in their hearts, and to impress it on the minds of the rising generation, so that it may answer the end for which it was composed.

From the counsel here given to all Israel, I will take occasion to show,

I. The regard which we should manifest towards the Gospel of Christ.

The testimony of Moses, though comprised in this song, did, in fact, comprehend "all the words of God's Law." In like manner, that which I have testified among you, while, in fact, it comprehends the entire Gospel, may be comprised in these few words, "This is the record, that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son; he who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life, [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12)." Paul, in still fewer words, sums it up in this significant expression, "Christ crucified! [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2)."

Now the regard which this demands, is,

1. That you receive the gospel cordially yourselves.

It is not sufficient that you hear it, or approve of it, or form your opinions in accordance with it; you must "set your hearts unto it;" you must feel towards it as you would towards a boat that was pressing towards you, while clinging to a plank in the midst of the ocean. You may form some conception of the eagerness with which you would welcome its arrival, and embrace the salvation which it offered to you; and those very emotions should you realize, when a Savior is set before you to deliver you from the guilt you have contracted, and the condemnation you have merited at the hands of your offended God. In this way must you set your hearts "unto ALL the words" which God has testified by my mouth; you must embrace the doctrines, as declaring what you are to believe; and with equal avidity are you to lay hold upon the precepts which God requires you to obey.

Neither the one, nor the other, are to be viewed as hard sayings, which you would gladly modify to your own corrupt taste; but both of them are to be viewed as molds into which your whole soul is to be poured; so that in everything you may be conformed to the mind and will of God.

2. That you commend the gospel earnestly to others.

You are not to be content to go to Heaven alone; you must endeavor to draw all you can along with you.

Has God imparted to you knowledge? You must labor to communicate it.

Has he given you influence? You must exert it to the utmost of your power.

Has he invested you with authority? You must employ it for God.

Are you magistrates? you are "not to bear the sword in vain," but to use it for him, whose representatives and viceregents you are, [Romans 13:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-4).

Are you parents? you must, like Abraham, "command your children, and your household to keep the way of the Lord [Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19) with the text." Advice is not sufficient. If that prevails, it is well; you have gained your end by gentle means; which should always be resorted to in the first instance; but, if advice will not effect your purpose, you must exert authority, yes, even though your children have arrived at man's estate.

Eli reproved his sons, saying, "Nay, my sons, this is no good report that I hear of you; you make the Lord's people to transgress." But when he saw that they persevered in their iniquities, he should have turned them out of their priestly office; and because he neglected thus to exercise his authority, God visited him and his posterity with the heaviest judgments, even to many generations, [1 Samuel 2:33-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.33-36). To every parent, then, I say, The blood of your children will be required at your hands; and, though you cannot impart unto them any saving grace, you must keep a firm hand in restraining them from every thing that will be injurious to their souls; and must labor in every possible way to bring them to Christ, that they may be saved from wrath through him.

And let me mark,

II. The reasonableness of our duty in relation to this matter.

The service of God altogether is "a reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1);" and more especially that duty commended to us in our text.

1. The testimony itself is highly worthy of our regard.

What is it that we testify? It is, that God has redeemed us by the blood of his dear Son, and will cast out none who come to him in his Son's name. And "is this a vain thing?" is it doubtful, so that we may question it? or unimportant, that we may trifle with it? Let the Apostle Paul determine this, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners! [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)." Yes, indeed; it is "no cunningly-devised feeble," but the very truth of God, to which the whole Scriptures bear witness; and it is "the very wisdom of God, yes, and the power of God, [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24)," so that, in comparison with it, there is nothing, either in Heaven or earth, that gives any just conception of the Deity. In this mystery all the perfections of the Godhead unite, and harmonize, and are glorified.

2. On our regard to the gospel our eternal happiness depends.

"It is our life, whether theoretically considered, or practically applied. Our blessed Lord says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me! [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)." There is no way of reconciliation with God but through the sacrifice of Christ. No man can make atonement for his own sins; and every soul that would be saved, must "submit to the righteousness of God," even to that mode of justification which God has proposed in his Gospel, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3). It was this that distinguished Abel from Cain; Cain brought an offering of the ground; but Abel, looking forward to the Savior, brought a living sacrifice from his flock, [Genesis 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.3-5).

And this is what we also must do. We must look to Christ, and believe in Christ, and lay our sins on him, as the Jewish offerer did on his sacrifice. If we do this, we shall be saved; for "all who believe in Christ shall be justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)." But if not, "there remains for us no other sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation! [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27)."

I will now conclude, with drawing your attention to,

1. The circumstances under which this counsel was given.

"On the self-same day" that his counsel was given, "was Moses to go up to Mount Abarim and die, verses 40-50." This, then, was the dying testimony of Moses. And I, if I were now on my dying-bed, would give to you precisely the same counsel, and entreat you all to "set your hearts to what I have this day testified among you." "Lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, my beloved brethren, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes."

And to every individual I would say, "Teach them unto your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk along the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up; and you shall write them upon the door-posts of your house, and upon your gates, [Deuteronomy 11:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18-20)." Use all possible means of bringing these things to your remembrance [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1); but rest not satisfied, until they have wrought a thorough work upon your souls, and you are "cast into them as into a mold" that shall assimilate you altogether unto God's perfect image, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17).

2. The circumstances which must infallibly before long result from them.

Of this counsel both you and your teacher must shortly give account at the judgment-seat of Christ. In God's book of remembrance, every word is already recorded, together with the manner in which it has been both delivered and received. Gladly would I, my brethren, be "free from your blood," in that solemn day. I would, too, that "you also might, every one of you, deliver your own souls! [Ezekiel 33:2-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.2-9)."

But it is indeed most painful to your minister to reflect, that perhaps at this very moment, while laboring to save your souls, he is sinking many of them into yet deeper perdition; for we may be sure, that, "if he who despised Moses' Law died without mercy, there is a yet more severe punishment" awaiting those who despise the Gospel, [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29). I appeal to yourselves, "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great a salvation [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)."

Now, then, let me prevail upon you to go unto your God, and to entreat of Him to write these things upon your hearts by his Holy Spirit; for I declare unto you, that "they are your life;" yes, "I call Heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live! [Deuteronomy 30:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.19)."

#239

THE BLESSING BESTOWED ON THE TRIBE OF LEVI

**[Deuteronomy 33:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.8-9)**

"About Levi he said: Your Thummim and Urim belong to the man you favored. You tested him at Massah; you contended with him at the waters of Meribah. He said of his father and mother, 'I have no regard for them.' He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children, but he watched over your word and guarded your covenant."

As the father of his people, Moses desired to bless them before his death; and the pronouncing of this blessing, in which he was endued with a spirit of prophecy, was the last act of his life. The grounds on which the blessing was bestowed on the tribe of Levi, are so peculiar, that they deserve a distinct consideration.

There is manifestly a testimony given them of decided approbation; and from this circumstance commentators have been led to regard the whole of what is spoken in the text as of the same import; and to supply from conjecture what is nowhere noticed in the Mosaic history, or rather to contradict altogether what is plainly noticed.

The conduct of Levi both at Massah (which was also called Meribah), and, above thirty-eight years afterwards, at another place called Meribah, was exceeding sinful. Compare [Exodus 17:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.7) with [Numbers 20:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.10-13). At the latter place in particular, both Moses and Aaron, as well as the people, offended God; and were for that offence doomed to die in the wilderness, and never to enter into the promised land.

Hence it might have been supposed that God would punish the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron by withdrawing from them the peculiar honors he had conferred upon them; but as on one occasion they had signalized themselves by a very exalted act of obedience, he was pleased to record what they had done, and to make it an occasion of continuing in their line the most distinguished testimonies of his regard. This sense accords with the history; to the very terms of which the text seems specifically to refer. Compare the language in [Numbers 20:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.13) with the text.

In the words before us there are two things particularly to be noticed:

1. The commendation of Levi.

The act for which they were commended was truly laudable.

When the people throughout the camp of Israel were worshiping the golden calf, Moses, filled with indignation, called the Levites to him, and bade them gird on swords and slay the ringleaders in idolatry throughout the whole camp; and this order they executed immediately, without any respect of persons whatever; they spared not either their nearest relatives or their dearest friends; but slew of the people three thousand men, [Exodus 32:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.25-29).

This would be thought by many to be a savage act, and to deserve censure rather than praise. But it must be remembered, that God was, if I may so speak, their earthly Governor (they lived under a theocracy,) and that they acted in obedience to their supreme Magistrate. Nor could cruelty be imputed to them, any more than to any person who executes the laws among ourselves. They were justified in what they did, precisely as Phinehas was justified in destroying Zimri and Cozbi.

The law itself required, that, if their nearest relative only enticed them to idolatry, even where there was no overt act committed, they should instantly give information against him, and with their own hands put him to death, [Deuteronomy 13:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.6-10). But here was the overt act visible to all; and the civil magistrate was present to sanction their conduct; and therefore they were bound to obey the order given them, and to execute the laws with impartial severity. Hence their conduct is marked in our text as an act of obedience to God, and a "vindication of the quarrel of his covenant, [Leviticus 26:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.25) with the text."

Nor is it by any means unconnected with our duty as Christians. Certainly we have nothing to do with the judgment of zeal, nor any right to take the execution of the laws into our own hands. But we should be zealous for the honor of God; and we ought, in subservience to the laws of our land, to exert ourselves for the suppression of open impiety and profaneness.

More particularly are we bound to serve God ourselves, and to account all personal sacrifices as unworthy of a thought in comparison with our duty to him. Our Lord tells us, not only that "if we love father or mother more than him, we are not worthy of him;" but that we must "hate father and mother, yes, and our own lives also, if we would be his disciples, [Matthew 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.37) and [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)." Of course this must not be understood positively; (for the Gospel inspires nothing but love, and that even to our bitterest enemies,) but it must be taken comparatively; and be explained as intimating, that we should be so firm and decided in our obedience to him as to be altogether unmoved by the affection or threats of our dearest friends, or even by the apprehensions of the most cruel death.

Our Lord himself has set an example for us in this respect; for, when some people told him that his "mother and his brethren were standing without, and desirous to speak with him, he replied, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Whoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother and sister and mother, [Matthew 12:47-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.47-50)." Thus must love to the Creator be the predominant affection in our hearts; and all inferior considerations must be subordinated to his glory.

From the commendation given them we proceed to notice,

II. Their reward.

This may be considered as of two kinds:

1. Official honor.

The Urim and Thummim were in some way united to the breastplate of the high-priest; and by means of them he was enabled to reveal the mind and will of God when he went in before the Lord to consult him on any particular occasion. What the Urim and Thummim were, and how they answered the purpose for which they were made, we are not informed; and therefore it is in vain to waste time in conjectures.

Suffice it to say, that the high-priest who wore them was authorized to consult God in all public matters, and enabled to reveal his mind and will, [Exodus 28:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.29-30).

Now Moses prays, and indeed prophetically declares, that this high honor should descend to the posterity of Aaron; and that the service of the tabernacle should continue to be administered by the tribe of Levi, [Deuteronomy 33:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.10-11). This was a most exalted privilege; and, above a thousand years afterwards, it was expressly declared to have been given as a reward of the obedience before referred to [Malachi 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.5). What a glorious testimony was this, that God will allow nothing that we do for him to pass unnoticed even here; much less shall it go unrewarded in a future world. Truly "those who honor God, God will honor;" and every one that will serve him shall receive an abundant "recompense of reward".

2. Personal benefit.

The official honor was conferred on the posterity of those whose conduct was approved. But do we suppose that the immediate agents were overlooked, and that no blessing was bestowed on them? We can have no doubt but that they also had a recompense in their own bosoms. The import of the words Urim and Thummim is, Illuminations and Perfections; and these are the special benefits which God will confer on all his faithful servants. There is indeed a manifest connection between the work and the reward. The work in this present instance was a vigorous maintenance of God's honor, with an utter disregard of every consideration in comparison with it; and where that is, there will be a clear insight into the divine will, and a growing conformity to the divine image.

Where internal rectitude is lacking, the mind will be obscured, and the feet will stumble; but "where the single eye is, there will the whole body be full of light," and the conversation be regulated agreeably to the commands of God. Light in the mind, and holiness in the life, are mutually influential on each other; each will languish or be advanced, according as the other flourishes or decays; illumination and perfection will be the portion of the decided Christian; but darkness and inconsistency will be the fruit of a temporizing and timid conduct.

To prevent misapprehension or misconduct, we shall add:

1. A word of **caution**.

Let not anyone imagine that religion countenances a fiery zeal on any occasion whatever. The conduct of the Levites has not been proposed for imitation under the gospel dispensation, any further than is necessary for the maintaining of steadfastness in our allegiance to God. We are not to wage war, except against our spiritual enemies; and even then the weapons of our warfare must not be carnal, but spiritual. In all the opposition which it may be necessary to make to our earthly friends or relatives, we must maintain a holy meekness and patience, not attempting to oppose evil by evil, but to "overcome evil with good." The civil magistrate indeed may use the sword, and ought to be "a terror to evil-doers;" and all Christians should be ready to aid him in the suppression of iniquity; but in all private and personal concerns our only armor must be that which God himself has provided for us, [Ephesians 6:11-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11-17), and we must "overcome our enemies by the blood of the Lamb! [Revelation 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.11)."

2. A word of **direction**.

Let a concern for God's honor and your own spiritual advancement be paramount to all other considerations whatever. You must "not account even life itself dear to you, so that you may but finish your course with joy." It must never be a question with you, whether you will perform any particular duty, however difficult it may be, or whatever self-denial it may require. Your mind must be made up to "follow the Lord fully," and to observe the commandments of God "without preferring one before another, and doing nothing by partiality."

This is the way to entail the blessing of God upon your souls, and to "grow both in knowledge and in grace." But you must not attempt these things in your own strength; in order that you may be enabled to act thus, you must pray to "the God of peace to sanctify you wholly," and to "make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever! Amen. [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23); [Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21)."

#240

THE PRIVILEGE OF THOSE WHO LIVE NEAR TO GOD

**[Deuteronomy 33:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.12)**

"About Benjamin he said: Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long."

As God was pleased to communicate to some in former ages the knowledge of future events, so he frequently imparted to them the spirit of prophecy in a more abundant measure, about the time of their death. Thus Isaac and Jacob were peculiarly inspired at that season to foretell the things which should befall their children. Thus Moses also, when about to be gathered to his fathers, was commissioned to declare the states and circumstances of all the different tribes after their entrance into Canaan.

Of Benjamin he foretold, that his tribe should be situated close to the place which God had chosen for himself. This was remarkably fulfilled; for Mount Zion, whereon the temple was built, belonged to Judah; but the remainder of Jerusalem and almost the whole of Mount Moriah (of which Mount Zion was a part) belonged to Benjamin; so literally true was it, that God, the head of all the tribes, "dwelt between the shoulders of Benjamin." And this very circumstance occasioned the tribe of Benjamin to adhere to Judah, when the other ten tribes, under Jeroboam, apostatized from the worship of Jehovah; and that his proximity to the Lord's immediate residence should be to him a source and occasion of the richest benefits.

If it be considered how comprehensive many of the prophecies are, and how the Apostles themselves continually apply them to the general circumstances of the Church of Christ, we shall not be thought to put a strain upon the text, while we take occasion from it to set forth,

I. The state of God's people.

The situation of the tribe of Benjamin may serve at least as an emblem to represent the state of all "the beloved of the LORD." They are "a people near unto God, [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14)," "dwelling by him, and covered by him, all the day long."

1. They maintain a sense of the **divine presence**.

They not only cannot, like the generality, live "without God in the world," or rest, as many professors of religion do, in a round of formal duties; they are sensible that "God searches the heart and tries the thoughts." They long to have a conviction of this fastened upon their minds, and to see, as it were, on every place this inscription written, "You, O God, see me!" They do not harbor secret sin because it is invisible to man; but, assured that "the darkness is no darkness with God," and that he beholds the very counsels of the heart, they strive to "set him ever before them;" and to "walk in his fear all the day long."

2. They walk in dependence on the **divine aid**.

They are scarcely more conscious of their own existence, than they are of their utter insufficiency for anything that is good. They have so often failed through their reliance on their own strength, and they feel such a proneness to every kind of iniquity, if left one moment to themselves, that they are compelled to cry to their God for help. And, if they were not sure that "the grace of Christ is sufficient" for all who trust in it, they would utterly despair of holding out unto the end. Hence their continual prayer is, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" and God imparts to them his promised assistance, [Zechariah 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 10.12); [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3).

3. They delight in doing the **divine will**.

The "commandments of God are not grievous" to them. Their only grief is that they do not obey them with greater readiness and joy. Not but that they often find the workings of an evil principle, that would bring them back again into captivity to sin and Satan; but, through the operation of the blessed Spirit, they are enabled to get the victory over their corrupt nature, and both to obey the law outwardly, and to "delight in it after their inward man, [Romans 7:14-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.14-25)." They would gladly do the will of God on earth, as it is done in Heaven, without reluctance, without weariness, and without reserve.

There doubtless is a great difference between the attainments of different saints; yet this is, on the whole, the state of all; and that they are blessed in it will appear by considering:

II. The privileges they enjoy by means of it.

While the saints thus live near to God, God "keeps them in safety."

1. God protects them from the curse of the law.

We might speak of their deliverance even from temporal evils; since they have none which are not sanctified to their souls, and made blessings in disguise, [Job 5:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19-24). But respecting spiritual evils, we are warranted to speak with the fullest confidence. The saints may, it is true, be left to dread the wrath of God, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9); but it shall never come upon them, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1). While they are endeavoring to walk in communion with God, in dependence on him, and obedience to him, Christians have nothing to fear. God has pledged himself, that they shall never perish! [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7); [John 10:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.27-28).

2. God protects them from the assaults of Satan.

Satan will indeed exert all his power to destroy them; but he shall not finally prevail against them. He may "buffet them," and cast "his fiery darts" at them; but he is a vanquished enemy; and shall, before long, be bruised under the feet of even the weakest saints! [Psalm 91:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.1-3); [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7); [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20). Like the kings whom Joshua subdued, all the powers of Hell shall one day be brought out of their dungeons, to receive, from the very lips of those whom now they persecute, the sentence they so justly merit! 1 Corinthians 6:3.

3. God protects them from the dominion of sin.

Notwithstanding "the law of sin in their members," God's promise to all his people is, that "sin shall not have dominion over them, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14)." As by the operation of fire on the hearth we may see what it would effect, if allowed to extend itself over the whole house—so by the working of sin in our hearts we may clearly see to what a state we should quickly be reduced, if God should allow it to rage with all its force.

But he fulfills his Word, and though thousands of times we have been, as it were, on the very brink of falling, God has interposed by his providence or grace to preserve our souls; and we remain to this day living monuments of his almighty power and unchanging faithfulness!

Exhortation.

1. Let us seek to become "the beloved of the LORD".

We account it no small happiness to be beloved of our fellow-creatures; but how much more to be beloved of the Lord! Whose favor is comparable to his? Whose favor is so honorable, so permanent, so beneficial, [Psalm 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3). Let us then go to him in the name of Jesus; for whose sake we shall be admitted to his favor, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21), and be "blessed by him with all spiritual blessings."

2. Let us endeavor to live more and more near to God.

It is our privilege to dwell in God, and to have God dwelling in us. We might "walk with God," as Enoch did, and though not visibly—yet really, converse with him as our friend, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3). And what greater encouragement can we desire, than that which the text affords? Others may fall; but we shall be "covered, and kept in safety, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17);" others may apostatize to their perdition; but we shall be preserved through faith unto everlasting salvation! [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5).

#241

STRENGTH ACCORDING TO OUR DAYS

**[Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)**

"As your days, so shall your strength be!"

Previous to his departure from them, Moses pronounced a blessing on all the tribes of Israel. The blessing to each was appropriate and prophetic. That assigned to Asher was, that his posterity should be numerous and happy; that his provision should be abundant, and his strength, under every emergency, fully adequate to the occasion.

It is thought indeed by some, that the promise, "your shoes shall be iron and brass," referred to mines in that part of Canaan which should be allotted to them; but it appears to me to import rather, that they should be possessed of great power; and to agree exactly with that address of the Prophet Micah to Zion, "Rise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will give you horns of iron; I will give you hoofs of bronze and you will break to pieces many nations, [Micah 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.13)." Then the meaning of our text will be clear; namely, that whatever difficulties they might have to contend with, they would find their strength sufficient for them.

Now, though many parts of the blessings here pronounced were doubtless so peculiar as to have no reference except to the particular tribe to which they were addressed—yet such parts as were of a more general nature may, without impropriety, be more largely applied to the 'Israel of God' in all ages. Such parts will be found in almost all the addresses to the different tribes; and the promise in our text most assuredly admits of such an interpretation. The promise made to Joshua, "I will not fail you, nor forsake you," might appear to belong to him only, as the individual to whom it was personally addressed. Yet Paul applied it generally to the whole Church of God in all ages; and authorized all saints, in every period of the world, to regard it as spoken equally to themselves, and to expect most assuredly its accomplishment in their own persons, "God has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me! [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6)."

In like manner, we may interpret this blessing, which was primarily addressed to the tribe of Asher—as properly belonging to all the people of God; so far, at least, as they may be in circumstances which call for similar support.

That we may enter the more fully into the meaning of this promise, I will point out distinctly:

I. What this promise supposes and implies.

It is here evidently supposed that the Lord's people will have seasons of trial, which will call for more than ordinary support.

And such seasons do sooner or later occur to all:

1. Seasons of **temptation**.

Who is there that does not experience more or less the temptations of Satan? He is not an inactive adversary. At no time is he unobservant of our frame, or unprepared to gain an advantage over us. But there are some times which he selects for his attacks, when he promises himself a more easy victory, and when he puts forth all his devices to draw us into sin. His wiles are unsearchable! Innumerable also are the modes in which he makes his assaults upon us. Sometimes he assumes the appearance of an angel of light; at other times his own proper character is clearly marked in the blasphemies which he suggests to our minds; and, on all such occasions, if we were not supported from on high, we would fall before him, as lambs before a devouring lion!

The world, too, presents its temptations on every side; it proposes to us its pleasures, its riches, its honors, as objects that may well stand in competition with Jehovah himself, and rival him in our affections.

And our own corrupt hearts, too, are ready enough to indulge all manner of irregular desires, and to draw us into the commission of actual sin.

What would become of us, if, at such seasons as these, we had none to support us, no arm but our own to help us?

2. Seasons of **trouble**.

"We are born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward!" Trouble is the inheritance of every man. No one is exempt: a king upon his throne is open to its incursions, no less than the lowest of his subjects. In his own person, he is exposed to pains and disorders; in his family, to feuds and bitter bereavements; in his circumstances, to all the varieties of change, poverty, and loss. To all of these the saints are exposed, as well as others; while they are oppressed with many troubles peculiar to themselves.

What they often endure from the workings of corruption, the hidings of God's face, the assaults of Satan, the fear of death and judgment, can little be conceived by those who do not fear God. Most generally, too, they are exposed to hatred and persecution for righteousness' sake; and find among their "greatest foes the people of their own household." True it is, that we are not in the present day called to "resist unto blood;" but let it not, therefore, be accounted a small matter to be treated with contempt by friends and enemies, and to be reduced to the alternative of sacrificing all that we hold dear in this life, or the hopes and prospects of a better life. These are great and heavy trials; and every child of God must expect to be conformed to his Lord and Savior in the endurance of them.

3. Seasons of **difficulty**.

Truly spiritual obedience is at all times difficult; and how much more so under such circumstances as those in which Daniel and the Hebrew Youths were placed! To resist an ordinance of a powerful monarch, when the whole empire was joining in the observance of it, and when that disobedience was threatened with a fiery furnace; and to maintain steadfastly the public worship of Jehovah, when, by a temporary neglect or concealment of it, a throwing into a den of lions might be avoided. were no easy matters. It surely needed much grace to maintain a good conscience under such circumstances. And there will be, in the experience of every saint, some special occasions where a strict adherence to duty is inconceivably difficult and painful. Such "days" the promise in our text teaches us to expect, and against such days it makes for us a merciful provision!

But let us distinctly state,

II. What this promise engages and assures.

Whatever our trials be, strength shall be given us in proportion to them; and our blessings from God shall be:

1. Seasonable, in respect of time.

Often, if support were delayed, we should fall a prey to our great adversary. But "God's eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of those who fear him, [2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9)." The very instant he sees us ready to sink, he interposes for our help. He has promised that he would do so, "The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left,

[Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36)." "In the very mount" of difficulty "he will be seen."

The Apostle Paul experienced this on a very trying occasion. When summoned before that bloody tyrant, Nero, "all his friends forsook him; but the Lord stood by him, and strengthened him, that through him the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear, [2 Timothy 4:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16-17)." Had he not been thus strengthened in the very hour of need, his courage might have failed; but by this seasonable interposition of the Deity, he was enabled to maintain his ground, and execute the trust committed to him. And David also attests that this was his frequent experience, "In the day when I cried, you answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul, [Psalm 138:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.3)."

2. Suitable to the particular occasion.

Different are the communications that are wanted under different circumstances. Sometimes wisdom is necessary; and that shall be imparted as our necessities may require. This was promised, in a more especial manner, by our Lord to his disciples, "When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates and powers, take no thought how or what thing you shall answer, or what you shall say; for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that same hour what you ought to say, [Luke 12:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.11-12)."

If patience be needed, that in like manner shall be supplied; for "he will strengthen us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness, [Colossians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11)."

If faith is that which is more especially necessary for the soul, then he will impart that in richer abundance. We have a very striking instance of this in Peter Our Lord had forewarned him that he would deny his Master; and if Peter, after the perpetration of this evil, had given way to despondency, he would have perished in his iniquity, just as Judas did. But our Lord "prayed for him, that his faith might not fail;" and through the operation of this grace upon his soul, he was kept from destruction, and restored to the favor of his God. In a word, the grace which he will bestow in the time of need shall be a tree of life in the soul, "bringing forth its fruit in its season, [Psalm 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.3)," yes, "twelve kinds of fruits, [Revelation 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.2)," according to the occasion that may call for them, and the season to which they may be suited.

3. Sufficient for our utmost necessities.

"Our strength shall be fully equal to our day." Let our weakness be ever so great, or our trial ever so heavy, our Lord "will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able; but will, with the temptation, make for us a way to escape, that we maybe able to bear it, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)." Certainly, the trials of Paul were as numerous and heavy as ever were sustained by mortal man; and under them, especially under that which he calls a thorn in his flesh, and the buffetings of Satan, he cried mightily to the Lord for deliverance. The answer given to him by our Lord was, "My grace is sufficient for you; and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness."

Now, behold, how all his troubles were in an instant turned into occasions of joy! "Most gladly, therefore," says he, "I will rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong! 2 Corinthians 12:9-10." And from that time we find him hurling defiance at all his enemies, however numerous and powerful they might be, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)."

As the promise made to the tribe of Asher may fitly be applied to believers generally, let us consider,

III. What it speaks more especially to God's redeemed people.

Truly, it is a most instructive passage of Holy Writ; for it shows, to all God's believing people,

1. The grounds of their security.

Believers, or unbelievers, we have no strength in ourselves; our strength is in God alone; and, if ever we be strong at all, it must "be in the Lord, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)." His power, as engaged for us; and his fidelity, as pledged to us, are the true, and proper, and only grounds of a sinner's hope. Let the promise which we are now considering be apprehended, and relied upon, and pleaded in faith and prayer, and we can have nothing to fear. "A very worm," so supported, shall "thresh the mountains! [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-15)." "If God be for us, none can be against us, [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)."

2. The reason of their falls.

Notwithstanding what is spoken in the text, it is certain that many saints do fall, and that most grievously. But whence is this? Is not God "able to make them stand? [Romans 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.4)." Or is He not "faithful who has promised? [Hebrews 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23)." Know you, brethren, that the fault is not in God; but in his people themselves, who either become unwatchful, and are therefore left to reap the fruits of their heedlessness; or indulge self-confidence, and are therefore given up for a season to betray their weakness and folly. To these causes must be traced the falls of David and of Peter. If God has engaged to "keep the feet of his saints, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9)." He has not given them therefore a licence to rush into temptation, or to relax their vigilance, or to confide in themselves. His word is true; and he will fulfill it to all who plead it with him. But if we grow remiss and careless, he will leave us to "eat the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices, [Proverbs 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.31)."

I will ask of anyone that has been left to dishonor God, and to wound his own soul, "Have you not procured this unto yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord, when he led you along the way [Jeremiah 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.17)." He has warned you that it should be thus, "The Lord is with you, while you are with him; if you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you, [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2)."

3. The extent of their privileges.

As weak as we are, and in the midst of enemies, still he would have us without worry. He has bidden us to "cast all our care on Him who cares for us, [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7)." He considers himself as dishonored when we indulge any doubts or fears, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint! [Isaiah 40:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.28-31)." "Know, then, in whom you have believed; that He is both able and willing to keep that which you have committed to him! [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

And do not let any dangers, however imminent, appal you. "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14)."

O blessed tidings! Rejoice in them, Beloved, and realize them in your souls. Then shall you enjoy both stability and peace; for "God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on him. Trust therefore, in the Lord forever; for with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength! [Isaiah 26:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3-4)."

#242

THE HAPPINESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

**[Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)**

"Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places."

The God of Israel is infinitely exalted above all the gods of the heathen; and though there cannot be any such disparity between one creature and another, as between the Creator and the creature—yet is there a wonderful difference between the people of God and all other people upon the face of the whole earth. This indeed is a necessary consequence of the former; for, if there is no God like the God of Israel, then there can be no people like the Israel of God, since they, and they only, have Jehovah for their God.

These truths are united in the passage before us; the former had been mentioned in a preceding verse, verse 26; and, in the text, the latter is declared, together with its dependence on the former.

From these words, we shall consider,

I. The happiness of God's people.

The manner in which Moses speaks on this subject is worthy of notice; we may observe in his address to Israel a strong persuasion of the truth he was uttering, a sincere delight in declaring it, and an affectionate solicitude, that they might both be persuaded of it themselves, and live in the comfortable enjoyment of it. He affirms that they were,

1. Truly happy.

It is God's own declaration, "Happy are you, O Israel!" and, if appearances were ever so unfavorable, we might be sure that his judgment was according to truth. But this testimony agrees with the experience of God's people in every age. They are represented as possessing a "peace that passes understanding," and a "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!"

Is it objected that they are also represented:  
as mourning, [Matthew 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-4),  
as tempted, [James 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2); [James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.12),  
as persecuted, [Luke 6:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.22-23); [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14).

True, yet none of these things interfere with their real happiness; yes, instead of destroying, they advance it. See the passages just referred to. If then they can be happy in such situations as these, [Acts 16:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.23-25), and even derive happiness from these situations, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41); [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10), they must be truly happy.

2. Incomparably happy.

It is God himself who challenges all mankind to vie with his people; and this too, not in respect of privileges merely, or of prospects, but in respect of present enjoyments. Who are those who will presume to rival the Lord's people? You great, you rich, you mirthful, what is your happiness, when compared with that which God's Israel possess? Is not all your happiness mixed with gall? Is it not altogether dependent on the creature? Is it not cloying, even in the very possession? Do you not find it transient, and, on the whole, delusive, promising far more in the anticipation than it ever affords in the enjoyment? In all these things it is the very reverse of the Christian's happiness. His blessedness, as far as it is derived from spiritual things, is unmixed; none can rob him of it, because none can intercept the visits of his God; no man was ever surfeited with spiritual delights; if we lived to the age of Methuselah, we might, by a retrospect, revive a sense of them in our souls; and, if our expectations be raised to ever so high a pitch, the reality will far exceed them. We will therefore confidently repeat the challenge, and say, as in the text, "Who is like unto you, O people, saved by the Lord?"

To show that this is no enthusiastic conceit, we proceed to notice,

II. The grounds of their happiness.

It will soon appear that their blessedness is not a baseless fabric, if we consider:

1. What God has done for them.

They are "a people saved by the Lord." Salvation is not a blessing which they merely hope for, but which they already possess. They are saved from the guilt and punishment of sin; all "their iniquities are blotted out;" there remains "no condemnation to them;" they are "complete in Christ;" they stand "before God without spot or blemish."

But as great as this mercy is, they would not be truly happy, if they were not also saved from the power and dominion of sin. It is true, they yet carry about with them a "body of sin and death;" but they never commit iniquity as they were accustomed to do in their unregenerate state; they "cannot continue to sin thus, because they are born of God, and his seed remains in them." God has promised that "sin shall not have dominion over them;" and they experience the accomplishment of this promise to their souls, being "redeemed from all iniquity, and purified unto God a peculiar people zealous of good works [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)."

And is not this salvation a ground of happiness, more especially if we consider by whom it was procured, and by whom conferred? It was "the Lord," even Jesus, who purchased our freedom from guilt; and it is "the Lord," even the Holy Spirit, who gives us a deliverance from sin. Surely such a salvation, bought at such a price, and imparted by such an agent—cannot but be a source of unspeakable felicity to the soul.

2. What God will be unto them.

In vain would all past mercies be, if they were not secured to them by the continued agency of Jehovah. A vessel fitted out and freighted, would not more certainly be overwhelmed by storms, if destitute of a pilot, than man, however gifted, would become a prey to Satan, if he were not constantly aided and protected by his God.

But Israel is happy in this respect also, since, notwithstanding he is yet upon the field of battle, he is placed, if we may so speak, beyond the reach of harm. He is not only furnished with defensive and offensive armor, but has God himself for his "shield," and God himself for his "sword;" so that his enemies must elude Omniscience, before they can destroy him; and must withstand Omnipotence if they do not fall before him. Hence it is that he attains such "excellency," and proves victorious in all his conflicts.

View the believer thus environed, and thus armed, and you may well say to him, "Happy are you, O Israel! who is like unto you?" for the salvation he already possesses, is a pledge of his everlasting triumphs.

APPLICATION.

To whom, besides the true Israel, can we venture to say, "Happy are you?" Are you happy, who, instead of having experienced salvation, are yet under the guilt and power of all your sins; and, instead of having Jehovah for your shield and your sword, have the almighty God for your enemy? Deceive not yourself; you may dream of happiness; but you are in a pitiable condition. So far are you from rivaling the happiness of Israel, you are even inferior to the beasts that perish; and, if you were sensible of your state—you would envy them their prospect of annihilation. Oh, if ever you would be happy, seek to be "saved by the Lord," even by the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, and by the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. What Moses said to his father-in-law, that would God's people say to you, "Come with us, and we will do you good; for God has spoken good concerning Israel [Numbers 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.29)."

As for you who are of the true Israel, seek to be as distinguished for your holiness, as you are for your happiness. When we speak of your felicity, the world cannot understand us, because they are strangers to your feelings. But they can judge of holiness with some considerable degree of accuracy; and your superiority in this respect will be more effectual for their conviction, than all that can be said respecting the happiness of your state. Endeavor then so to live, that we may challenge the world to produce any people comparable to you in holiness. Enable us to say with confidence, Who is like unto you, O Israel? Who is dead to the world, as you are? Who abounds in all holy duties, in all devout affections, in all amiable dispositions, like you? This will silence those who call your happiness enthusiasm, and will convince them, that you are superior to others, "not only in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth!"