**CHARLES SIMEON DEVOTIONA; COMMENTARIES**

**JOSHUA-ESTHER**

**JOSHUA**

***~~#243~~***

***~~CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE~~***

***~~[Joshua 1:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.7-9)~~***

"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

In an address to Joshua, when about to invade a country "wherein were seven nations greater and mightier than he," we might well expect a charge to him to "be strong and very courageous;" but we would naturally suppose, that the exhortation to fortitude would have respect chiefly, if not exclusively, to the enemies whom he was about to encounter; whereas his enemies are left, as it were, altogether out of sight; and no notice is taken but of the Law of God, as that towards which his courage should be exercised.

But, as all his success depended entirely upon God, it was indispensably necessary that he should secure the divine favor; which could not be done but by an obedience to God's commands; and an unreserved obedience to them would, in fact, require in him a stronger principle of courage, than the most formidable enemies would give occasion for. In confirmation of this, I will show,

***~~I. Wherein the fortitude of a Christian soldier should chiefly display itself.~~***

***~~He is to contend with all the enemies of his salvation, in obedience to the laws of God.~~***

The *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*—are the enemies with whom he is to fight.

Now, a soldier in the army of an earthly prince is to act in all things according to certain rules, which are laid down for him in a code of laws drawn up for that specific purpose; these are called the Articles of War; and with them he is to be conversant, in order that he may conform himself to them in all things.

The Christian soldier, also, has his code drawn up for him by God himself, and revealed to him in the Oracles of Truth. This code he is to study with all diligence, and "to meditate on it day and night," that there may be in him an accordance with it in every particular. "Never is he to turn aside from it, to the right hand or to the left." However difficult or self-denying its injunctions may be, he must obey it; and by it, as a test, must he try all the instruction or advice given to him in relation to his conduct. It must be so sacred in his eyes, that he will die rather than depart from it in anything. If blamed in anything, as too scrupulous and too strict, he must refer to that as his standard, "it must be ever in his mouth," as well as in his heart; and he must inculcate on others the same observance as he pays to it himself.

***~~This will require all the courage that any man can possess.~~***

It will require no little courage so to subdue and mortify all his corrupt inclinations, as to have them brought into subjection to the laws of God. And to maintain such a habit in the midst of an ungodly world, will expose him to the heaviest trials. A man who enlists in an army has but to contend with enemies; but the Christian soldier will have to maintain sore conflicts even with his friends; yes, "his greatest foes will be those of his own household."

Nor is it only for a season, during a few campaigns, that he must fight; but every day, every hour, throughout his whole life. He is never off the field of battle; he is never at liberty to relax his vigilance for a single hour. His armor must be girt upon him day and night.

The *weapons*, too, with which he is assaulted, are formidable in the extreme. Shall it be thought that death alone has its terrors? I scruple not to say, that there are thousands who would find it easier to face a battery of cannon, than to withstand the sneers, and contempt, and ridicule, of their nearest and dearest friends. The Christian soldier must be prepared to "resist even unto blood." If he will not lay down his life for Christ, he cannot be his disciple. And does not this require courage?

Worldly soldiers have many things to animate and embolden them, which the Christian soldier lacks.

They are surrounded by multitudes, who are engaged in the same contest, and who invigorate one another by their voices and example; but he engages alone, or nearly so, at the point of attack, and at the time that he is most pressed.

They are applauded in proportion to their exertions, and commend themselves to the esteem of all who behold them; but the more strenuously the Christian soldier exerts himself, the more is he hated and despised by all who ought to encourage and commend him; and, instead of looking for any reward in this life, he knows that to his dying hour he has no other treatment to expect.

Truly, it is not for nothing that the Christian soldier is bidden to be strong and very courageous; for there is more need of a principle of fortitude in him, than in any other person under Heaven.

Let us however notice, on the other hand,

***~~II. The encouragement which God himself affords to all who desire to serve him in truth.~~***

As he reminded Joshua of the grounds he had for encouragement, so he would have us to consider,

***~~1. In whose service we are engaged.~~***

"Have not I commanded you?" Yes, it is the God of Heaven whose battles we fight, and in whose service we are engaged. Were it only an earthly monarch to whom we had devoted ourselves, we ought to serve him with all fidelity. What, then, should we not do for the King of kings, who has not only chosen us to be his soldiers, but has himself taken the field for our sakes, to subdue our enemies, and to deliver us from their assaults?

Contemplate Jehovah as our Covenant-God. Contemplate him as assuming our very nature on purpose to fight our battles. rounder him as submitting to death itself, that on the very cross he might "spoil the principalities and powers of Hell," and "lead captivity itself captive." This is "the Captain of our salvation" under whom we fight; and shall not that encourage us? Suppose the whole universe combined against us, and issuing their orders that we shall not obey so strictly the laws of God; what reply should we make, but that of the Apostles, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you; for we cannot but fulfill his will and execute His commands!"

***~~2. The pledge he gives us of his presence and support.~~***

"Be not afraid, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go," said the Lord to Joshua; and He says the same to us, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world! [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20)." Now, imagine a soldier with his commander and his prince always at his side; would he not be stirred up by that to acts of valor, which, in the absence of such a stimulus, he would be unable to put forth? Know, then, that your God is ever with you; and with you, not only as a Witness of your actions, but as a *Helper*, to strengthen you, to uphold you, to combat with you. What encouragement can you desire beyond this? Hear his own words, addressed to every soldier in his army, "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)."

What does it matter, then, how many there may be against you? If they were as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, you may boldly say, "There are more with you than with them." In fact, "If God is for you, who can be against you?" They may assault you, and boast of their triumphs; but they can do nothing, but in accordance with his will, and in subserviency to his designs.

***~~3. The assurance he gives us of ultimate success.~~***

"Then you shall make your way prosperous, and you shall have good success." You are persecuted; you are imprisoned; you are put to death—but are you vanquished? Was the Savior overcome when he was put to death? Did he not "by death overcome him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage?" "He was the stone which the builders rejected; but, is he not the Headstone?" Know, then, that you are not to estimate victory by the present and temporary effects—but by the ultimate and everlasting results. Be it so; you are sorely oppressed, and your enemies are exulting over you; but God's Word is not broken; for *tribulation is the way to glory; and the cross precedes the crown*. Only be content to suffer with Christ; and be assured you shall speedily be "glorified together, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

**ADDRESS.**

***~~1. Let none expect victory without conflicts.~~***

What shall we say of the religion of your enemies? Has it any resemblance to the religion of the Bible? Are they hated for righteousness' sake? No; the world cannot hate them, because they are of the world. You, on the contrary, are hated purely because you will conform yourselves to the laws of God. Be thankful, then, that you have this evidence that you are the Lord's.

***~~2. Let none doubt of victory, who fight in dependence on the Lord's strength, and in conformity to his commands.~~***

Be strong, and very courageous to do his will. But take special care what kind of fortitude it is that you maintain. There is an unhallowed boldness, which savors of pride and vain-glory. You cannot be too much on your guard against this. Yours must be a *passive fortitude*, such as Christ manifested when "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and opened not his mouth." You are to "love your enemies, to bless those who curse you, and to pray for those who despitefully use you." "You are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good." In you are to be seen "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Only fight with these weapons, and, "even though you are slain like sheep, you shall be more than conquerors [Romans 8:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.36-37)."

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***~~RAHAB PROTECTS THE SPIES~~***

***~~[Joshua 2:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 2.8-14)~~***

"Before the spies lay down for the night, Rahab went up on the roof and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death." "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."

*God is pleased to accomplish his promises by the use of means; to neglect the means therefore is to tempt him, rather than to trust in him. To expect the end without using the means is not faith, but presumption*. Hence the strongest believers have always accounted it their duty to exert themselves as much as if success depended solely on their exertions; while, on the other hand, they placed their hopes in God, as much as if no effort whatever were used by themselves.

Joshua had no doubt respecting his ultimate success in conquering and possessing the land of Canaan; yet, as every prudent General endeavors to obtain information respecting the state of any fortified city which he is about to besiege, before he proceeds actually to invest it, so Joshua felt it his duty to send spies to ascertain the state of Jericho, before he passed over Jordan to attack it. To the spies themselves the undertaking was perilous in the extreme; yet they went forth in humble reliance on their God, and were almost miraculously preserved from falling into the hands of their enemies. The manner of their preservation is here circumstantially related; it was effected solely by the good offices of a woman who lived in the city, and to whom they were providentially directed. Her name was Rahab; and she is constantly in the Scriptures called a harlot; but whether she was at that time a harlot, or was a reformed character, we know not; but this is plain, that her mind was wonderfully overruled by God to screen and protect them. The interposition of God in this matter seems to have been not unlike to that which fifteen hundred years afterwards led to the conversion of Cornelius. Cornelius was instructed in a vision to send for Peter, and was directed where to find him; and at the same time Peter was instructed in a vision to go to him, notwithstanding he was a Gentile. Thus the minds of the spies were directed to the only person in the city that would have afforded them an asylum; and her mind was directed to prefer their safety before every other consideration whatever.

The conduct of Rahab on this occasion is repeatedly mentioned in the New Testament, and that too in terms peculiarly honorable to her. We shall find it therefore not unprofitable to consider,

***~~I. The service she rendered.~~***

In speaking upon this part of our subject, we shall notice separately,

**1. What she did.**

From the first interview which she had with the spies, she knew the true object of their mission; and determined to advance it to the utmost of her power. Her first object therefore was to prevent any discovery; and for this purpose she conducted them to the roof of her house, and there covered them with stalks of flax. As she had foreseen, they were traced to her house, and messengers from the king were sent to apprehend them. She acknowledged that they had been there, but said that they were gone away but a little before, and, if pursued immediately, would certainly be taken. Thus she avoided all suspicion of favoring them, and prevented all further inquiries about them at her house.

Having succeeded thus far, she went up to them, and asked of them an assurance, that they, in return for this kindness, would spare her and all her family, when they should take the city. To this they bound themselves and all Israel by a solemn oath; stipulating, however, that the matter should be kept a profound secret; that her family should all be collected under her roof; and that a scarlet line, by which she let them down from her window, should be bound in the window, to prevent any mistake.

The instructions which she gave them for the avoiding of their pursuers, were such as prudence directed; these they followed implicitly; and after hiding themselves three days in a neighboring mountain, they returned across the fords to their own camp in safety. Thus did she effectually preserve the spies that Joshua had sent.

***~~2. From what principle she acted.~~***

It certainly appears strange, that she should so betray her king and country; and stranger still, that she should be commended by God himself for this conduct; more especially when we find, that she uttered various falsehoods for the attainment of her end. Let us then investigate this point.

**The principle from which she acted, was faith.** Of this we are assured on the authority of an inspired Apostle, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace [Hebrews 11:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.31)." The same is manifest in the account before us. She believed that the God of Israel was the only true God. She believed that God was the great Disposer of all events; that he had given the land of Canaan to his people Israel; that he had miraculously opened a way for them through the Red Sea, at their first coming out of Egypt; that he had enabled them to destroy Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, and to take possession of their land; and that he would infallibly accomplish his promises to them, in the total subjugation of the Canaanites. All this is evident from the very words of our text.

Now, if we consider how contracted were the views even of the pious Israelites at that time, this faith, strong and assured as it was, was truly astonishing; it might justly be said of her, as of another Canaanite woman, "O woman, great is your faith! I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

But here arises a question of considerable difficulty; How can we reconcile the falsehoods which she uttered with the professions which she made, and with the commendations given her in the Scriptures? To solve this difficulty, commentators have had recourse to various expedients; some extenuating, some justifying, and some altogether condemning her conduct. But we apprehend that the true solution must be found in the strength and assurance of her faith; she herself said, not, "I fear," or, "I believe," but, "I know that the Lord has given you the land." She was fully assured that it was in vain to fight against God; that, if these two spies were put to death, it would make no difference whatever as to the outcome of the contest; that the whole city and all its inhabitants would infallibly be destroyed; and that the only possible way of securing herself and family would be to submit to the God of Israel, and to unite themselves to his people. To what purpose then would it be to deliver up the spies? it would not save one single life; it would only be to continue fighting against God, and to bring on herself and all her family that destruction which it was now in her power to avert. By concealing the spies she, in fact, could injure nobody; but by giving them up, she would sacrifice, both for herself and family, all hopes of life either in this world or the world to come. At the same time that this view of the matter gives the easiest solution to the difficulty, it serves to explain the commendation given to her by the Apostle James, "Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way [James 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.25)." Yes; she did by this act evince the reality and strength of her faith, and prove that she had determined to cast herself entirely, both for time and for eternity, upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

If it is asked, whether faith in God will produce, or even countenance, falsehood? We answer, No; but that question does not fairly belong to the subject; let it be asked, whether Elisha was justified in deceiving the Syrian army, and leading them from Dothan, where they had come to destroy him, to Samaria, where they were brought into the power of the king of Israel? [2 Kings 6:13-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.13-19). Or, if the cases are thought not sufficiently parallel, let anyone ask, whether, if a maniac were coming to destroy his whole family, he should not think himself justified in denying them to him, when no evil could accrue to the maniac himself by means of it, and the preservation of so many lives depended on it?

Yet even this case, strong as it would be, would fall very far short of Rahab's, whose eternal, no less than temporal, interests depended on her forwarding the purposes of Heaven. But, whether we justify or condemn her conduct, it can afford no precedent to us; for, before we can plead her example in justification of treachery or falsehood, we must be circumstanced like her, which it is nearly impossible we should ever be.

Such was the service which she rendered to the Lord. Let us now consider,

***~~II. The reward she obtained.~~***

This was greater far than ever she herself could have conceived.

***~~1. She and all her family were preserved.~~***

In a few days, Joshua and all his army appeared before the city; and, by God's special interposition, captured it. The sign before agreed upon had been attended to by Rahab, and the two very people with whom the agreement had been made were sent to secure the execution of it. They went to the house, brought out Rahab and all her family, and placed them in safety near the camp of Israel; then the order was given to burn the whole city, and to destroy every one of its inhabitants without exception.

The fulfillment of the covenant which the spies had entered into is particularly noticed at the taking of Jericho; and Rahab herself long continued in Israel as a monument of the mercy of God and of the fidelity of his people, [Joshua 6:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.22-25).

This alone was an exceeding great reward; to be so distinguished herself; and, after all the distress which her former wickedness had occasioned to her family, to be made an instrument of saving all their lives, surely this was an inestimable benefit, and assimilated her to the angels which rescued Lot and his family from the flames of Sodom.

***~~2. She is enrolled among the number of God's most eminent saints.~~***

We have already had occasion to refer to the testimony of two Apostles in her behalf. The very scope of one was to illustrate the transcendent excellence of faith, and of the other to show its operative and transforming power; by both of them is she united with the patriarch Abraham himself; and by one she is said to be justified by this work of hers, as Abraham was justified by offering up his son Isaac on the altar. The blessing she desired was, temporal life; and behold, here was given to her spiritual and eternal life.

How loudly did this proclaim to Israel the determination of God to incorporate with them in due time the Gentile world! And how strongly does it declare to us, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound!" Methinks, as Paul says of himself, that "for this cause he obtained mercy, that in him the chief of sinners God might show forth all patience for a pattern to them that shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting," so we may say of this woman: O that all the harlots in the world could hear of the mercy showed to this notorious prostitute! Despised as they are and abandoned by their fellow-creatures, O that they knew what compassion for them exists in the bosom of their God! They usually persist in their wickedness, through an utter despair of obtaining the mercy and grace which they stand in need of; but here they might see that *the vilest of sinners may become the most eminent of saints*. Our Lord indeed tells us, that *publicans and harlots are often more willing to seek for mercy than proud self-complacent moralists*[Matthew 21:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.31); O that the instance before us might lead many to repentance, and that, like another of whom we read, "having had much forgiven, they may love much!"

***~~3. She was made an ancestor of the Messiah himself.~~***

Mysterious truth! A Gentile, belonging to an accursed nation, and to a place peculiarly liable to the wrath of God; and she too, a harlot of peculiar notoriety; to be chosen of God, not only to become an eminent saint, but an instrument of continuing the line of his elect, and ultimately of bringing into the world his only-begotten Son! [Matthew 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.5). What shall we say to this? The truth of it cannot be doubted; for she is expressly mentioned in the genealogy of Christ. If Salmon, who married her, was, as is by no means improbable, one of the two spies, what beautiful considerations would arise out of that circumstance! But, where there is so much known, it is not desirable, unnecessarily, to introduce conjecture.

How infinitely did this honor surpass all that she could ever have imagined! What a reward was here for protecting the spies! But truly we never can entertain too exalted thoughts of God's love and mercy; *the riches of his grace are altogether unsearchable, and the extent of his love is incomprehensible*.

This however we may learn from it, that God will abundantly recompense whatever we do for him, " Even a cup of cold water given for his sake, shall never lose its reward." *Let us then enlarge our expectations from him, and open our mouths wide, that he may fill them*. Let us not be afraid to incur risks for him; but let us serve him at all events, accounting nothing of any value in comparison with his favor, nothing desirable but an inheritance with his people; The brief practical hints contained under these three subdivisions, might be omitted, and added separately as three inferences from the subject. Thus,

**Inferences**

    1. There is no person so vile, but he may become an eminent saint.

    2. Faith, if true, will uniformly produce good works.

    3. Whatever we do for God, shall most assuredly be richly rewarded.

***~~#245~~***

***~~THE PASSAGE OF JORDAN COMMEMORATED~~***

**[Joshua 4:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 4.20-24)**

"And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."

To remember God's mercies to us, and to transmit the remembrance of them to future generations, is a solemn duty imposed upon us, especially where the mercies are of such a nature as to involve the welfare of our posterity as well as our own, [Psalm 78:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.4-8). On different occasions God appointed *memorials*for that express purpose; and ordered that the children in all succeeding generations should make inquiries respecting them, and receive an answer from one duly qualified to give the desired instruction. This was the case with respect to the *Passover*, which was instituted in order to perpetuate the remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from the sword of the destroying angel, when all the first-born of Egypt were slain, [Exodus 12:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.24-27). So with *the unleavened bread*, 13:7, 8.

The *passage of the Israelites through Jordan*was also to be borne in everlasting remembrance. For this end, twelve stones were erected in Gilgal; and an order was given, that when children, even to the remotest ages, should inquire what event these stones referred to—they should be informed of all the circumstances which took place when their forefathers first entered into the promised land. We propose to notice two things:

***~~I. The mercy commemorated.~~***

Here we shall content ourselves with briefly relating the circumstances which preceded and accompanied the passage of the Israelites over the river Jordan. That they are deserving of our attention is evident from the injunction given by the prophet many hundred years afterwards, "My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember [your journey] from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD, [Micah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.5)." Shittim was the place from whence they last proceeded (perhaps about seven miles) to the banks of Jordan, [Joshua 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 3.1). There all the people were ordered to sanctify themselves, in order that on the morrow they might be in a fit state to behold the wonders which the Lord was about to do for them, [Joshua 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 3.5). A similar order was issued previous to the giving of the law, [Exodus 19:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.10-11); [Exodus 19:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.13-14).

The time being arrived, the ark, which was accustomed to be carried in the midst of them, was borne before them, and they were to follow it at a respectful distance (about three quarters of a mile), that they might all be able to behold it, and that they might see that, instead of their protecting it, they owed all their protection to it. And the respectful distance which they were to keep, gives us a most important hint in reference to the mode in which we should on all occasions follow divine providence; precipitancy must be avoided, as well as delay.

As soon as the priests who carried the touched the brim of the waters with their feet, (for at that season, the snows of Lebanon having begun to melt, the river, as was usual, had overflowed its banks,) the waters were arrested in their course, and formed a wall on their right hand; while those which had passed them ran down towards the Dead Sea, and left the channel dry for the space of several miles From the city Adam to the part opposite Jericho was eighteen or twenty miles, [Joshua 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 3.16). The priests then proceeded with the ark into the midst of the channel, and abode there while the whole nation of Israel, with their cattle and baggage, passed over; nor did they leave their position, until they were expressly ordered to do so by God himself; and then, as soon as ever their feet touched the opposite bank, the waters resumed their course, and flowed in their accustomed channel.

What a proof was here, that the passage was opened not by any natural means, but by the immediate agency of God himself! The people "hastened over," for, where so much was to be done in one day, there was no time to be lost; but we do not apprehend that their haste proceeded from any unbelieving fear of the impending flood; it rather indicated a fearless confidence in the divine protection, and an assurance that the enemies whom they were invading should not be permitted to prevail against them.

Such was the mercy given unto them. Let us now proceed more particularly to notice:

***~~II. The means used to perpetuate the remembrance of it.~~***

For this end two monuments were erected; one, of twelve stones, in Jordan, on the very spot where the priests who bore the ark had stood, which was probably visible at low water; and the other in Gilgal, where they immediately afterwards encamped.

In our text two reasons are assigned for the erection of them; they were to serve, both to Israel and to the world at large:

***~~1. These monuments were to serve as memorials of God's power.~~***

What could not God effect, who by a simple act of volition wrought such a miracle as this? The miracle could not be denied, because the stones which commemorated it were taken out of the midst of the river by people selected for the purpose out of all the tribes. Who then, we may ask:

Who can ever oppose him with success?

It should seem that the Canaanites, if they had acted according to the rules of war, should have opposed the Israelites in their passage; but the destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea had spread such a panic through the land, that they did not dare to avail themselves of any supposed advantage, lest they should perish after his example. The event indeed shows how vain any attempt on their part would have been.

And does not this convince us, that, when the measure of any person's iniquities is full, he shall never escape the vengeance of his God? Whatever obstacles may appear to lie in the way, and whatever barrier an ungodly world may have, or think they have, for their defense—God will surely make a way for his indignation; opposing myriads shall be only as the stubble before the consuming fire, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

Let anyone dreaming of security, go and behold the stones in Gilgal. Let him ask, "What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? and you Jordan, that you were driven back?" and then let him add with the Psalmist, "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob! [Psalm 114:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 114.1-7)."

We may further ask,

Who can ever fail, that trusts in him?

There might have been some hope of crossing the ford, as the spies had done, if the river had not overflowed its banks; but now it seemed to present an insurmountable obstacle to their passage, especially considering that their cattle and baggage were to be taken over with them. But this generation were not like those who had perished in the wilderness; they had learned to confide in God; and God interposed for them in a way which they do not appear to have at all expected. It had been promised indeed that they should pass over Jordan, and that no opposition should be made to them in their passage; for their enemies, "through fear and dread, should be still as a stone" until all the people should have completely passed, [Exodus 15:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.13-17); but they do not seem to have had any precise idea of the way in which the promises should be accomplished. Nor, on the other hand, do they appear to have entertained any doubts but that they should be brought over in safety. Their confidence was well rewarded; and the very impediments which obstructed their progress, served only to display and magnify the power of God!

Thus, whatever difficulties his people may have to surmount, they may at all times adopt the triumphant language of the prophet, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain;" and they may assuredly expect, that He who has "laid the foundation, will finish it, and will bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, *Grace, grace!*unto it, [Zechariah 4:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7-9)."

**2. These monuments were also to serve as memorials of God's love.**

The conduct of Israel in the wilderness abundantly showed, that God "never set his love upon them for their righteousness," but solely from his own free and sovereign grace. When therefore they looked upon these stones, they could not but see how greatly he was to be loved, and honored, and feared, and served, for all the mercy—the undeserved mercy, which he had shown unto them. They would be ever ready to exclaim, "Who is like unto you, O God—glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!"

In like manner we may see in these stones how effectually God will interpose in our behalf, if only we fear and honor him as our God.

We see what we may expect from God in the time of TROUBLE.

We are brought perhaps by God's providence into great tribulation, so that "all his storms and billows go over us." But we need not therefore suppose that he has forsaken and forgotten us; for his Word to us is, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior! [Isaiah 43:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.1-3)."

*The greater the trials of His redeemed people are, the richer will be the manifestations of God's love and mercy to them. His consolations will abound, not only according to, but far above, all our afflictions!* This is the very improvement which the Prophet Habakkuk made of the history before us. He expatiates upon the event, as if he had himself been an eye-witness of it:

[Habakkuk 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.7-8) "I see the people of Cushan in distress, and the nation of Midian trembling in terror. Was it in anger, LORD, that you struck the rivers and parted the sea? Were you displeased with them? No, you were sending your chariots of salvation!"

[Habakkuk 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.13) "You went out to rescue your chosen people, to save your anointed ones. You crushed the heads of the wicked and stripped their bones from head to toe."

[Habakkuk 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.15) "You trampled the sea with your horses, and the mighty waters piled high."

[Habakkuk 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-19) "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights!"

We see what we may expect from God in the hour of DEATH.

*The passage of the Israelites through Jordan is properly considered as an emblem of the Christian's transition from the dreary wilderness of this world to the Canaan that is above.* And when the time is arrived for passing by that unknown, untrodden path, we are apt to fear lest we should sink in the deep waters, and never attain the wished-for end. But God has promised to be with us, to "Are you not the same today, the one who dried up the sea, making a path of escape through the depths so that your people could cross over? Those who have been ransomed by the LORD will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness.

[Isaiah 51:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10-11)," and to bring us in safety to the land that flows with milk and honey. "When therefore we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need to fear no evil;" yes rather we may rest assured that "God will perfect that which concerns us," and "preserve us safely unto his heavenly kingdom!"

***~~Improvement.~~***

***~~1. Let us mark and bear in remembrance, God's mercies towards us.~~***

There is no one who, if he had marked the dispensations of God towards himself, might not find many occasions for erecting monuments to God's praise; nor is there anything which will be more conducive to our comfort; since *every past mercy may be considered as a pledge of future blessings*. The Psalmist's mode of arguing may safely be adopted by every child of God, "You have delivered my soul from death; will not you deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living, [Psalm 56:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.13)." Set up then within your own bosoms an *Ebenezer*, whenever God favors you with any peculiar deliverances, [1 Samuel 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 7.12); then will you have within yourselves a never-failing source of comfort, and an irresistible incentive to "fear the Lord."

***~~2. Let us endeavor to transmit the knowledge of his goodness to the last generations.~~***

We should encourage young people to seek instruction, and should be glad of everything may afford us an occasion of making known to them the wonders of redeeming love. The whole scene of God's dispensations towards Israel, from their first deliverance out of Egypt to their final possession of the promised land, was figurative of our redemption by Christ Jesus; and it is worthy of observation, that this was strongly marked at the commencement and conclusion of their journey. The night before they set out from Egypt, they feasted on the paschal lamb; and they entered into Canaan, forty years afterwards, four days before the Passover, that is, precisely on the day when the law required them to set apart the paschal lamb for the approaching festival. Compare [Exodus 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.3); [Exodus 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.6) with [Joshua 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 4.19); [Joshua 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.10). Thus was it intimated to them that our redemption from first to last is the fruit of Christ's sacrifice; on that must we feed in order to obtain deliverance; and even in Heaven itself must we ascribe the glory of our salvation "to Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood!" Let us then labor to diffuse this saving knowledge, as opportunity shall offer, that our fellow-creatures may reap the benefits designed for them, and God may have the glory due unto his name!

***~~#246~~***

***~~ISRAEL'S FIRST PROCEEDINGS IN CANAAN~~***

***~~[Joshua 5:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.8-10)~~***

"And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day. On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover."

There are, in the Scripture history, many important incidents which we overlook, as not supposing them to be capable of any spiritual improvement. To those, indeed, which are directly *typical*, we pay attention, because they are illustrative of the Gospel. But if they do not command our respect in that view—then we rarely consider what great practical lessons may be derived from them for the regulation of our conduct. But if, in reading the Sacred Oracles, we were frequently to ask ourselves this question, What is the state of mind which is manifested in this or that action? we should gain an insight into many truths which now utterly escape us; and derive to our souls far greater benefit than we can readily imagine.

Take, for instance, the conduct of Joshua on his entrance into Canaan. Doubtless it was novel and curious, and such as we would not have expected; but we little think what exceedingly rich instruction it is calculated to convey. To point out this, will be my endeavor at this time. Yet, in pointing it out, I have in view, not merely the elucidation of this particular event, but *a general suggestion as to the mode in which the Scripture history may be improved*. Let us then consider,

***~~I. The conduct of Joshua on his entrance into Canaan.~~***

God had opened for him, and for all Israel, a passage through *Jordan*, at a time when it overflowed all its banks; just as he had for Moses through the *Red Sea*, at the time of his departure from Egypt. Now, therefore,

***~~What should we expect to be the conduct of Joshua?~~***

Certainly, I apprehend, if he acted on principles which were common to all other generals when invading an enemy's country, he would either prosecute his advantage instantly, while all his enemies were filled with terror, and crush them before they had any time to concert measures for their defense; or he would fortify his own camp, to prevent surprise, and prepare for carrying on his conquests by such a disposition of his army as his skill in war might suggest.

***~~But, what is the information given in our text?~~***

Behold, instead of adopting any military plans whatever, the very day after he had invaded a country in which there were seven nations greater and mightier than his, he appointed every male in the whole nation that had been born in the wilderness, and consequently that was under forty years of age, to be circumcised. He did not even wait a day, to know what the effect of his invasion would be, or what efforts his enemies were making to repel it; but by one act disabled the greater part of his whole army from even standing in their own defense.

It may seem strange, that Moses, whose own life had been endangered by neglecting to circumcise his son, [Exodus 4:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.24-26), should allow the whole nation of Israel, who until the hour of their departure from Egypt had observed the rite of circumcision, utterly to neglect it for forty years. Whence this neglect arose, we are not informed; but I conceive, that if in the first instance it arose from the unsettled state of the people until they came to Mount Horeb, and was permitted by Moses for about three months on that account, it was allowed afterwards by God as a just judgment on account of the worship paid to the golden calf, and because of the murmuring of the people at Kadesh-barnea when they were discouraged by the report of the spies who had searched out the land.

On the former occasion, Moses broke the tablets of the covenant, to show that the covenant which God had made with them was dissolved. On the latter occasion, God swore that not a soul of those who had attained the age of twenty at the time of their departure from Egypt should ever enter into the promised land. Being thus disclaimed by God as his peculiar people, they were allowed to withhold from their descendants, for forty years together, that seal by which alone they could be admitted into covenant with God.

But, however the neglect originated, so it was that not one of all the children of Israel was circumcised for the space of forty years; and all of these did Joshua circumcise, the very day after his entrance into Canaan.

Only three days after this, (for they passed over Jordan on the tenth day of the month, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth, at evening, (compare [Joshua 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 4.19) with [Joshua 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.2); [Joshua 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.10),) did he also enjoin the observance of the Passover. The *Passover*had also been neglected, just as *circumcision*had been, [Amos 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.25) and [Acts 7:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.42); and now that also must be revived, together with the attendant feast of unleavened bread.

But was this a fit season for such observances? Had not Joshua other matters to occupy his attention? In a time of peace we might well expect that a holy man of God would renew these ordinances; but at the very moment of invading an enemy's country, and within two or three miles of a fortified and strongly-garrisoned city, was this a measure to be adopted? Human prudence, doubtless, would have deferred it; but piety towards God was regarded by Joshua as superseding every other consideration, and as the best means of securing His favor, through whose blessing alone any human efforts could prove effectual.

Now, instead of passing over this conduct of Joshua as an event in which we have no interest, it will be well to inquire,

**II. How far it is proper for our imitation at this day.**

Enter into the state of Joshua's mind at this time; and then say, whether we may not learn from his conduct, many lessons for ourselves at this day.

***~~1. We may learn that in whatever circumstances we are in, piety should be our first concern.~~***

If ever there were circumstances under which the offices of religion might be postponed, methinks they were those of Joshua on this occasion, when he had but just set foot on the land where great and powerful nations were prepared to combat for their very existence. And, in fact, it is the general opinion of military and naval commanders, that they have, as it were, a dispensation to neglect the ordinances of religion on account of the urgency and importance of their occupations. *The same idea prevails through almost all the orders of society, every one being ready to plead his temporal engagements as an excuse for neglecting the concerns of his soul*.

The *statesman*is too much engaged with politics;  
the *merchant*too much engaged with business;  
the *philosopher*too much engaged with his researches;  
the *student*too much engaged with his books;  
the *servant*too much engaged with his duties; and *every man*too much engaged with his own separate vocation.

Each, in his place, urges his occupations as justifying a neglect of his duties towards God.

But if Joshua, under his peculiar circumstances, sought first to serve and honor God, we can have no hesitation in saying that *in comparison with the divine favor there is not an object under Heaven worthy of a thought*. I mean not by this to say, that we are at liberty to neglect the discharge of any office to which God in his providence has called us; or so to postpone the discharge of it as to endanger our ultimate success; far from it. It is the inward service of the soul, of which I speak; and which needs not to delay any outward act for one moment.

It is not the *act*of Joshua which I propose to your imitation, but the *habit of his mind*; and that, I say again, is proper to be exercised by every man.

***~~2. We may learn that in whatever circumstances we are in, we should place the most implicit confidence in God.~~***

Suppose yourself in the presence of Joshua while these religious ceremonies were proceeding; you would naturally ask: Are you not in an enemy's land? and have you not many conflicts to maintain before you can get a quiet possession of it? Yet you seem as much at your ease as if the whole land were already subdued before you.

What reply do you suppose Joshua would make to observations like these? True, he would say, you behold me in a state of as much quietness and confidence as if I had not an enemy to contend with. But whose battles am I fighting? In whose service am I engaged? Is there any device or power that can succeed against God? In him I trust; and he it is that "keeps my mind in perfect peace, [Isaiah 26:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3-4)."

Now, though in respect of temporal trials we cannot be sure that we are called to them in the way that Joshua was. But in our spiritual warfare we stand, as it were, on the same ground as he; we are called to it, as he was; and it is the way appointed for our getting possession of our destined inheritance. We also have our enemies at hand, enemies with whom, in our own strength, it would be impossible for us to cope with. But "our God is for us;" and therefore, we ask with confidence, "Who can be against us?" Though in ourselves we are weak, we may be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Though we have a warfare to maintain against all the powers of darkness, we should never regard it as of doubtful issue; we should assure ourselves, that in all our conflicts we shall be victorious, and that "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

Already may we look upon the land as ours, and see the crowns and kingdoms there reserved for us. There, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, we should consider ourselves as already enthroned, [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.6); and look forward with joy to the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle, in order to its erection in that good land where it shall be the habitation of God forever and ever, 2 Corinthians 5:1; [Ephesians 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.21-22).

***~~3. We may learn that in whatever circumstances we are in, we should be determined, through grace, to "roll away the reproach" of our unconverted state.~~***

The reproach of the Israelites in Egypt was, that they were in bondage both to men and devils; for, while they were involuntarily engaged in the service of their Egyptian task-masters, they voluntarily worshiped the gods of Egypt, [Joshua 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.14) with [Ezekiel 20:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.5-8). But behold them now consecrated to God by circumcision, and their reproach was completely rolled away.

Just so, is not the unconverted man also both a slave and an idolater? Yes, whatever be the exterior of his deportment, he serves the world, the flesh, and "the devil, by whom he is led captive at his will!" And, whether more or less correct in his outward conduct, he "worships and serves the creature more than the Creator, who is God blessed for evermore."

Now then, I say, if you are consecrated to the Lord in baptism, your duty is to rise superior to all your lusts, and to give yourselves entirely to the service of your God. You must also, in remembrance of your adorable Redeemer, be feeding continually on his body and blood, by means of which you are to be strengthened for all your conflicts, and to be "made more than conquerors" over all your enemies! "Christ our Passover being sacrificed for us," your whole life must be one continual feast, which you are to "keep, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

It is the reproach of man that ever he was the servant of sin in any degree; and this reproach we are to be rolling away; and, as the redeemed of the Lord, we are to be "glorifying God with our body and our spirit, which are his, 1 Corinthians 6:20." To this employment I call you all. I ask you not what your engagements are in life, or what else you have to do; this I am well assured of, that there is not a person under Heaven that is not called to this duty; nor is there a circumstance that can be imagined, wherein this duty can be dispensed with. Be then, upright in serving God; and never fear but that God will be faithful in saving you.

***~~#247~~***

***~~CHRIST THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S ARMY~~***

**[Joshua 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.13-14)**

"Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

Most seasonable are the mercies which God gives to his people. His interpositions for them at the Red Sea and the wilderness, and at their entrance into Canaan through the river Jordan, are ample illustrations of this truth, as is also the peculiar fact recorded in my text.

Joshua was now surveying *Jericho*, which was the first fortress that was to be attacked by him. That he had no fears about success, was evident; because, from his first entrance into the land to that hour, he had acted rather like a person at peace with all men, than as one in the midst of enemies whom he was commissioned to destroy. Still, the visible manifestation of Jehovah's presence with him could not but greatly strengthen his faith, and increase his assurance that every enemy, however powerful, should fall before him.

The points for our consideration are,

***~~I. The character which our blessed Lord assumed on this occasion.~~***

***~~The person who now appeared to him as "a man," was no other than the Son of God himself.~~***

Many were the occasions on which, at that period of the world, the Son of God assumed either an angelic or human shape, for the purpose of encouraging his believing people. To Abraham, [Genesis 18:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.2); and Jacob, [Genesis 32:24-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-30); and afterwards to Manoah, [Judges 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.6); [Judges 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.22), were manifestations given similar to that which was here given to Joshua.

That the person who here appeared to Joshua was more than either man or angel, is clear, I think, from the worship which Joshua, on discovering who he was, paid to him, "Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and worshiped him." Now, I grant that Joshua might have made a mistake; but if he had, it would have been corrected by the person, who, if he had not been God, would not have allowed these divine honors to be paid him, compare [Revelation 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.10); [Revelation 22:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.8-9) where such a mistake was made indeed, but rectified with holy abhorrence. But, so far were these honors from being declined, that the bestowment of them was sanctioned by an express command, similar to what had been before given to Moses. Jehovah, when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush, commanded him to "put his shoes from off his feet, seeing that the place whereon he stood was holy," being sanctified by the divine presence; verse 15 compared with [Exodus 3:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.2-6). But indeed, in the beginning of the next chapter, the very person who thus addressed Joshua is called Jehovah, "And the LORD (Jehovah) said unto Joshua, [Joshua 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.2)." I think, then, that we are in no danger of mistake, when we say that the person who here appeared to Joshua as "a man," was no other than the Son of God himself, the Second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity.

***~~He, in answer to the question put to him by Joshua, declared himself to be "the Captain of the Lord's army".~~***

This, in its primary import, signified that all Israel were under his special protection; and that under his command they might be assured of victory.

But the same is true of God's spiritual Israel, in all ages of the world. They are one great army collected under him, and fighting the Lord's battles, in order to a full and undisturbed possession of the heavenly Canaan. Of these the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head and Chief. He has received a commission from his Father to be "the Leader and Commander of his people, [Isaiah 55:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.4);" and whatever a general is, or can be, to his army—that is he to all who fight under his banner.

*Instruction*in the use of weapons, *provision*for their whole campaign, *encouragement*to meet their foes, *support*in every difficulty, *protection*from every danger,  
and all the rewards of *victory*—are assured to every one of them, in due season.

Seeing, then, that we have such a Captain, let us contemplate,

***~~II. Our duty towards him under that character.~~***

Doubtless our first duty is to enlist under his banner; for we are not his soldiers by nature; yes rather, we are his enemies, and fight against him in every possible way. But He is held up "as an banner to the people; and to him must all people seek, [Isaiah 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.10)." And, as a man entering into the army of an earthly monarch surrenders up himself altogether to the disposal of the general who is placed over him—so must we voluntarily devote ourselves to the service of Christ, before we can be numbered among his army over whom he presides. But, supposing this to has been done, then we say that,

***~~1. We must execute his commands.~~***

Observe the question which Joshua put to him, the very instant he knew the Lord under this character, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" A similar question was put by the Apostle Paul, the very instant that the Lord Jesus Christ revealed himself to him, "Lord, what will you have me to do? [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6)." In truth, there is not a soldier in any army who does not look for orders from his commanding-officer from day to day, or who does not feel himself bound to carry them into execution.

Now the reading of the *Scriptures*with diligence will, for the most part, supply the needful information; yet there are many particular occasions whereon we must be peculiarly attentive also to the voice of his *providence*; and in those instances must we seek, by prayer and supplication, his special guidance, which he has promised to us in answer to our prayers.

For instance; in the attack which was to be made on Jericho, nothing was left to the direction of Joshua, but the most minute particular was given in command from this great Captain. And we also, if we will look unto Him, may expect all needful directions; to which, of course, we must adhere with all fidelity, in order to approve ourselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

***~~2. We must go forth in an entire dependence upon him.~~***

Soldiers of necessity confide in their commander; and in proportion as is their estimate of his talents, will be, for the most part, their expectation of success. Among men, however, this confidence is mutual; for the best general in the universe can effect nothing, if he has not good soldiers to carry his orders into effect. But, in the Christian camp, the confidence must be altogether in the Captain; without whom the most gallant army in the universe must fail. We must be strong indeed, and of good courage; but we must "not lean to our own understanding," or "trust in an arm of flesh." In fact, we are really strong only in proportion as we feel ourselves weak, and look to Christ to "perfect his strength in our weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10)." We must therefore be strong, not in ourselves, but "in the Lord, and in the power of *his*might! [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)."

***~~3. To disregard difficulties, and even death itself, in his service.~~***

A soldier necessarily expects to encounter difficulties, and to expose his life to hazard in the service of his king and country. And the greater the difficulties which he has to sustain, the more he rises to the occasion; insomuch that, if a service of peculiar danger is proposed, the whole army will vie with each other in their readiness to undertake it. Now, if this be the case with those who have enlisted under the banners of an earthly monarch, shall it not much more obtain among the armies of the living God? Paul "gloried in distresses and necessities for the Lord's sake;" and the same spirit should animate us also.

Indeed, at our very first admission into the service of our Lord we were forewarned, that "he who loved his life, should lose it; and that he only who was willing to lose his life for Christ's sake, should save it unto life eternal! [Matthew 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.39)." We must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would attain a crown of life!"

**ADDRESS.**

Inquire now, I beg you, whether this Savior is to you a friend or an adversary? He is here in the midst of us, "and with his sword drawn," though we see him not. And to every one of us is he either a friend or a foe. There is no neutrality, either on his part or on ours. Our Lord himself has told us, "that he who is not with him, is against him; and he who gathers not with him, scatters! [Matthew 12:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.30)."

Would you, then, ascertain whether he be a "Captain" unto you? Examine your own hearts; and ask: Whether you have ever enlisted under his banners by a voluntary surrender of yourselves to him; and then: Whether you are habitually regarding his will as your rule, and his arm as your stay, and his glory as the one object of your life?

These are points easy to be ascertained; and on them your eternal happiness depends. If these things are true, then will he be a "Captain of salvation" unto you, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10); but if this be not the experience of your souls, then you have nothing to expect, but that he will say concerning you, "Bring here those that were my enemies, who would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me! [Luke 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.27)."

Oppose him, and you have nothing to hope.

Submit to him, and you have nothing to fear, to all eternity!

***~~#248~~***

***~~THE TAKING OF JERICHO~~***

***~~[Joshua 6:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.20-21)~~***

"When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it--men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys."

*The promises of God, though often delayed beyond the time that our impatient spirits would fix for their accomplishment, are always fulfilled in their ordained season.* The period at which God promised to Abraham, that he would bring forth his posterity out of Egypt, was at the end of four hundred and thirty years. During the latter part of that time the afflictions of the people increased beyond measure; yet was their deliverance neither accelerated nor delayed; but at the precise period that God had fixed in his eternal counsels, and had revealed to Abraham, even on "the self-same day," they were brought forth from their bondage, [Exodus 12:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.51).

They would doubtless have been brought also into the full possession of the promised land if they had not provoked God to transfer to their children the mercies which they had treated with contempt. The space of forty years was allotted for that generation to wander, and to die, in the wilderness. During that time a new generation arose; and to them God fulfilled his Word; he led them in a miraculous manner into Canaan, as we have seen; and now began to subdue their enemies before them. The first place which they were to conquer, was Jericho, a city of great strength; the taking of which is the subject for our present consideration.

We shall notice three things:

**I. The preparations for the siege.**

One would naturally suppose that they would instantly avail themselves of the terror which their miraculous passage through Jordan had inspired; and that, after fortifying their own camp, they would proceed to construct works for the capture of the city. But behold! instead of engaging in any such labors, they address themselves to works of a very different nature, suited only to a season of profound peace.

***~~1. They renew the ordinance of circumcision.~~***

This ordinance had been entirely neglected in the wilderness; so that, with the exception of those who had not attained the age of twenty at their departure from Egypt, all were uncircumcised. Their first object therefore, after entering into the promised land, was, to renew their covenant with God by circumcision, [Joshua 5:2-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.2-9). But was this a time for such an ordinance, when they would thereby disable themselves for war, or even for repelling an assault in case their enemies should attack them? Was it wise, or was it right, to act thus at so critical a juncture? Was it not a tempting of God, rather than a service that could be pleasing in his sight? No! It was commanded by Jehovah himself; and was therefore commanded, because God would make them to know that HE was their defense; and, that *to mortify sin and surrender up themselves to him, was the surest road to victory. It was not by human policy or strength that they were to prevail, but by his care and his power; and whatever was most suited to obtain his favor, was most calculated to ensure success.*

***~~2. They keep the feast of Passover, [Joshua 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.10).~~***

This ordinance also had been neglected in the wilderness; and, in renewing it, they brought to their remembrance God's gracious interpositions for them at their departure from Egypt, and expressed their conviction, that their whole security depended on the blood of that great Sacrifice which would in due time be offered.

How strange does such an occupation appear, when the delay occasioned by it might give time for the arrival of supports to the besieged city! But, to those who know what interest God takes in the welfare of his people, this time would appear to be spent to the greatest possible advantage. And, though we, who are not to expect miraculous interpositions, should not be justified in following literally the example of Israel on this occasion—yet would it be well if we were more conformed to it in spirit; for assuredly, *whatever difficulties or dangers we are in, it is our wisdom first to betake ourselves unto prayer, and, by renewed exercises of faith on the Lord Jesus, to secure the favor and protection of our God*.

The wisdom of the preparations appears, in that they secured,

***~~II. The fall of the city.~~***

The manner in which it was taken was indeed surprising.

The armed men were appointed to go round the city in perfect silence, verse 10, once every day for six successive days; and, on the seventh day, they were to compass it seven times. In the midst of this procession the ark was to be carried by the priests, and to be preceded by seven priests with "trumpets of rams' horns," which they were to sound during the whole procession. On the seventh day, at the seventh time of compassing the city, the army, on a signal given, were to shout; and behold, no sooner did they shout, than the walls on every side fell down flat, opening a ready way of access for the army of Israel, and causing the disconcerted men of Jericho to fall an easy prey to their invaders.

***~~It is also replete with instruction.~~***

We are not warranted perhaps to speak of this event as *typical*; nevertheless it was doubtless intended to convey most important instruction to all succeeding ages; and to show to them, how easily God can make a way for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and for the salvation of his own people.

If it did not typify, it certainly well illustrates, the victories which the Gospel was to obtain over all the principalities and powers of earth and Hell. No human force was used; nothing but the sound of the gospel trumpet prevailed for the subversion of Satan's kingdom. Though preached by men of no education, it proved effectual for the destruction of idolatry, and the establishment of the Redeemer's power, throughout the earth.

In like manner at this time it prevails over the lusts and prejudices of mankind; the publication of it is committed to weak and sinful men, who go forth in Jehovah's name to subdue the world to the obedience of faith; and though "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," nor such as appear likely to be wielded with success—yet are they "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds," and to the "bringing" of, not only the actions, but even "the thoughts, of men, into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5)." As for the weakness of the instruments, God has selected such on purpose, "that the excellency of the power may appear to be of him, 2 Corinthians 4:7." His voice to us is the same in all his wonders both of providence and grace, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty! [Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6)."

The next thing which calls for our attention is,

***~~III. The destruction of the inhabitants.~~***

With the exception of Rahab and her family, for whose preservation the word of the spies was pledged, every human being, old and young, male and female, was destroyed. Even the beasts also of every kind were destroyed, and the whole city was burnt with fire. Nothing was preserved but the silver and gold, and brass and iron, which were to be put into the treasury of the Lord for the use of his sanctuary.

***~~Now in this indiscriminate slaughter we are apt to find occasion of offence, as though we thought ourselves more merciful than God. But were not these people the enemies of Jehovah? And had he not a right to cut them off in any way he pleased? If he had taken them away by an earthquake or a pestilence, or had cut them off, as he did the Egyptian first-born and the Assyrian army, by the hand of an angel—we would have bowed to his sovereignty, and confessed him to be just. But because he used his own people as the executioners of his vengeance, we are ready to accuse both them and him of inhumanity and injustice!~~***

***~~But we are sure that the Judge of all the earth will always do right; and that whatever is done by his command is right, whether we can discern the reasons of that command or not.~~***

With respect to this particular act, if there was severity in it towards them, there was goodness in it, yes great goodness, towards the world at large; for it has shown the danger of unbelief and impenitence in such awful colors, that the proudest and most obdurate must tremble.

The inhabitants at first were certainly filled with terror and dismay; but probably when they saw for six successive days nothing but an empty parade, they would begin to think themselves secure. At the appointed time however the judgment came; and that in a way that they did not at all expect. And thus will it be towards impenitent transgressors. They may imagine that the delay of God's judgments warrants them to expect impunity in the ways of sin; but "when they are saying, *Peace and safety!*Then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

***~~From this part of divine history we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The excellence of faith.~~***

What was the principle which enabled the Israelites to manifest such composure in the presence of their enemies, and to forbear the use of all common means either for the preservation of themselves or for the destruction of their enemies? It was faith! And so says an inspired writer, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days! [Hebrews 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.30)."

Faith is the principle which will carry us through all difficulties, and enable us to triumph over all our adversaries. Under the influence of faith, our first care in every situation will be to serve and honor God. In the path of duty, we shall feel no fear about our ultimate success.

The means which God has appointed we shall use, and none other. If they appear wholly unsuited to the end, we shall not on that account despond; but shall expect his gracious interposition in his own time and way, assured that He will make the weakest and most contemptible of beings to confound the honorable, and to overcome the mighty! [1 Corinthians 1:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.27-28). Let us then cultivate this principle, and go forth to our warfare, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might!"

***~~2. The benefit of enlisting under the banners of Christ.~~***

Christ revealed himself to Joshua under the appearance of a man, and professed himself "the Captain of the Lord's army, [Joshua 5:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.13-15)." It was he who directed Joshua how to conduct the siege, and "gave the city of Jericho into his hand, verse 2." And who but He is "the Captain of our salvation?" Who but He can guide us aright in our spiritual warfare, or give us success in it? Truly, if we are made "more than conquerors, it must be through Him who loved us, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)," and gave himself for us. To him will we direct you in every part of your warfare. Do nothing without first asking counsel of him; attempt nothing, but in his strength; and doubt not but that in all your conflicts you shall have reason to say, "Thanks be unto God who has always caused us to triumph" hitherto, and will "give us everlasting victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.14) and [1 Corinthians 15:57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.57)."

***~~#249~~***

***~~ISRAEL ROUTED BY THE MEN OF AI~~***

***~~[Joshua 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.8)~~***

"O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?"

*Uninterrupted prosperity is not to be expected in this changeable and sinful world*. Even the most favored of mankind must have some trials; nor is there any season when they can presume to say, "My mountain stands strong; I shall not be moved." If at any time Joshua and Israel might adopt this language, it was immediately after they had entered on the possession of the promised land, and had received a pledge of the complete enjoyment of it by the miraculous destruction of the walls of Jericho. Yet behold, *scarcely had they tasted the first-fruits of God's mercy, before a cup of bitterness was put into their hands*; which made them regret that they had ever attempted the conquest of the land.

In an attack upon Ai, a detachment of Israelites had been defeated with the loss of thirty-six men; and this filled them all with such terror and dismay, that the whole nation, not excepting Joshua himself, gave way to despondency. Of this we have an account in the passage before us; to elucidate which, we shall notice,

***~~I. The defeat of Israel.~~***

***~~Their mode of proceeding to the attack of Ai was far from right.~~***

Having so easily vanquished a much larger and stronger city, they held Ai in contempt, and concluded of course that God must interpose for them just as he had done in the former case. Hence they said, "When they returned to Joshua, they said: Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there, [Joshua 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.3)."

Now in this they were guilty of very great presumption. To confide in God was right; but to expect his aid, while they neglected to use their own endeavors, was highly presumptuous. And what excuse had they; what plea? None, except that they did not choose to fatigue themselves with the march. They did not even consult God respecting it; but acted purely from their own conceit. What was this, but to tempt God? And how could they hope to succeed, when acting in such a way?

However favored any man may have been with divine support and protection, if he presumes upon it, and enters into temptation without necessity, and conceives that because his spiritual enemies appear weak, he shall of necessity overcome them; if he neglects to use the proper means of grace, such as searching the Scriptures and prayer to God—he shall fall. God will leave him to himself, that he may learn by bitter experience his own weakness, and "no more be high-minded, but fear. This is taught us in [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13) which says, " Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose," and God will render your efforts effectual. But work, not with self-confidence, but with fear and trembling, because *all your strength is in God*; and if by pride or negligence you provoke him to withhold his aid, you can never succeed."

***~~But their defeat was owing to another cause.~~***

God had forbidden that anyone should take to himself any of the spoils of Jericho; but one man, (how astonishing was it that only one among all the hosts of Israel was found to transgress the command!) tempted by the sight of a costly Babylonish garment and some silver, and a wedge of gold, hid them for his own use, verse 21. This sin was imputed to the whole nation, and visited upon them all. God had declared that if any such iniquity were committed, the whole camp of Israel, as well as the guilty individual, should be accursed, [Joshua 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.18); and now the curse was inflicted upon all; so that if the whole host of Israel had gone against Ai, they would have been discomfited, even as the small detachment was. To this the failure of the expedition is ascribed by God himself, verses 11, 12.

And to what are we to ascribe the calamities inflicted on our nation, the reverses experienced, and the losses sustained—in this long-protracted war?

Is it not to our sins, which have incensed God against us? We all acknowledge the greatness of our national sins, but forget to notice our own personal iniquities; whereas, if we saw everything as God sees it, we would probably see, that our own personal guilt has contributed in no small degree to bring down the divine judgments upon us. Because we are mere individuals, we think that our transgressions can have had but little influence in matters of this kind; but did not *Saul's*violation of the covenant he had made with the Gibeonites, occasion, many years afterwards, a famine of three years' continuance? [2 Samuel 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 21.1). And did not *David's*numbering of the people, occasion a pestilence, to the destruction of seventy thousand of his subjects? [2 Samuel 24:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.10-15).

But these offenders, it may be said, were kings; whereas we are obscure individuals. And was not *Achan*an obscure individual? Yet behold, how one single act of sin, an act too, which would not have been considered as very heinous among ourselves, stopped in a moment the course of Israel's victories, and turned them into shameful defeat! Let this point be duly considered in reference to ourselves; and let us learn, that abstinence from sin is an act no less of patriotism, than of piety.

The defeat coming so unexpectedly, we do not wonder at,

***~~II. Joshua's distress.~~***

***~~His conduct on this occasion was reproachable.~~***

The manner in which he complained to God reflected even upon the Deity himself, "O Lord God, why have you at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us?" Alas! alas! Is this Joshua, that thus accuses the Most High God of cruelty and treachery? Lord, what is man! *What will not the best of men do, if left by you to the workings of their own corruption!*Such had been the language of the murmuring Israelites on many occasions; but we readily confess that Joshua, though he spoke their opinions, was by no means actuated by their rebellious spirit; yet *he was wrong in entertaining for a moment such a thought*.

His distrust of God also was highly unfitting, "Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of Jordan!" What, do you so readily relinquish the possession of Canaan, because of this single check? You are afraid that "all the inhabitants of the land, hearing of this defeat, will be emboldened to environ you around, and to cut off the name of Israel from the earth." But have you so soon forgotten all the wonders that God has wrought in order to bring you into Canaan, and all that he has promised in relation to the ultimate possession of it? "Is God's hand shortened, that he cannot save, or his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?" "Has he at last forgotten to be gracious, and shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure?" Alas! Joshua, "this is your infirmity."

But it is an infirmity incident to the best of men under great and unexpected misfortunes. We are but too apt to give way to murmuring and desponding thoughts, both in relation to our temporal and spiritual concerns, when we should be rather encouraging ourselves with the recollection of past mercies, and pleading with God his promises of more effectual aid.

***~~Yet on the whole there was much in Joshua's conduct to be admired.~~***

We cannot but highly applaud the concern he expressed for the loss of so many lives. Common generals would have accounted the loss of thirty-six men as nothing; but "the blood of Israel was precious in the sight" of Joshua. We might have expected that he would have blamed the spies for deceiving him in relation to the strength of the city; and have punished the soldiers for cowardice; but he viewed the hand of God, rather than of man, in this disaster; and this led to (what also we much admire) his humiliation before God on account of it.

This was very deep, "he tore his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads, verse 6." He had seen on many occasions how Moses and Aaron had succeeded in averting the divine displeasure from the people; and, in concert with the elders, he now tried the same means; and we may confidently say, that, if all the hosts of Israel had been defeated, this was the sure way to retrieve their affairs.

But his tender regard for the honor of God was that which eminently distinguished him on this occasion, "O Lord, what will you do unto your great name? verse 9." This was the plea which Moses had often used, [Exodus 32:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.12); [Numbers 14:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.15-16), and to which God had paid especial regard, [Ezekiel 20:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.9); and the man that feels it in his soul, and urges it in sincerity and truth, can never be ultimately foiled.

O that such were the disposition and conduct of our whole nation at this time! But alas! we hear of numbers slaughtered, without any emotion. We have fasts appointed; but how few are there who observe them with such humiliation as that before us! It is true, the honor of God's name, I fear, is but little interested in our success; perhaps it is rather interested in the destruction of such an ungrateful and rebellious people as we are!

But in relation to his Church and the advancement of religion among us, his honor is concerned; because he has bestowed on us advantages equal, if not superior, to any that are enjoyed elsewhere on the face of the whole earth! Here then we may, and should, plead the honor of his name; he expects us to lay to heart the abounding of iniquity in the midst of us; and takes it ill at our hands that there are so few who "mourn for the afflictions of Joseph, [Amos 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 6.6)," and "cry for the abominations of Israel, [Ezekiel 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.4)." Let, however, the example of Joshua and the elders be impressed upon our minds, and serve as a pattern for our future imitation.

***~~Improvement.~~***

Let us not confine our attention to public calamities, but turn it to those afflictions which are personal and domestic. In this history we may behold the source and remedy of all the evil that can come upon us.

That God, in some particular case, may afflict his people, as he did Job, for the magnifying of his own power, and the furtherance of their welfare, we acknowledge; but yet we never can err in tracing *our afflictions*to sin, as their procuring cause; and, if only they are the means of discovering and mortifying our corruptions, we shall have reason to number them among the richest mercies we ever received!

Let us then inquire of the Lord, "Why he contends with us?" Let us set ourselves diligently to search out our iniquities; and let us beg of God to reveal them to us, that no one sin may remain unrepented of and unmortified.

If in anything we have been overcome by our spiritual enemies, let us not reflect upon God, as though he had tempted us to sin; nor, on the other hand, let us distrust him, as though he were either unable or unwilling to deliver us. But let us humble ourselves before him, remembering that he is still full of compassion and mercy; and relying on that gracious invitation, "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely!"

***~~#250~~***

***~~ACHAN'S GUILT AND PUNISHMENT~~***

**[Joshua 7:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.19-21)**

Then *Joshua*said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."

*Achan*replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

*The rise, and progress, and termination of sin, afford as interesting a subject, as any that can be presented to our view.* It is exhibited to us by James in few words, and with remarkable precision, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death! [James 1:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.14-15)." Here we see the whole process; the inward corruption of the heart is first drawn forth by some enticing object; the desire of gratification is then formed, and the determination to attain it is fixed. Then comes the act whereby it is attained; and then death, the bitter consequence of sin, inevitably follows.

On this passage the history before us is an instructive comment. Achan saw a goodly Babylonish garment, with two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, and *coveted*them; then he *took*them, contrary to the divine command; and then the *penalty*of his transgression was inflicted on him.

In discoursing on this event, we would call your attention to,

***~~I. Achan's guilt.~~***

This sin of his had been perpetrated with so much caution, that it was unperceived by any human being. The consequences of Achan's sin were felt in the divine displeasure; but what evil had been committed, or by whom, no one knew. How then was his sin detected? How was the offence brought home to Achan? His guilt must be proved, before he can be punished; nay, there must be two witnesses, or testimony equivalent to that of two witnesses, before he can be put to death, [Deuteronomy 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.6). Behold then by what means his guilt was ascertained:

***~~1. Achan's guilt was proved from unquestionable testimony.~~***

Though the matter was altogether hidden from man, it was known to the omniscient, omnipresent God! "The darkness is no darkness to him; but the night and the day are both alike." God's eye was upon him, while he thought that no eye could see him; and God himself gave the information against him. He declared to Joshua what the true reason was of his displeasure, and of Israel's defeat. But though he revealed the fact, he did not name the person that had committed it, but left that to be discovered in a way more impressive to the nation, and more merciful to the offender, (inasmuch as it gave him space for repentance and voluntary acknowledgment,) summoning the whole nation, as it were, before him, first, by their *tribes*, that he might point out to which tribe the offender belonged; then, by their *families*; then, by their *households*; and lastly, by the *individual person*; and thus by four successive lots he fastened upon Achan as the guilty person.

Never was there a more striking comment than this on those words of David, "Evil shall hunt the wicked man to overthrow him, [Psalm 140:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 140.11)." The offender was out of sight; but his steps were traced with unerring certainty. The first lot showed that his *scent*, if I may so express myself, was found; and, when found, was followed with undeviating steadiness, and irresistible rapidity; until at last the criminal was seized, a lawful prey, a just victim to the divine displeasure!

***~~2. Achan's guilt was proved from personal confession.~~***

The testimony of God would of itself have been sufficient; because he could neither deceive nor be deceived. But, as it was intended that the offender should be made a public monument of divine justice, and be held up as a warning to the whole nation—it was desirable that other proofs of Achan's guilt should be adduced, sufficient to convince the most scrupulous, and satisfy the most partial. Behold then, Achan himself supplies a testimony which none could controvert or doubt; he bears witness against himself.

Joshua, assured that God had fixed upon the guilty person, entreats the offender to declare openly wherein he had transgressed. And here, we cannot but admire the tenderness of Joshua's address. He does not insult Achan, nor loads him with reproaches; but, as a compassionate father, beseeches him to acknowledge the truth of God's testimony, and to "give glory to him by confessing" his crime. This indeed was known to Joshua, and might have been specified by him; but it could not be proved; and therefore he wishes to hear it from Achan's own mouth; more particularly as a confession of it would honor God in the sight of all; it would glorify:  
his *omniscience*in revealing,  
his *holiness*in hating, and  
his *justice*in punishing,  
the iniquity which had been committed.

Achan, convinced that any further attempt to conceal his guilt would be in vain, confessed it, and that too with a sincerity and fullness, which would have given us hopes concerning him, if the confession had not been extorted from him by a previous discovery.

On this testimony, sentence might well have been passed and judgment executed. Nevertheless, that no doubt might remain on any mind, it was further desirable that his guilt should be ascertained also, as it eventually was.

***~~3. Achan's guilt was proved from corroborating facts.~~***

It has sometimes been found that people have unjustly accused themselves; but it was not so in this case; for Achan, in confirmation of his word, told them where they might find the stolen property. A messenger is sent; the property is found; the proofs of his guilt are exhibited before the Lord and in the sight of all Israel. To this testimony nothing was wanting, nothing could be added. The truth of God was manifest, and the equity of his judgments was demonstrated; and nothing now remained but to execute on the offender the punishment he had deserved.

We now proceed to notice,

***~~II. Achan's punishment.~~***

God had before declared that any person who should take to himself any part of the spoils of Jericho should be accursed, [Joshua 6:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.18-19); and, after the transgression had been committed, he declared that he would no more be with his people until they have destroyed the accursed person, and everything belonging to him, from among them, verses 12, 13, 15. No option therefore remained to Joshua, but to execute the sentence according to God's command.

***~~The sentence, though dreadful, was not too severe.~~***

Achan, with all his children, and his cattle, were stoned to death; and afterwards, with his tent and stolen property and every thing belonging to him, consumed by fire. Now it is true, that God had expressly forbidden that parents or children should be put to death for each other's iniquities, [Deuteronomy 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 24.16); but God is not restrained by the laws which he gives to man; he may alter or reverse them as he sees good; and in the present instance he was fully justified in the sentence he pronounced.

The sin that had been committed, was peculiarly heinous.

View it in itself: it was a sacrilegious robbing of God, who had ordered the gold and the silver to be appropriated to his use in the sanctuary.

View it in its circumstances: it was committed immediately after a most solemn surrender of himself to God by circumcision and at the paschal feast, and at the very instant that God had magnified his power and love in causing the walls of Jericho to fall at the sound of rams' horns and the people's shout.

Had Achan scaled the walls of Jericho and gained the spoils by his own sword at the peril of his life, it would have been some little extenuation of his crime; but God had disarmed his enemies, and made them like sheep for the slaughter; and therefore to rob God of the spoils was the basest ingratitude. In a word, it was direct atheism; for the very idea that he could hide the matter from God was a practical denial of his omnipresence.

View it, lastly, in its effects: what evil it had brought upon the whole nation; what a calamitous defeat, accompanied with the loss of thirty-six Israelites; and what inconceivable misery it would have entailed upon the whole nation, if it had not been duly punished, even the entire loss of God's favor, and the utter destruction of all the people.

View the transaction, I say, in this light—and the punishment, as awful as it was, will be acknowledged just; he who sought in this manner the destruction of every family in Israel, might well be destroyed together with his own family.

If our proud heart still rises against the sentence, let us silence every objection with this unanswerable question, *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

**The execution of it was calculated to produce the best effects.**

It was necessary that, in the commencement of this new scene of things, the people should know what a God they had to do with; and that, while they learned from his *mercies*how greatly he was to be loved; they might learn also from his *judgments*how greatly he was to be feared. This lesson they were now effectually taught; they could not but see that "God is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence by all them that are round about him."

To impress this lesson more deeply on their minds, a heap of stones was raised over the ashes of this unhappy family; that, as a lasting memorial of God's indignation against sin, it might declare to all future generations, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Now if we consider what incalculable benefit was likely to arise, not only to the people then existing, but to all future generations, from that act of severity, and that the good issuing from it would in many instances be, not merely temporal in relation to their bodies, but spiritual also and eternal in relation to their souls—we shall see that severity to them was kindness to millions; and that therefore the punishment inflicted on them comported no less with the goodness of God than with the sterner rights of divine justice.

***~~That we may gather yet further instruction from the history, let us behold in it:~~***

***~~1. The deceitfulness of sin.~~***

Achan at first contemplated only the satisfaction he would feel in possessing the Babylonish garment, and the comforts which the gold and silver would procure for him. The ideas of shame and remorse and misery were hidden from him; or, if they glanced through his mind, they appeared as visionary, and unworthy of any serious attention.

But O! with what different thoughts did he contemplate his gains, when inquisition was made to discover the offender! Or, if at first he thought that the chances were so much in his favor, as to preclude all fear of discovery, how would he begin to tremble when he saw that his own *tribe*was selected as containing the guilty person! How would his terror be increased when he saw his own *family*pointed out! and what dread would seize hold upon him when the lot fell upon his *household!* Methinks, when the different members of that household came before the Lord, it might have been seen clearly enough who the guilty person was, by the paleness of his cheeks and the trembling of his limbs.

What now becomes of all his expected enjoyments, when once he is detected? With what different eyes does he view the garment and the money when brought forth before the people, from what he did when first he coveted them in the house of their owner! How glad would he now be if he could recall the act, which had thus brought him to shame and ruin!

Thus then will it be with all who violate the laws of God. The seducer, the whoremonger, the adulterer, the thief—thinks of nothing at first but the pleasure he shall receive in the gratification of his lusts, and congratulates himself on the attainment of his wishes. But he has no sooner attained his object, than he begins to be filled with apprehensions of a discovery; he is carried on perhaps by the impetuosity of his passions; but he is a stranger to peace. Perhaps he silences his convictions, and follows his sinful ways without much compunction. But it will not be always so; there is a time coming when he will view his gratifications with other eyes; or if he is so blinded by the devil as to make light of sin unto the last, his illusions will vanish the very instant that his soul is departed from the body!

For the most part, that is found true which is spoken of hypocrites in the book of Job, "Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue, though he cannot bear to let it go and keeps it in his mouth, yet his food will turn sour in his stomach; it will become the venom of serpents within him! [Job 20:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.12-14)."

How awfully was this experienced by our first parents! When tempted to eat of the forbidden tree, they thought of nothing but the delicious flavor of the fruit, and the prospect of being made "wise as gods." But they were soon convinced, by bitter experience, that "to regard lying vanities, was to forsake their own mercies." Some indeed, by continuance in sin, have become "past feeling, having their consciences seared as with a hot iron;" but *death and judgment will speedily undeceive them, and the wrath of an almighty God shall teach them, that "sin was indeed exceeding sinful."*

***~~2. The certainty of sin's exposure!~~***

It is profitable to observe how often God interposes to reveal the hidden iniquities of mankind. Some sins in particular appear to engage him in more decided hostility against the perpetrators of them. I refer more especially to *murder*and *adultery*. The interest which the guilty people feel in concealing their iniquity makes them as cautious as possible to prevent discovery; yet is their very caution oftentimes the cause of their detection. To such sinners we may almost universally address that solemn warning, "Be sure your sin will find you out!" It frequently happens that men are so harassed in their minds, as no longer to be able to conceal their guilt; like Judas, they cast back the wages of their iniquity, and court even death itself, by their own hand, or by the hand of a public executioner, as a relief from the torment of a guilty conscience.

But be it so; they hide their wickedness from man; but can they hide it from God? Is there "any darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves?" No! If they go up to Heaven, or down to Hell, or flee to the remotest parts of the earth—there does God behold them, and from thence will he bring them to judgment. In that day shall the book of his remembrance be opened, and men shall see the records of their own actions. Then shall the proofs of our guilt be exhibited before the assembled universe, and we shall be unable to utter one syllable in arrest of Judgment.

O that we could realize the thoughts of that day! What a day will it be, when the secrets of all hearts shall be exposed to view, and every hidden abomination be brought to light! Happy, happy they, who in that day shall be found to have a saving interest in Christ, and in whom his love and mercy shall be forever magnified!

Now since it is certain that our sins will sooner or later find us out, let us consider how we shall view them in that day; and, as we would not now commit a scandalous iniquity in the sight of a fellow-creature, lest he should proclaim our wickedness, so let us bear in mind that there is One, "unto whom all things are naked and opened," and who has declared that he "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart!" Surely, however skillfully we conceal our abominations now, God will be a swift witness against us in that day to our everlasting confusion.

***~~3. The awfulness of sin's wages.~~***

Who does not shudder at the thought of that vengeance which was executed on Achan and his family? Who does not see how hot the indignation of God against sin was, when the sin of one single person prevailed more to incense him against the whole nation, than the innocence of the whole nation did to pacify his wrath against the individual, and when nothing but the most signal punishment of the individual could reconcile him to the nation to which he belonged? Yet was all this but a faint shadow of the indignation which he will manifest in the future world. Surely we should profit from such a history as this; we should learn to dread the displeasure of the Almighty, and to glorify him now by a sincere confession, that he may not be glorified hereafter in our eternal condemnation.

Hear then, brethren, what the weeping prophet speaks to us in the name of the Lord, "Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant, for the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God before he brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light, but he will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom. But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears," for the destruction and misery that shall come upon you [Jeremiah 13:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.15-17).

Blessed be God, though Achan's confession did not avert punishment from him, our confession of sin shall avert punishment from us, provided it is truly sincere, and deeply penitential. The Lord Jesus Christ never yet spurned from his feet a weeping penitent. He shed his blood even for the chief of sinners, and "will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." But confession on our part is indispensable; his Word to us is, "Return, O backsliding sinner, says the Lord, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever; Only acknowledge your iniquity! [Jeremiah 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.12-13)." Let us but do this aright, and we shall soon be enabled to say with the Psalmist, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and so you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

***~~#251~~***

***~~PERSEVERING ZEAL RECOMMENDED~~***

[Joshua 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 8.26)

"For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his spear until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai."

Whatever instruments God is pleased to make use of, it is by his hand alone that any victory is wrought; and he will be seen in his works. For this end, he has frequently appointed such means to be used, as had, in reality, not the smallest degree of fitness to the end proposed; and which were of no other use, than to direct the eyes of men to him as the true agent, and to constrain them to acknowledge him in the effects produced.

The stretching forth of Moses' rod neither had, nor could have, any direct influence in producing the plagues of Egypt, or in opening a passage through the depths of the sea; but it marked, in the most signal manner, the power of Almighty God, who had engaged to accomplish his wonders by those means.

Thus it was, that God decreed to give to Joshua the victory over Ai, by the stretching forth of his spear. The Israelitish host had been repulsed before Ai; but now they were ordered to attack it again. Means of every kind were to be used, as if the victory were to be gained by human skill and valor. Thirty thousand men were to be placed in ambush; and a feigned retreat was to be made, in order to draw the people of Ai from their strongholds, and to seize upon their city while they were pursuing the retreating hosts of Israel. All this was well, according to the arts of war; and all this was to be rendered subservient to the end proposed.

But still it was not by this that success was to be obtained. Joshua must stretch forth his spear; and, though that could be no signal to direct the operations of his army, (for he was alone, and at a distance from the army,) it was the signal by which, if I may so speak, God would act; for at the moment that Joshua, according to the divine appointment, stretched forth his spear, God stirred up the hosts that were in ambush to execute the concerted movement; and thus a speedy and entire victory was gained.

The second night before the battle, Joshua was with the army, arranging the plans of attack; but the night preceding the battle, and the whole time of the battle, Joshua was alone with God in the valley. Compare verse 9, 13. For the order given by God to Joshua, and its instantaneous effects, see verse 18, 19. But God would still have it seen that the success was owing to him alone; and, therefore, Joshua must still keep his arm and spear extended, until all the people of Ai were completely destroyed.

Now, in this significant act, Joshua was both a type and an example; and in it we see,

***~~I. How our Great Captain interests Himself for us.~~***

***~~Joshua was a very eminent and distinguished type of Christ.~~***

To him was committed the office of leading God's chosen people into Canaan. Moses might conduct them through the wilderness; but he could not bring them into the promised land. Moses represented the Law, which serves as a rule of conduct, but can give no man a title to Heaven. He must give up this honor to Joshua, who was raised up by God for this purpose, to subdue their enemies before them, and to put them into the possession of the promised inheritance. His very name was changed, in reference to his appointment, from Osea to Jehoshua; which is a compound of Jah Osea, and signifies 'divine Savior' [Numbers 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.16). His name, thus altered, is the very same with that of Jesus, whose type he was.

No less than twice in the New Testament is his name translated "Jesus," when it should rather, for distinction sake, have been translated "Joshua [Acts 7:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.45) and [Hebrews 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.8);" and both times in reference to his conducting the children of Israel into Canaan.

*Joshua*was the ostensible leader of the Lord's people; but the *Lord Jesus Christ*was the real "Captain of the host," and before Joshua had fought one battle in the land, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in a visible shape as a warrior, and made known to him, that he held but the second place, and that the Messiah himself was, in truth, "the Leader and Commander of the people, [Joshua 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.14) with [Isaiah 55:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.4)."

Agreeably to this appointment, the Lord Jesus Christ is called "the Captain of our salvation, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10)," and is declared to be "exalted by God to be a Prince, and a Savior, that he may give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31)." In fact, it is through Jesus alone that any of "the sons of God are brought to glory, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10)."

***~~Joshua was a type of Christ in the very act we are considering.~~***

Joshua was at a distance from the immediate combatants, and in the presence of his God, with whom he was, no doubt, engaged in fervent intercession for the people; and through him was the victory obtained. To the eye of sense, Joshua did nothing; but to the eye of faith, he did everything.

Thus it is that the Lord Jesus Christ has gone into Heaven, "there to appear in the presence of God for us, [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)." There is he "our Advocate with the Father, [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1)," and never ceases to make intercession in our behalf; and on that very account "he is, and shows himself, able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)." True it is, that we must fight, as if all depended on ourselves; but still it is through him alone that we can prevail; and whoever he be that is finally made a conqueror, he is made so altogether "through him who loves him, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37);" "God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 15:57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.57) and [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.14)."

From the same significant action we may see,

***~~II. How we are to engage in combat for ourselves.~~***

Behold the attitude of Joshua, his spear stretched out from the very commencement of the battle to the close. Who sees not in this his determined purpose, and his confident expectation of success? Thus, then, we must fight the Lord's battles against our spiritual enemies:

***~~1. With determined purpose.~~***

A command is given us to destroy them; and, as in God's purpose they are all devoted to destruction, so they must be in ours. No truce is to be made with any of them; not one is to be spared. We have enlisted under the banners of our Lord Jesus Christ; and his battles we must fight, until every enemy is subdued before us. Under whatever discouragements we may fight, we must approve ourselves "good soldiers of Jesus Christ;" never retreating through fear, never fainting through weariness, never relaxing our efforts in any respect, nor ever dreaming of rest, until "Satan and all his hosts are bruised under our feet! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

The posture of Joshua was no doubt painful to maintain; even as that of Moses had been on a similar occasion, when he held up his rod on the hill in Horeb, [Exodus 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.9). Moses' hands were heavy, and he needed the assistance both of Hur and Aaron to hold them up. Through their help, however, he did hold them up until the going down of the sun, and until Amalek was discomfited before Israel, [Exodus 17:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.10-13). Such resolution must we also possess; and never draw back our hand, until the victory is complete.

The importance of this determination of heart will appear by the effects produced by the lack of determination in Joash king of Israel. The prophet Elisha being sick, the king of Israel went to visit him. The prophet announced to him God's gracious intention to destroy the Syrians, his powerful and bitter enemies. The prophet bade him take a bow and arrows; to shoot with an arrow, which should mark the speed with which they should be destroyed; and to strike the arrows on the ground, in token of the extent to which success over them should be obtained.

But the king, being but languid in his desires of victory, and not very optimistic in his expectations, smote the ground but thrice; when he should, with determined purpose and joyful confidence, have smitten it five or six times. For this lukewarm conduct he was severely reproved; and his success was limited to the measure of zeal which he had expressed, [2 Kings 13:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.15-19).

Just so shall we find that our success will exactly correspond with the zeal with which we prosecute our endeavors. Let us determine to conquer, and the victory is ours; let our efforts never be relaxed, and they shall infallibly succeed at last, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9).

**2. With confident expectation.**

It is clear that Joshua entertained no doubts of final success; he was well assured that the outcome would be such as God had given him reason to expect. It is true, he could see no connection between his holding forth a spear in the valley, and the success of combatants at a distance from him; to the judgment of reason, it would appear, that he would have been better employed at the head of the army, animating and directing his men. But he knew Who alone could give the victory, and that a compliance with God's command was the surest means of obtaining help from him. Hence, without any apprehensions about the outcome, he maintained his stand before God, and held forth his spear until all his enemies were destroyed.

Such is the confidence which we also must maintain, in all our conflicts with sin and Satan. God has promised us success; and "what He has promised, He is able also to perform." There may appear to us but little connection between our poor efforts and the destruction of such mighty foes; but we are not to be listening to the suggestions of unbelief; but to "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." We should even now, by anticipation, see all our enemies subdued before us, and the crown of victory set upon our heads. "If God is for us, who can be against us!" should be our triumphant boast; and we should hurl defiance at our enemies, in the name of the Lord Almighty. Though we be only as David, a stripling, with a sling and stone, going forth against Goliath fully armed for the combat, we should know in whom we have believed, and advance as to certain victory. Trusting assuredly in the promise of our God, "we shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

***~~Let me, in conclusion, say to all of you,~~***

***~~1. Do not think lightly of the spiritual warfare.~~***

Every one among us has a warfare to maintain. Notwithstanding Canaan is the gift of God, it must be obtained by a manly and continued conflict with our spiritual enemies. The *world*, the *flesh*, the *devil*—are all combined against us, as much as ever the seven nations of Canaan were against God's people of old; and we must go forth against them in the name of our God. We must not despise any as too weak, nor fear any as too strong.

Joshua erred in sending only about three thousand men against Ai in the first instance, because the warriors in Ai were but few. His success against Jericho had led him to indulge an undue confidence in the prowess of his men; and he forbore to impose on any greater number what was deemed both by him and them an unnecessary burden and fatigue. But this unhallowed confidence was punished with defeat; and afterwards he proceeded with his whole force, and with a careful attention to all the stratagems of war.

We, too, must follow him in this respect. *There is no enemy so weak, but he will be able to overcome us—if we indulge a careless habit, or confide in an arm of flesh*. We must fight the good fight of faith, and behave like men upon the field of battle; but we must, also, be much and often with our God "in the valley, verse 13;" there must we be holding forth our hands in prayer; nor must we ever draw them back, so long as one single enemy survives.

In this respect we cannot do better than follow the steps of David, "Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"

[Psalm 35:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.1-3)." *If you hold forth your spear, and prevail on God to draw forth his, it will be impossible for any enemy to stand before you.*

***~~2. Cease not to prosecute it, until your victory is complete.~~***

As to "run well for a season only" is the sure way to lose the prize; so to fight, however well, for a season only, will ensure nothing but defeat. You are told, that when Moses' hands hanged down, Amalek prevailed; and it was only by their being held up until the evening, that ultimate success was gained. "Be then faithful unto death, in order that you may obtain the crown of life!" "If any man draws back, it is to certain and inevitable perdition, [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39)." Take the great Captain of your salvation for your pattern; he never ceased from his work, until he could say, "It is finished!" Or, if you would have for your pattern a man, "who was of like passions with yourselves, then set Joshua before your eyes; and let his posture in the presence of his God be the continued posture of your souls.

***~~#252~~***

***~~JOSHUA'S LEAGUE WITH GIBEON~~***

**[Joshua 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 9.15)**

"Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them (the Gibeonites) to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath."

It is common for people to harden themselves against God, and, like Ahaz, "in their distress to trespass yet more against the Lord, [2 Chronicles 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.22)." The inhabitants of Canaan had been filled with terror and dismay even before the Israelites had passed over Jordan; yet they prepared to contend with the invading army, and to repel force by force. But when they saw that a passage was opened for Israel through Jordan, and that the walls of Jericho were thrown down by the sound of rams' horns, and that Ai also was vanquished—it might have been hoped that they would submit themselves to the God of Israel, and endeavor by penitence to avert the impending danger. This however was not the case; on the contrary, the different kings of the country formed a confederacy to oppose with their united power those whom they despaired of withstanding by their separate exertions. One people indeed ventured to stem the tide; the Gibeonites determined to shun the storm which they could not avert; accordingly they sent some of their chief men to make a league with Joshua.

This league is the subject of our present consideration; and we shall notice it, with a view to,

***~~I. Moral instruction.~~***

Two things in particular require our attention:

***~~1. The deceit they practiced.~~***

The deceit which they executed was extremely subtle and ingenious. They knew that God had given to the Israelites a command to extirpate the seven nations of Canaan; and they saw by the manner in which Jericho and Ai had fallen, that there was no hope of resisting them with success. They therefore sent some of their chief men, with instruction to feign themselves ambassadors from a distant nation, and in a very submissive manner to entreat that they might not be extirpated also. Whatever terms Joshua chose to impose, they were ready to accede to, provided they might but return to their country assured on the oath of Israel that they should be permitted to live. That their story might have the appearance of truth, "they took old sacks, old and rent leather wine-bottles, old shoes, clouted upon their feet, and old garments, and, for their provision, bread that was dry and moldy," pretending that everything was new when they set out from home, but that, by reason of the length of their journey, it had been reduced to the state in which it then was. They professed a great regard for the God of Israel whom they feared, having heard of all the wonders he had wrought for his people in Egypt, and of the victorious manner in which he had enabled them to prevail over the kings on the other side of Jordan. But respecting the miraculous passage through the river Jordan, or the fall of Jericho and Ai, they said not a word; because they would have it supposed that their country was so far distant as not to admit of such recent events being known there.

But this falsehood was altogether unjustifiable. It is true, the very existence of their nation apparently depended on it; and to deceive an enemy may in some cases be allowable; but here was falsehood, direct, palpable, systematic falsehood; and, as is usually the case, having begun with one falsehood, (that they had come from a far country,) they were forced to utter a multitude of others to support it. Nothing could justify this; and, if they had been truly pious, they would have preferred death before it.

Their better way would certainly have been, to declare the whole truth, and to implore Joshua's intercession with God to spare their lives, and to instruct them in the knowledge of his ways. This, we can have no doubt, would have succeeded, though no provision was made for such an event in the general orders which God had given to Israel. The exception of sparing those who opened their gates related to distant nations only, and not to those within the borders of the promised land, [Deuteronomy 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.10-11); [Deuteronomy 12:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.15-16). Yet God, as a God of mercy, would have spared them; or, if he had not, it would have been better for them to die, than to preserve their lives by falsehood; for the sentence of God against liars, without any respect to the occasion of their lies, is, that "they shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death! [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)."

**2. The league that Joshua made with them.**

Joshua, though some suspicion was intimated in the first instance, verse 7, was too easily imposed upon; (for those who are themselves guileless, are least suspicious of deceit in others,) he formed his judgment from the circumstances that were before him, and made up his mind without consulting God, verse 14. This in him was faulty; both he and the elders were guilty of criminal neglect. To what purpose had God given them the Urim and Thummim, but that they might ascertain his will in all doubtful matters? And Eleazar, the high-priest, was at hand; so that no delay would have been occasioned.

To the same source may be traced innumerable errors of our own. We "lean to our own understandings," instead of seeking direction from God. To what purpose is it said, "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths! [Proverbs 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.5-6)," if we do not avail ourselves of this privilege? Let us bear in mind, that *there is nothing so great or so small, but it is our duty and our privilege to ask counsel of God respecting it.*

But though we blame Joshua for so hastily concluding a covenant with the Gibeonites, we highly applaud him for adhering to his engagement. There might indeed have been much to say for rescinding the covenant: 'He had been imposed upon; they were not the people whom they had represented themselves to be; nor were their cities out of the precincts of the promised land.' Still however, "he had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel;" and therefore he considered the whole nation as pledged to fulfill the covenant; nor would he allow the congregation to execute upon them the vengeance which they meditated. This was doubtless the proper line of conduct for him to pursue. If he had rescinded his covenant, the whole people of Canaan would have represented him as a violator of his engagements; it was therefore better to fulfill his hasty and unadvised agreement, than by departing from it to give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme.

From hence *we*may learn our duty on all such occasions. Joshua had erred through haste, and a neglect of properly consulting God; and therefore it was right to abide the consequences. Had his oath indeed been like Herod's, duty would have required him to violate it; because an engagement to commit murder could not be binding upon any man; but as there was no such obstacle to the performance of his vows in the present instance, he acted the part of an upright man, who "swears to his neighbor, and changes not, [Psalm 15:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 15.4)."

Nevertheless it was not necessary that he should go *beyond*his agreement. All that he had promised, was to spare their lives, which therefore he adhered to, (see the text, with verse 20,) but as they had deceived him, and as it was necessary to pacify the congregation who were offended at the covenant, he reduced them all to a state of servitude, and made them hewers of wood and drawers of water to the whole congregation in the house of the Lord. This satisfied all parties, and turned even the error which he had committed, into a public benefit.

Thus have we considered the subject with a view to moral instruction, particularly in reference to:

1. The evil of falsehood.

2. The importance of seeking direction from God.

3. The indispensable necessity of fulfilling our engagements.

We shall now consider it with a view to:

***~~II. Religious improvement.~~***

It is thought by most commentators that the league made with Gibeon was typical of the admission of the Gentiles into the Christian Church; but without insisting upon that, we may justly deduce from it the following instructions:

***~~1. That we ought without delay to seek the salvation of our souls.~~***

The Gibeonites did not wait until Joshua came to their cities, but, while he was yet at a distance, sent to desire conditions of peace. They believed that God had given the whole land to Israel, and had ordered them to slay all the inhabitants, and that it was impossible to oppose them with success. They knew also that there was abundant evidence of God's power to execute all that his wisdom had decreed, verse 24. Therefore they lost no time in seeking to arrest the hand of vengeance, and to obtain life on any terms.

Did *they*then act thus for the life of their bodies, and shall not *we*for the life of our souls? *Have not we as clear evidence of God's determination to destroy all the ungodly*, as they had of the gift of Canaan to Israel? And are not the judgments inflicted on the rebel angels, on the old world, on the cities of the plain, and on the Jews themselves at this hour, as clear proofs of God's determination to fulfill his Word?

I say then: Learn from these heathens—learn to come to Jesus before it is too late. Do not wait until you are besieged by sickness and death; but now, while the enemy appears distant, seek a covenant of peace and life. You need not cover your design with falsehoods, but rather declare the whole truth; and come at first, as they did after their imposture was detected, "Behold, we are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you, [Joshua 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 9.25)."

***~~2. That no man shall seek for mercy in vain.~~***

The Gibeonites, though they obtained mercy by fraud, were spared from a respect for the honor of the God of Israel. Notwithstanding Joshua had been commanded to extirpate all—yet were they spared, when once he had inadvertently passed his word in their favor.

And shall not *we*be spared if we apply to the true Joshua? The Lord Jesus to whom we apply "came into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." So far therefore is mercy from being contrary to the ends of his mission, it is the very end for which he came, that he might "seek and save those who are lost."

Nay more, he came not only to spare us, but to bring us into covenant with himself, that we might be numbered among his own peculiar people. Hear his own word, addressed to every one of us in his name by the Prophet Isaiah, "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David, [Isaiah 55:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.3)." If you are inclined to doubt whether "he will take the children's bread, and cast it to such a dog as you," then learn from the Canaanite woman, that your unworthiness shall be no bar to your admission to his favor; only, like her, believe in Jesus; and, like her, you shall assuredly find acceptance with him. Moreover, if Jesus once admits you into covenant with himself, not all the universe shall ever prevail upon him to violate his engagements with you. If at any time he appears to frown upon you, you may take his covenant, and plead it with him at the throne of grace, "For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it, [Jeremiah 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.21)."

What astonishing pleas are here! And shall they be used in vain? Had Joshua such respect for the honor of God, that he would not violate his inadvertent covenant, and shall not Jesus fulfill the covenant which he has ratified with his own blood? Surely none ever did, or ever shall, make application to him for mercy in vain.

***~~3. That, if we would obtain mercy, we must submit to the terms imposed upon us.~~***

The *Gibeonites*accounted it a small matter to surrender their cities, and to spend their days in servitude, seeing that their lives were spared.

And shall *we*think much of sacrificing any temporal interests, or of performing any self-denying duties, when we have reason to hope that God has spared the life of our souls?

What if we are called to give up father and mother, and houses and lands, for Christ's sake; should we not "account them all as loss for Christ?"

What if we are threatened with cruel torments and death for his sake; should we not say, "None of these things move me, neither do I count my life dear unto me, so that I may but fulfill his will, and finish my course with joy?" Had the *Gibeonites*demurred, they would have lost the benefit conferred upon them; and so shall *we*, if we refuse to comply with the terms assigned us; for "whoever loves his life, shall lose it."*If we look for mercy at the hands of Jesus—then all that we have, and all that we are, must be the Lord's. Our whole life must be a life of self-denying obedience.*

Hear this then, you Gibeonites, who desire a covenant of life and peace; these are the terms, and only these, that can ever be allowed to you. But know this, that though they may appear hard to flesh and blood, they are not really hard; on the contrary, the service of God is perfect freedom; and it is "better to be a doorkeeper in the house of your God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

If then you have been awakened from your heathenish security, whatever terrors may have brought you to the feet of Jesus, bless God for them. Whatever hardships you may endure in the service of your Lord, bless God for them also. If only you submit to God, and take part with his people here, you shall have your portion with them to all eternity!

***~~#253~~***

***~~JOSHUA'S VICTORY OVER THE CONFEDERATE KINGS~~***

**[Joshua 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.24-25)**

"When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, "Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks. Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight."

The Jewish history, considered merely as a history, is the most wonderful, and most instructive, that ever was recorded; but considered as a shadow of things to come, it has an interest peculiar to itself. The attention which it excites, is not that of speculative curiosity, but of practical concern; and everyone who desires to obtain favor with Israel's God, feels himself bound to study it, in order *to learn from it the character of God, together with the duties and privileges of his chosen people*.

Having had frequent occasion, in our discourses on the Pentateuch, to show that the figurative import of this history is not imaginary, but real; and that such an explanation of it is strongly intimated in the New Testament; we may dispense with any remarks of that kind at present, and proceed to notice, in reference to the Christian's warfare, the defeat of the five confederate kings by Joshua; a full account of which is given in the chapter before us.

The things which we shall more particularly refer to, are:

***~~I. The occasion of the confederacy.~~***

The Gibeonites, who were a strong and powerful people, had made a league with Joshua, while all the other kingdoms of Canaan were determined to oppose him. This incensed all the other powers against the Gibeonites, especially their nearer neighbors, who considered it as betraying the common interest, and as facilitating the threatened subjugation of the whole country. To prevent the influence of such an example, and to punish those whom they regarded as traitors, five kings united their forces to go and smite Gibeon, before they should be able to obtain any assistance from their new ally. They accordingly went up with all possible expedition to attack the city, and to wreak their vengeance on its inhabitants.

Here then we may see what usually takes place when any of the enemies of Christ submit themselves to him. Their former friends and companions consider it as a defection from their standard, and a dereliction of their cause; and often resent it with acrimony, [Isaiah 59:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.15); [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19); [Luke 12:51-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.51-53). And though their opposition does not in all cases proceed to the same extremity, it never fails to show itself in a way of contempt and ridicule, [1 Peter 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.4).

Satan too, is indignant at losing one of his vassals; and not only stimulates his subjects to commence hostilities against them, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2), but labors by all possible wiles and devices to reduce them to their former bondage, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11); [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16); [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8).

There is the same enmity against the cause of Christ existing now as ever. As "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, [Psalm 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.2)," in the days of old, so the same rage continued against all the Apostles and Disciples in after ages, [Acts 4:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.1-3); [Acts 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.18); [Acts 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.40); [Acts 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.23), so must it be, and so it will be, as long as Satan shall be permitted to exert any influence over the minds of men, [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). Earth and Hell will combine against the Church of Christ; and every one that enters into covenant with Jesus, shall have a powerful confederacy to contend with, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29); [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12); [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12).

From the occasion of that confederacy, we proceed to notice,

***~~II. The means by which the confederacy was defeated.~~***

Instantly, and with great importunity, did the Gibeonites make application to Joshua for timely support, verse 6. They rightly judged, that, having once made a covenant with the Israelites, Joshua would afford them his effectual aid. Nor were they disappointed of their hope; for Joshua, without delay, gave orders to his whole army, and marched all night to their deliverance.

Such is the way in which Christians also must obtain deliverance. If they attempt to resist their enemies in their own strength, they will be vanquished; but if they betake themselves to prayer, they cannot but succeed. *Prayer calls Omnipotence to their aid*; and while it is yet offering, God will both hear and answer it, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24).

Behold the Apostle Paul, how sorely he was beset, how grievously he was assaulted; yet scarcely had he been able thrice to repeat his cry for help, before the Lord answered him, "My grace is sufficient for you!" and immediately you behold him triumphing, as if all his enemies were lying prostrate at his feet. [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-9).

Thus the Christian, whatever confederacy is formed against him, has only to cry unto the Lord for help, saying, "I have no might against this great company that comes against me, neither do I know what to do;" and the victory will be no longer doubtful, [2 Chronicles 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.12); [2 Chronicles 20:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.15-17). The devil himself could not stand before such a prayer as that, but would instantly be put to flight, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7). Joshua felt that there was danger of his coming too late; but no such danger exists in relation to the Christian; for his Lord is always near as, "a very present help in the times of trouble! [Psalm 46:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1)."

Let us next contemplate,

***~~III. The extent of the confederacy's defeat.~~***

The confederate armies were defeated in a moment, and the pursuit of them continued so long, that Joshua entreated that the sun and moon might be arrested in their career, in order to afford him light to finish the work he had begun, verses 12, 13. And because the slaughter of them by the hand of Israel was not sufficient, God himself cast down great hailstones upon them, and slew more than all the host of Israel had slain with the sword! verse 10, 11. All the five kings also were captured, and, after the captains of Israel had put their feet upon their necks, they were slain, and hung up on trees, as accursed monuments of God's wrath and indignation. Thus complete was the destruction of Israel's enemies by Israel's God.

Thus shall the Christian also be enabled to say with the Apostle, "Thanks be unto God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ!" When once he has entered into covenant with Christ, "sin shall no more have dominion over him;" "being Christ's, he shall be enabled to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." Yes, God will so give him the victory, that "Satan himself shall be bruised under his feet shortly, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

See the victories granted to David in answer to his prayer; these were a counterpart of those recorded in the text, and of those also which every true Christian shall experience, [Psalm 18:4-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.4-10); [Psalm 18:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.16-19); [Psalm 18:36-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.36-40); [Psalm 18:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.50).

It was not for the purpose of insulting over a vanquished enemy that Joshua ordered his captains to trample on their necks, but in order to show unto Israel, what opinions this victory should inspire; and to set before their eyes,

***~~IV. The prospect which the confederacy's defeat afforded to the Israelites in all their future conflicts.~~***

Many conflicts yet remained for them, before the whole land would be completely subdued. But, however numerous or severe these conflicts might be, the people had no reason "to fear or be dismayed," since every enemy would be subdued before them in like manner, and be, as had long since been foretold, mere "bread for them, [Numbers 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.9)."

In like manner *we*are also taught to regard our victories as pledges of future and greater conquests. While we are in this militant state, we shall and many enemies to encounter. Sometimes our enemies may appear so formidable as almost to defy Omnipotence itself; but we need not fear; there are at all times "more with us than with them, "we shall always have Jehovah himself on our side; and "if God is for us, who can be against us?" Our own weakness is no ground of fear; because God "will perfect his own strength in our weakness;" "instead of breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax, he will bring forth judgment unto victory."

In this light then let us view the threats and assaults of all our enemies; they shall only be the means of displaying and magnifying the power of our God. Only let us remember that encouraging direction, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear you, and you shall glorify me," and then may we rest assured, that "no weapon which is formed against us shall prosper;" yes, we may defy all the powers of earth and Hell ever "to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17); [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39)."

**APPLICATION.**

***~~1. To those who put discouragements in the way of repenting sinners.~~***

Few will acknowledge themselves to be persecutors of the Lord's people, though there is scarcely a more common character to be found. But know that mocking is as painful to the mind, as scourging is to the body, [Hebrews 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.33); [Hebrews 11:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.36);" and "It would have been better to have a millstone hanged about your neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that you should cause one of Christ's little ones to stumble! [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6)." If any think that because multitudes concur with them, they are the less in danger, I would remind them of Gibeon's enemies, and say, "Associate yourselves, and you shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and you shall be broken in pieces! [Isaiah 8:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.9-10)."

***~~2. To those who yield to discouragement.~~***

Think not of your own weakness, but of the power and grace of Christ. And if others cry out by reason of a confederacy, join not with them in their desponding apprehensions, but "sanctify the Lord Almighty himself, and make him your fear, and him your dread, [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13)."

***~~#254~~***

***~~THE CONQUEST AND PARTITION OF CANAAN~~***

**[Joshua 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 11.23)**

"So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war."

*The promises of God, though often slow in their accomplishment, are sure to be fulfilled in due season.* Abraham waited twenty years for the promised child, until, according to the course of nature, there was no hope that Sarah should ever become a mother; yet Isaac was born to him in due time. God promised to give to him and to his posterity the land of Canaan; yet it was four hundred and thirty years before his posterity were brought out of Egypt; and forty more before they entered into Canaan; and even then it was six more years before they obtained a quiet possession of it. Still however, the promise could not fail, nor did it fail in any particular.

The accomplishment of that event is recorded in the words we have just read; which will naturally lead us to contemplate the conquest and partition of the promised land.

***~~I. The conquest of the land.~~***

Beautiful is the analogy between the warfare of the Israelites, and that which is maintained by every true Christian. We have had repeated occasion for this remark before; but the illustration of it admits of endless diversity.

***~~Mark their warfare in its various stages.~~***

Behold its commencement: it began with astonishing interpositions of the divine power in their behalf. The river Jordan opened to them a passage, as on dry land, at a time that it had overflowed all its banks; and the walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of rams' horns, and the people's shout; and thus a footing for them was gained in a way that gave all possible encouragement to their future efforts.

In its progress they were left more to their own personal exertions. Great confederations were formed against them; and they had sometimes to contend with powers which seemed likely to overwhelm them, [Joshua 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.5); [Joshua 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 11.4). At other seasons they enjoyed comparative rest; yet were they never without some enemies to combat, and some conflicts to maintain. God had told them, that he would "not drive out the Canaanites before them in one year, but little by little;" that the beasts of the field should not multiply against them, and that their population might so increase as to enable them to occupy the land, [Exodus 23:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.29-30).

Hence, long after the inhabitants of the south were subdued, their northern enemies remained unbroken; and some of their fiercest conflicts were reserved for a period when they had expected nothing but easy and progressive triumphs. their last trials even seemed to be the greatest; for the Anakim, who were of such gigantic stature, and whose strongholds were so impregnable as to intimidate all the spies that Moses had sent forty years before to search out the land, maintained themselves to the last, and were never conquered until all the other powers had been rooted out, verse 21.

With the exception of Gibeon, there was not so much as one city that sought peace with Joshua; all of them being given over to judicial blindness, that they might suffer the full punishment of their iniquities! verse 19, 20.

At last, however, came the completion of their warfare, when every enemy being subdued, they rested from all their perils and fatigues, and took possession of the whole land. Then they reaped the fruits of all their labors; they occupied all the cities, enjoyed all the spoils, and sat down in peace and safety, none making them afraid, verses 13, 14.

***~~And now contemplate the Christian's warfare.~~***

In its commencement, the power of God is not less displayed than in the history before us. The transition which a person experiences in conversion, is justly represented in the Scripture as a coming "from darkness into marvelous light! [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9);" or rather, as "a passage from death to life! [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14)." What human power is sufficient for a change like this? Paul represents the power displayed in it as equal to that which was exhibited by Almighty God in raising his Son Jesus Christ from the dead, and in setting him at his own right hand in Heaven, above all the principalities and powers, whether of Heaven or Hell! [Ephesians 1:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18-22). The remembrance of this is an encouragement to the Christian in all his future conflicts. He knows assuredly who it is that "has begun the good work within him;" he is constrained to say, "I have labored—yet not I, but the grace of God that was within me. By the grace of God I am what I am! 1 Corinthians 15:10."

In its progress the work is carried forward more apparently by his own exertions. He has the armor given him; but he is called forth to use it. His whole life is to be a state of warfare; and it is by fighting that he is to obtain the victory. He will not find any one enemy that will submit to him, until smitten by the sword of the Spirit, and constrained by the holy violence of faith and prayer. The *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*—will combine their forces to destroy him. There will be some seasons of more than ordinary temptation, when he will need peculiar support from on high; and there will be other seasons of comparative rest; but, if Satan at any time departs from him, it will only be for a season, as he departed from Christ himself, [Luke 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.13).

As it is with the Church at large, which has times of persecution and times of peace, [Acts 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1); [Acts 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.31), so is it, in a greater or less degree, with all the individuals that compose the Church; and frequently has the Christian his sorest trials, either when he is most expecting peace, [Job 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.10); [2 Corinthians 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.2); [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7), or when his last enemy, even death itself, is about to be swallowed up in everlasting victory! [1 Corinthians 15:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.54).

At last the completion of his warfare will arrive; O blessed season, when every enemy shall be finally subdued! Then the almost invincible Anakim shall be rooted out; and Satan, that great adversary, by whom all the rest are concentrated, and led on to battle, shall be bruised under his feet; and he shall enjoy the fruit of his victories in everlasting rest!

The same resemblance as we have traced in reference to the conquest of Canaan, may yet further be revealed in:

***~~II. The partition of the land.~~***

The land, when conquered, was divided to the tribes by lot—God having reserved to himself the whole disposal of it; his it was from the beginning; and his it continued to be; and they must all receive it as a gift from him. Mark here the order of events:

***~~1. The grant of the land.~~***

God gave the land to Abraham, whom of his own sovereign will he had called out from an idolatrous people, and to whom for his own glory's sake he had revealed his will. To him, I say, God gave the land; not for any merit that was in him, either seen or foreseen, but, "for the manifestation of his own glory."

Just so, why is it that fallen man is chosen, in preference to the fallen angels?

Why are Christians selected from the whole world, which lies under pagan darkness or Mohammedan delusion?

Why are some "saved out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been led captive at his will," while others are left still in bondage to him, wallowing in their lusts, and enemies of all righteousness?

Will any man presume to say that he "made himself to differ, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)," or that God chose him for his own superior goodness, either seen or foreseen, [Deuteronomy 9:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.4-6). Every such thought is reprobated; and how much more such an assertion!? Let not that man ever speak of pride; for wherein could Lucifer himself exceed such presumption as this?

No! We must affirm with the Apostle, that "God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world; and that, not because we were holy, or because he foresaw we would be holy—but that we might be holy and without blame before him in love! [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)." God, of his own sovereign will, gave his Son to us, and us to him, [John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6); [John 17:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.9-10). Yes, he "predestined us also unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the Beloved! [Ephesians 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.5-6)." It is not expedient to be always harping upon this subject; but we must not be ashamed of it, or afraid on proper occasions to confess it.

***~~2. The acquisition of the land.~~***

This, though a gift, was yet attained by means of their own exertions. The common objection against the doctrines of predestination and election is that it encourages men to sit down supinely, expecting God to do everything, while they themselves do nothing. But did Joshua and Caleb argue so; or was there found one single person in the whole kingdom of Israel who argued so? No! They all knew that the gift of Canaan did not supersede the necessity of their exertions, nor did the efforts they used prevent it from being a gift. They knew that it was a gift; and that very consideration encouraged them to fight for it; and they labored cheerfully, because they "knew that their labor would not be in vain in the Lord."

Thus then it must be with us. "The covenant whereby Heaven is made over to us, is ordered in all things and sure;" yet we must "fight the good fight of faith" and "be courageous like men," if ever we would enjoy anyone of its blessings. It is "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, to whom eternal life will be given, [Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7);" nor is there one single hour on this side eternity when we are at liberty to take off our armor; we must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would obtain the crown of life." The will of God is made known to us; every assistance is offered for the performance of it; in obeying it we must find our present happiness, and ensure that which is to come.

This order of things is absolutely irreversible, "we have need of patience therefore, that, after we have done the will of God, we may receive the promise, [Hebrews 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.36)."

**3. The enjoyment** **of the land.**

This, though long delayed, they attained at last; and doubtless considered themselves as well repaid for all their labors.

But what was their rest in comparison with that which God has reserved for genuine Christians? Of our rest David speaks, when he represents God as swearing that the impenitent and unbelieving shall never enter into it. And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, this declaration of David's is brought to prove that there must be some other, and better, rest than ever was enjoyed in this world.

*The rest which Joshua promised and gave to Israel in the land of Canaan, was only a type and shadow of that which God has prepared for us*, "If Joshua had given them rest," says the Apostle, "David would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest to the people of God, [Hebrews 4:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.7-9). In verse 8 the name "Jesus" should be translated "Joshua." They are both the same word in the Greek." Now here the whole parallelism which we have illustrated, is marked by God himself. Their Captain has the very same name with ours, and was a most illustrious type of him; and the rest of Canaan which he gave them after all their conflicts, was a distinguished type of Heaven; to the everlasting possession of which we shall be advanced, when, under the direction, and by the aid of Jesus, we have subdued our spiritual enemies. *Then all difficulties, temptations, trials, conflicts, will be forever banished—and rest in the bosom of our God will be our everlasting portion!*

***~~Let us learn then from hence:~~***

***~~1. The outcome of the world's impieties.~~***

God bears long with unrepentant sinners; and because his judgments against their evil works are not executed speedily, their hearts are the more fully, and more securely, set in them to do evil. But "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." He has fixed a period beyond which his forbearance shall be exercised no longer; and then the most secure shall be visited, and the most powerful brought down. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." O that the secure and thoughtless would reflect on this, before it is too late!

Hostility to Jesus and his people, whatever men may imagine, can never terminate, but in the destruction of those who indulge it. Beware then, brethren, of hardening yourselves against God; for "who ever hardened himself against him and prospered?" His hand will surely find out all his enemies; and every refuge of lies shall be swept away with the broom of destruction!

***~~2. The outcome of the saint's conflicts.~~***

Victory may in some cases be long held in suspense; and the most courageous veteran may need peculiar comforts from above. But the weakest shall triumph in due time; and be made "more than conquerors through Him who loved them!" We readily grant, that, as the Israelites had to contend with "nations that were greater and mightier than they"—so it is with us; but the outcome of our conflicts shall be like theirs also. It is said on different occasions, that "God delivered their enemies into their hands;" and from thence the victory became certain. The same promise has he made to us; and it shall be fulfilled to everyone of us in its season. Let not any then give way to unnecessary alarms. Appearances may be awful and alarming; but our consolation is, that "greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world;" and, if at any time we are tempted to say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"—let us instantly reply with the holy Apostle, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

***~~#255~~***

***~~SLOTH AND LUKEWARMNESS REPROVED~~***

**[Joshua 18:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 18.3)**

So Joshua said to the Israelites: "How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?"

*Consistency in true religion is by no means an easy attainment. Certain duties may be performed with zeal, while others of a more difficult and self-denying nature are shamefully neglected.* We admire and applaud the conduct of "the whole congregation of Israel" in relation to the tabernacle, which with one consent they "set up for the Lord in Shiloh," as soon as ever "the land was subdued before them." This mark of respect and gratitude, of love and devotion, was due to God in the first place; but should we not have expected, that they would immediately go on to complete the work which God had assigned them, and which they had almost brought to a successful termination? Yet behold, there were no less than seven tribes out of the twelve, who had not yet received their inheritance, and who manifested a most criminal indifference respecting the possession of their appointed portion. Joshua reproves this negligence in the words which we have read; for the elucidation of which we shall show,

***~~I. The force of the reproof as applied to these Israelites.~~***

God had given them the land, and had so far subdued the inhabitants before them, that little remained but to go and take possession of the whole country. But they delayed, and their neglect brought a just reproof upon them:

***~~1. For their indolence.~~***

It is manifest that they gave way to an indolent and slothful spirit, which kept them from making the exertions necessary for the acquisition of their respective lots. Now this is a habit which we are all too apt to indulge, and which has a most injurious effect wherever it prevails. Solomon speaks of it as rendering a man averse to the most necessary duties, insomuch that "his way is always like a hedge of thorns" that makes his every motion difficult and painful, [Proverbs 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.19). Hence he is impoverished, "The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, [Proverbs 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.4);" even the attainments he has made are rendered unprofitable to him through the influence of this corrupt principle, "The lazy man does not roast his game, [Proverbs 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.27);" in fact, as Solomon further observes, "The desire of the slothful kills him, [Proverbs 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.25)." Now to yield to this principle at any time is very reprehensible; but under their circumstances, when God had done so much for them, and there remained so little for them to do, it was highly criminal!

***~~2. For the undue satisfaction they took in their present comforts.~~***

Doubtless their present state formed a great contrast with that which they had experienced in the wilderness; for they enjoyed all the rich provisions which had been treasured up for the use of the former inhabitants. But, because they were at present possessed of such abundance, they were unmindful of that which was destined for their future and permanent support.

Thus *it frequently happens that a present portion diverts men from the pursuit of an ulterior object, which would have more richly compensated their continued labors*. Not that we mean to decry moderation; for, when it is seated in the desires without impeding our actions, we consider it as a distinguished virtue; but where a partial attainment of what is truly good, renders us indifferent to the fuller possession of that good, we regard that as an abuse of God's goodness to us, and a perversion of what he designed for our encouragement. In the Israelites it argued base ingratitude to God, and was a very shameful method of requiting all his kindness to them.

***~~3. For the light thoughts which they entertained of their promised inheritance.~~***

It is evident that they did not regard it in the exalted light in which God had represented it to them; they thought but little of it as an inheritance assigned to them by the Deity, and still less as a type and emblem of that glorious inheritance reserved for his people in a better world.

In this respect they are followed by the whole race of mankind. God bestows innumerable blessings on us, to lead up our minds to Him who gave them, and to stimulate us to the pursuit of far higher blessings; but we view these mercies only as they conduce to our present comfort, and entirely overlook the intention of the Donor; yes, we scarcely ever begin to think of spiritual benefits, until he has either withdrawn, or embittered to us our carnal enjoyments.

In Israel, this conduct was peculiarly criminal, because the possession of this land had been promised to Abraham so many hundred years before, and had constituted the chief encouragement to the whole nation to devote themselves unreservedly to the service of Jehovah.

The reproof however must not be confined to them:

***~~II. We must acknowledge the justice of the reproof as applied to ourselves.~~***

God has given to us a better inheritance, even Heaven itself; and much has he done for us, in order to bring us to the possession of it. We speak not now of those who are yet "in darkness and the shadow of death," but of those who have been "brought out of darkness into marvelous light;" yes, to the greater part of them is this reproof preeminently due. Let it only be considered how "slack" the professors of religion almost universally are in the pursuit of Heaven:

***~~1. How slack professors are in reading the Scriptures.~~***

The sacred volume contains, not only the will which makes over to us the grant of this inheritance, but the title-deeds themselves; yes, a map also of the whole estate, a description of everything that is valuable in it, and clear directions for securing to ourselves the everlasting possession of it!

Now I would ask: What would be our employment, if such a document were put into our hands in reference to an earthly inheritance; especially if we were called to make out our title to it, and our ultimate enjoyment of it depended on proofs to be adduced from the records themselves? Would we not diligently apply ourselves to those records without loss of time? Would we not call in professional aid, and use every possible effort to establish our right? Would we find ourselves at ease while the outcome of our exertions was doubtful? or would we waste our time in unprofitable pursuits, and thereby endanger the ultimate loss of our property through the craft and subtlety of an envious adversary?

We all know how we would feel and act on an occasion like that. But how do we act in reference to the inspired volume? I speak not of those who entirely neglect the Bible; their conduct speaks loudly for itself; I speak of those who do occasionally read the Scriptures. Do we search that blessed book with half the interest that we ought? Do we mark everything in it that can assist us either in discovering our title to Heaven, or in securing the attainment of it? Let us ask ourselves, whether we do not often find less interest in it than in a common newspaper? And, though for conscience sake we read a portion of it every day, we find it oftentimes only a dead letter, and a sealed book, from whence we derive no real benefit. Does not this then show how justly the reproof of "slackness" may be applied to us?

***~~2. How slack professors are in prayer.~~***

Prayer is that which brings down aid from above, and tends, more than anything else, to the furtherance of the work of God within us. But *O! what a poor, cold, formal service is prayer in general, even among those who profess to be looking for the enjoyment of Heaven!*

But, what if we were professing great concern to reach a destined port, and yet carried no more sail than was just necessary to keep the vessel's head towards it; and every storm threatened to drive us out of our course; and it was often doubtful whether the currents had not a more powerful influence to counteract our design, than the wind to further it; would anyone believe that we were in earnest?

It is by prayer that we catch the heavenly gales, and are advanced towards the land which we pretend to seek; let conscience say then, whether we carry the canvass which we might; or whether our secret aspirations justify our outward professions. Who among us, in the view of these holy duties, does not even reproach himself, and almost doubt his own sincerity?

***~~3. How slack professors are in the mortification of sin.~~***

In this we particularly resemble the Israelites of old. Because the armies of Canaan were no longer formidable to them, they overlooked the scattered remains which still occupied many strongholds, and considered them as unworthy of their notice. And is it not thus with too many among ourselves? We are not any longer tempted to the commission of gross, open, scandalous iniquities; and therefore we rest satisfied with the victories we have gained, instead of prosecuting them to the utter extirpation of our indwelling corruptions.

Look at many professors of religion; they will not be guilty of palpable dishonesty; yet will harbor covetous and worldly desires; they will not commit whoredom or adultery; yet will indulge much impurity in their imaginations.

See the various parties in the Church; instead of exerting all their powers against their common enemy, they can waste their time in contending with each other; and even those who are united in the same Church too often weaken each other's hands by mutual disagreements, instead of edifying each other by fervent love. Do not these things show *how lukewarm we are in the prosecution of our best interests?*Were we in earnest, as we ought to be, we would account sin to be our only enemy; and the extirpation of sin would be the one labor of our lives.

***~~4. How slack professors are in pressing forward for the prize of our high calling.~~***

This distinguished the great Apostle of the Gentiles; he "forgot the things which were behind, and reached forward for that which was ahead;" and, after his example, we should account nothing attained, as long as anything remains to be attained; we should consider victories only as steps to future conquests; and think it time enough to rest, when every enemy, even death itself, has been put under our feet.

Instead of dreading the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle, we should groan for it, desiring to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ! Yes, we should be "looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of Christ," when our sanctification will be perfect, and our triumph complete!

But how far is this from being the experience of the generality of Christians! We seem to cleave to life, as if a state of pain and conflict were preferable to that of rest and happiness. Alas! alas! we live far below our privileges! Whereas, if we were as heartily engaged in the work of our salvation as God requires us to be, we would manifest in our very countenances the radiance of God's image, and bear about in our souls the felicity of Heaven!

That we may give more effect to this reproof, we will set before you,

***~~III. The considerations which are proper to stir us up to diligence.~~***

***~~1. Consider how much time you have lost already.~~***

What attainments might we not have secured, if, from the commencement of our warfare, we had made no truce with our enemies, but had followed up our advantages with befitting zeal! Many may look back for years, and yet be scarcely able to point out one foot of ground that they have gained, beyond that which was given to them in their first conflicts. But we must not forget that *it is not he who begins well, but "he who endures to the end, that shall be saved."*

***~~2. Consider how your difficulties are increased by delay.~~***

Forty years after this time, the tribe of Dan had yet to fight for their inheritance, [Judges 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 18.1); and it was four hundred years before the Jebusites were driven from Jerusalem, [2 Samuel 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.6-8). Had all the tribes proceeded with united vigor to fulfill the divine command in its utmost extent—they would not so long have had to lament that their remaining enemies were as "scourges in their side, and thorns in their eyes."

Just so, who does not find that *corruptions gather strength by indulgence*, and that *graces decay for lack of exercise?*"Look then to yourselves, that you lose not the things that you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John verse 8."

***~~3. Consider how certain is your success, if you advance in your work.~~***

The promise and oath of Jehovah are on your side. If there were any room for doubt respecting the ultimate success of your labors, there would be some little excuse for lukewarmness; but when victory is sure, methinks the most timid person in the universe should not fear the conflict, nor the weakest hesitate to put forth his strength. Go on then without fear; and "you shall never fall, but an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11)."

***~~4. Consider how richly Heaven will compensate for all your labors.~~***

What was Canaan, in comparison with the eternal rest that remains for the people of God? It a common thing for the ungodly to find fault with the Lord's people as too strict, and to dissuade them from the exercise of so much zeal in the cause of Christ. But what would they think, if, like Paul, they were caught up to the third heavens, and beheld for a single hour those blessed abodes? Would they think us then too much in earnest? Would they not rather stand amazed at the lukewarmness of those, whom they now condemn as "righteous overmuch?"

They themselves cannot but feel the full force of this appeal; much more must you who are engaged in the service of the Lord, be well convinced, that "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good cause." To you therefore we say, as the spies did to the neglectful Danites, "Come on, let's attack them! We have seen that the land is very good. Aren't you going to do something? Don't hesitate to go there and take it over! [Judges 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 18.9)."

***~~#256~~***

***~~THE DISBANDING OF THE TROOPS OF ISRAEL~~***

***~~[Joshua 22:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 22.4-5)~~***

"Now that the LORD your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul."

The duties of soldiers and of their commanders are well illustrated in this passage. The *soldier's*chief excellence is a prompt, steady, persevering, uniform obedience to the commands of his superiors, without regarding any difficulties, any dangers, any sacrifices. Among the chief excellencies of a *commander*is an attention to the spiritual and eternal interests of those who are under his authority.

The Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites, had received their portion on the other side of Jordan on the express condition, that a just proportion of their tribes should pass over Jordan to fight in concert with the other tribes, and not return unto their inheritance until the whole land would be subdued. This they had done; and now that they were about to be disbanded, Joshua acknowledges to their honor, that "they had kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded them, and had obeyed his voice also in all that he had commanded them."

But while he commends them for their fidelity to him, he endeavors to impress upon their minds a sense of duty and allegiance to God; and enjoins them to "take diligent heed to serve the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul."

From this parting exhortation we are led to remark,

***~~I. That a progress in holiness is above all things to be desired.~~***

Had Joshua merely judged it proper to insert an admonition relative to their religious duties, one or two expressions would have sufficed; but from the multitude of expressions used in the text, we see of what unspeakable importance he considered piety to be to every man. He not only mentions the subject first in general terms, that "they should do the commandment and the law," but enters particularly into it; they must have:  
as the *principle*of their obedience, the love of God;  
as the *extent*of it must be to all God's ways;  
as to the *manner*of it, they must cleave to him with an unalterable determination of their wills, and the most ardent exercise of their affections.

This is Scriptural holiness, and nothing short of it will suffice.

We do not say that the Christian must be perfect; for where should we then find a Christian? But he must aim at perfection, and be continually pressing forward for the attainment of it. This was the great object of Joshua's solicitude both for himself and his soldiers; this was the great end for which our Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross, even "to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous for good works;" and this must be the one object for which we should desire to live.

***~~II. That, whatever progress any person may have made, he still needs to hear words of counsel and exhortation.~~***

The soldiers whom Joshua was disbanding had continued with unshaken fidelity to fulfill their engagements; and though they had been detained from their families and possessions for seven years, they never once murmured or repined at the delay; yet Joshua did not on that account think that his religious counsels to them were superfluous.

Nor should the most established Christian imagine himself to be beyond the reach of danger, or to have attained such eminence as not to need every possible help for his furtherance in the divine life. Peter, writing to those to whom "divine power had already given all things that pertained to life and godliness," says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth." And indeed the counsel in our text intimates, that, in order to do the commandments, we must "take heed," yes, "take diligent heed" to them; *so many are our temptations to violate them, and so averse are we by nature to observe them*.

In a general way, the truth of these observations will be thought so obvious, as that they scarcely deserved a mention; but experience proves that they need to be insisted on with all possible earnestness; for, while the professors of religion depart from open iniquity, *there is in every one of them some besetting sin, which they are prone to cherish and indulge*. Moreover, *their blindness with respect to their besetting sin is most astonishing*; for, not only are they unconscious of its domination, but they are even ignorant of its existence in them!

How frequently do they give themselves credit for that as a virtue, which others see to be their greatest defect! *How blind are most Christians to their pride, their vanity, their worldliness!*How often does an angry and bitter spirit habitually prevail in men, who never mourn over their sinful tempers, or appear even to be aware of them! We call upon all then to "be jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy;" and to hear the exhortations of the Gospel with an especial reference to themselves, searching out their own spirit, and striving to attain the full "mind that was in Christ Jesus."

***~~III. That a state of peace and prosperity is a season of peculiar danger.~~***

Now the disbanded soldiers were returning to the bosom of their families, and the peaceful prosecution of their worldly business. And, as Moses had long since warned them that they were in danger, while enjoying "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! [Deuteronomy 6:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 6.10-12)."

And *who does not feel how apt the mind is to yield to the pleasures of sense, and to relax its ardor in the pursuit of heavenly things, when it has no trials or troubles to stimulate its exertions?* Visit the chambers of sickness, and of health; and see how different the same people are under the two different states! View people under painful bereavements, and see them afterwards in the full enjoyment of all earthly comforts! Truly, if we regarded heavenly things only, we might rather congratulate men on troubles than on the absence of them, and *to account prosperity their greatest snare*. To all then who are looking forward to any worldly acquisitions or comforts, or who are now living in the possession of them, we would urge with peculiar earnestness the necessity of vigilance, lest having "begun in the Spirit, they end in the flesh!"

Hear the exhortation of an inspired Apostle, "Follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled, [Hebrews 12:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14-15)." There you may see the hidden nature, the growing tendency, the baneful effects of sin, and its effects on the heart! O that we may be ever on our guard against sin's secret workings; and most of all on our guard, *when ease and prosperity are administering opiates to our souls!*

"Allow then, brethren, a word of exhortation, [Hebrews 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.22). When you are released from your present warfare, and are dismissed to your eternal inheritance, you will be beyond the reach of sin; in the bosom of your God your holiness and felicity will be complete. But, as long as you are in this sinful world, you will need to have every word of Joshua's injunctions repeatedly enforced.

See then to it that you "love the Lord your God," who has redeemed you from sin and Satan, death and Hell!

See that, from a sense of love to him, and his love to you, your obedience is carried to its utmost possible extent; and strive to "be perfect even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect!"

And, since it is certain that you will find many things to draw you away from him, mind that you "cleave to him with full purpose of heart," "abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good!"

Lastly, let all your affections center in Him, and in his ways. Let "your whole heart and your whole soul" be engaged in his service. And let the delight which you experience in fulfilling his will, be manifested, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth;" so that your bitterest enemy, or most watchful observer, may have no room to doubt either the excellence of your spiritual principles, or the reality of your spiritual attainments!

***~~#257~~***

***~~THE ALTAR OF WITNESS~~***

***~~[Joshua 22:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 22.10-12)~~***

"When they came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan. And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side, the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them."

Religion has often been made a plea for ambitious and bloody projects; but it never was on any occasion so truly and properly the ground of war, as in the event that is here recorded. The tribes who had their portion on the east of Jordan, after having been disbanded, came to the land of their possession; and, apprehending that at some future period they might be disowned by their brethren on account of their not having their inheritance in the land of Canaan, they built a large altar on the borders of their own land near Jordan, to serve as a memorial to all future ages that they belonged to the tribes of Israel, and were the worshipers of Israel's God.

The other tribes having no conception of an altar being erected but for sacrifice, regarded this as an act of rebellion against God, and determined instantly to go and punish the supposed apostates. But first they agreed to send an embassy, to see whether they could not prevail by milder methods to reclaim them from their wickedness. The ambassadors went; a convention met; an explanation took place; the misapprehensions were removed; and all was speedily and amicably settled.

Now this history will suggest many useful hints for the regulating of,

***~~I. National interests.~~***

The question was, in fact, of infinite importance to the whole nation. Repeated occasions had arisen wherein the sin of individuals had been visited upon the whole nation. The iniquity of Achan had not long since caused the defeat of Israel's hosts, and the loss of thirty-six men; and, not very long before, the connection of many with the Midianite women in whoredom and idolatry, brought destruction on twenty-four thousand Israelites in one day. What then could he expected, but that, if these who had erected the altar should pass unpunished, God would punish all the other tribes as partners in their guilt? To avert so terrible an evil was their bounden duty; and therefore they acted right in determining to avenge the quarrel of their God. But, as it was possible they might prevail by gentler means, they sent delegates from every tribe, with Phinehas at their head, to expostulate with them on their conduct. These were met by other delegates from the supposed offenders, and everything was cleared up to their satisfaction; and thus the controversy was terminated to the unspeakable joy of all parties.

Now in this we see how nations ought to act, whenever grounds of disagreement arise, and their mutual interests interfere. Their ambassadors should confer with each other in a conciliatory manner, anxious to prevent extremities, and, by mutual explanations and concessions, to adjust their differences. One thing in particular was worthy of applause in those who seemed disposed for war; they were intent only on the prevention of iniquity; and, imagining that the altar had been raised with a view to put the land of Gilead on a footing of equality with the land of Canaan, they offered to give up a proportionate share of their own land to those who had erected it, and thus to sacrifice their own interests for the preservation of peace.

Alas! how different is this from what is usually found among contending nations! Modern embassies are most frequently characterized by duplicity and concealment and chicanery, and by a wanton pertinacity about matters of inferior importance. Were all actuated by the spirit of Israel on this occasion, were frankness on the one side met by patience and conciliation on the other, the earth would be no more deluged with blood, but the "swords would be beaten into ploughshares," and happiness would reign, where nothing but desolation and misery is seen.

But this history will be further useful for the regulation of,

***~~II. Judicial policy.~~***

This act was in reality an enforcing of the existing laws under the direction of the civil magistrate; for, though Joshua is not mentioned, we can have no doubt but that Phinehas and the ten princes had received his sanction at least, if they did not proceed by his express command. The law of God had plainly enjoined that there should be only one place for God's altar, and that all the tribes should offer their sacrifices there, [Deuteronomy 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.5); [Deuteronomy 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.7). It also commanded, that, if any attempt should be made by any part of Israel to establish idolatry among them, the remainder, after due inquiry, should cut them off with the sword, [Deuteronomy 13:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.12-15). This then was an interference of magistrates in support of the laws; and it was indispensably necessary that they should interfere, to prevent so fatal a schism as was likely to arise.

We would not be understood to say, that civil magistrates would be justified in using the sword for the prevention or punishment of religious schism now. The true Church is not so accurately defined now, as that anyone body has a right to assume to itself the exclusive privilege of being called *The Church of Christ*; nor is there any commission given to magistrates to use carnal weapons in the support of any particular system, either of doctrines or of discipline, in the Church. But where, as in the instance before us, there appears to be a public renunciation of all religion, and a profane contempt of all laws, the magistrate is bound to interfere; and every Christian in the land is bound to give him his support.

Opinions are not within the cognizance of the civil magistrate, except when they are manifested in actions, or are so promulgated as to endanger the peace and welfare of society; but, when carried to that extent, they justly come under his control. This vigilance however, though sufficiently exercised in relation to the things which concern the State, is but little seen in the suppression of profaneness and iniquity. We have laws against every species of iniquity; but they are not carried into effect. The fear of divine judgments on the land scarcely ever enters into the bosoms either of magistrates or people; hence, if only there is no flagrant violation of the peace, iniquity may prevail almost to any extent, without anyone to vindicate the honor of God, or to avert his displeasure from a guilty land.

In this respect there is a solemn difference between the Israelites and us; insomuch that we, with all our superior advantages, are not worthy to be compared with them. Yet we must remember, that whenever we put forth the arm of power for the suppression of vice, our first object must be, by expostulation, to reclaim; nor must we ever inflict punishment, until milder measures have failed of success.

This history will be yet further useful to us in the regulation of,

**III. Religious zeal.**

"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" but our zeal should particularly exert itself:

***~~1. To prevent apostasy from God.~~***

This was the real object of the people who raised the altar; they, in a most reverential and solemn manner, called God to witness that they had been actuated only by a desire to transmit to their posterity an indelible assurance that they were as truly the Lord's people, as those who dwelt in Canaan; and that though their land was separated from that of their brethren, their interests and privileges were the same.

Here was a noble example of regard for posterity. It might have been better indeed to have consulted Joshua, or rather to have taken counsel of the Lord, respecting this measure, before they had carried it into execution; but holy zeal does not always pause to consider all possible effects and consequences; (though doubtless, the more tempered it is with wisdom, the more excellent it appears,) but God does not blame their conduct; and in this at least we shall do well to follow it, namely, by exerting ourselves in every possible way to transmit, and to perpetuate even to the remotest ages, the knowledge of God, as our God, our Father, and Redeemer.

The other tribes also manifested a noble zeal in the same cause, though by different means. They were fearful that this altar would be the means of turning many of their brethren from the worship of the true God; and they went forth at the peril of their lives to prevent it. It may be said, that these two were less temperate than they should have been; but, convinced as they were in their own judgment, their zeal was not at all more ardent than the occasion required. Though they spoke roughly, they spoke with candor, and with a perfect openness to conviction, if anything could be said to justify the act. And their offer to surrender a part of their own possessions, in order to remove the temptation to which, in their own minds, they had ascribed the act, showed, that they were actuated solely by a regard for God's honor and for Israel's good.

Here then is proper scope for all our zeal. We should remove, as far as possible, both from ourselves and from our children, every temptation to apostasy from God. We should rebuke sin in others also, and set ourselves against it to the uttermost, We should show ourselves on all occasions on the Lord's side; and be willing to sacrifice, not only our property, but even life itself, in vindicating his honor, and maintaining his interest in the world.

***~~2. To preserve love and unity with man.~~***

If we find somewhat to blame in each of these opposite parties; in the one, an undue precipitation in building the altar; and, in the other, an undue hastiness in ascribing it to wrong intentions; we behold much, very much, to admire in both. When the accusers found themselves mistaken, they did not shift their ground, and condemn their brethren for imprudence; nor, when the accused had evinced their innocence, did they condemn their accusers on the ground of uncharitableness and injustice; the one were as glad to acquit as the others were to be acquitted; and both united in sincere thankfulness to God, that all ground of dissension was removed.

Now it will almost of necessity sometimes happen that *the well-meant actions of our brethren shall be misconstrued, through an ignorance of their precise views and intentions*; it may also happen, that *the well-meant reproofs of our brethren may be founded in misconception*. Here then is ample room for the exercise of well-tempered zeal. To avoid, on the one hand, unnecessary accusations, and gladly to retract them if they have been unwittingly adduced; and, on the other side, to avoid vindictive recriminations, and with pious meekness to satisfy the minds of any whom we may have unintentionally grieved; this is the spirit which we should continually cultivate; it should be the labor of our lives to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

***~~3. To avert the divine judgments from our guilty land.~~***

It is a memorable expression which is recorded on this occasion, "Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord, verse 31." Sin delivers us into his hand for punishment. Of this, the history of Israel in all ages is a decisive proof. On the other hand, repentance delivers us out if his hand; as was remarkably exemplified in the case of Nineveh; which, but for the intervention of their penitence, would have been overthrown in forty days. But we need not go further than to the history before us, where this very effect is ascribed to the pious zeal of the Reubenites and Gadites. *Happy would it be for us, if we all considered the effect of our conduct on the public welfare!*God has no pleasure in punishing his creatures; and he is ever ready to remove his judgments, when they have produced in us the desired humiliation. Let us then approve ourselves to him; and then, though our zeal be misinterpreted, and even our own brethren be for a time incensed against us—our righteousness shall be made to appear, and our labors be crowned with the approbation of our God.

***~~#258~~***

***~~GOD'S INTERPOSITIONS FOR US ARE OBLIGATIONS TO LOVE AND SERVE HIM~~***

***~~[Joshua 23:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.9-11)~~***

"The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the LORD your God."

Much as patriotism and valor are admired, and deservedly as, in many instances, they have been rewarded by men—they are of no value in the sight of God, if they be not accompanied with true piety. Their utility to the state of which we are members is undoubted; but their moral excellence depends on their union with religion. *Abstracted from a regard to God, they are a mere compound of pride and selfishness*; but, regulated by religion, they are in a high degree amiable and praiseworthy.

Many bright examples of patriotism, united with piety, are set before us in the Scriptures; but none shines with greater luster than that of Joshua; when his whole nation was sinking under desponding fears, he encouraged them by his unshaken fortitude and confidence in God, [Numbers 14:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.6-9); and when he had vanquished all their enemies, and put them into the quiet possession of the promised land—he still improved his influence to confirm their faith, and to establish them in the paths of righteousness. The words before us are part of his dying address to all the elders of Israel. In applying them to the present occasion, we shall show:

***~~I. To whom our successes have been owing.~~***

***~~God has promised to interpose on behalf of those who wait upon him.~~***

His promises to hear the prayers of individuals are numberless, [Matthew 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7). And the same are made also to repenting nations, [2 Chronicles 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 7.14).

***~~His interpositions on behalf of our nation have been signally manifest.~~***

We may be led to ascribe them to the valor of our forces, or the skill of our commanders. But it is God who endues them both with skill and courage, and gives the victory to whoever he will. Besides, there have been many peculiar circumstances which owed their origin to him alone. And, while these mark his providential care, they compel us to acknowledge that "it is he who fights for us, [Psalm 44:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 44.3)."

***~~Nor are we without a hope, that his mercies to us have been sent in accomplishment of his promise.~~***

Many have mourned over the troubles of the land, and have made earnest intercession with God on our behalf. And though there is nothing meritorious in their petitions—yet when God sends the mercies for which we have prayed, we have reason to hope that he has sent them in answer to our prayers.

Whatever may be our opinion respecting this, it befits us to consider:

***~~II. The improvement we should make of them.~~***

***~~Every mercy from God is an additional obligation to love and serve him.~~***

God has commanded us to love him with all our heart; and he is worthy of our supreme regard on account of the perfections of his nature, and the dispensations of his grace. But he is also to be loved in a peculiar manner for hearing and answering our prayers, [Psalm 116:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.1). The effect produced on the mind of David, should result from every expression of the divine goodness towards us, [Psalm 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.1) with the title of the Psalm.

***~~But we are very prone to forget all of his benefits.~~***

*However earnest we may be in a season of affliction, we become remiss and careless when the affliction is removed.*We are like metal, which is melted in the furnace, but returns speedily to its original hardness as soon as it is taken from the fire. Like the Jews we "forget the Rock that bought us." Even good "Hezekiah requited not the Lord according to all that he had done for him, [2 Chronicles 32:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.25)." And *too many among ourselves forget to pay the vows which we have offered in a time of trouble*.

***~~On this account we should take good heed to remember them.~~***

*Nothing is more displeasing to God than ingratitude.* Nor will he overlook it even in his most highly favored servants, [2 Chronicles 32:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.25). But "shall we thus requite the Lord?" Let us rather survey with gratitude the mercies we have received. Let us habitually behold the hand of God in them. And let us anxiously inquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?"

***~~This subject may teach us,~~***

***~~1. Where to look for future successes.~~***

If we look to our fleets and armies we may expect nothing but defeat. We are indeed to use all possible means of defense, but not to trust in any of them, [Isaiah 22:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.11). Our eyes must be directed unto God alone! "The battle is not ours, but his." "He can save by many or by few." Were we ever so superior to our enemies he could bring us down like Sennacherib, [Isaiah 10:8-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.8-19); or if we were reduced to ever so low an ebb, he could render us victorious, [Isaiah 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.4). And *it is certain that if we "walk in pride, he will abase" us; but if we humbly seek his aid, he will support and deliver us.*

***~~2. Where to look for success in our spiritual warfare.~~***

Whatever external peace we might enjoy, we yet should have a warfare to maintain. *There never will be one moment's truce with our spiritual enemies. The world, the flesh, and the devil, will incessantly fight against us; and we must conflict with them even to the end.*But God fights for those who put their trust in him. Let us call upon him, and he will clothe us with armor from the arsenal of Heaven, [Ephesians 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.13). The Captain of our salvation will go forth with us to the battle. He will shield our head, and strengthen our arm, and make us "more than conquerors" over all. Let us then "love him" for the victories we have already gained. Let us take good heed to ourselves that we never rob him of his glory. Let us thankfully ascribe our every success to him, [Psalm 115:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 115.1); and begin the song which we shall shortly sing in Heaven, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! [1 Corinthians 15:57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.57)."

***~~#259~~***

***~~GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES~~***

***~~[Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)~~***

"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!"

It has been common in all ages to pay peculiar attention to the words of dying men; and the more eminent their characters were, the more regard has been shown to their last instructions or advice. The person speaking in the text, was, in some points of view, distinguished even above Moses himself; for though Moses was the appointed instrument of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, he was forced to leave them to the care of Joshua, who alone was commissioned to settle them in Canaan; and who was therefore a more illustrious type of Jesus, whose name he bore, and whose character he prefigured.

The dying words of such a person, when speaking under the dictates of inspiration, may well be considered as calling for more than ordinary attention; especially when the scope of them was to vindicate the honor of God, and they were delivered in a way of solemn appeal to the whole nation of the Jews. But they have yet a further claim to our regard, because, *though primarily applicable to those to whom they were immediately addressed, they are equally applicable to the Lord's people, in every place, and every age.*"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ! [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20)."

To illustrate them in this view, we shall,

**I. Notice some of those good things which the Lord our God has spoken concerning us.**

In order to mark, what we are principally to insist upon, the faithfulness of God in performing his promises, we will specify some that were made,

***~~1. To the Church at large.~~***

God promised to the Church:

the gift of his dear Son, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15); [Genesis 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.18); [Deuteronomy 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.18); [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14); [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6); [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24); [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6);

the abiding presence of his Spirit [Proverbs 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.23); [Isaiah 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.15); [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27); [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26); [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14); [John 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8); [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10); [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5); 2 Corinthians 1:22;

and a final triumph over all our enemies [Isaiah 27:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.2); [Isaiah 33:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.20); [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17); [Jeremiah 31:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.35-37); [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18).

***~~2. To individual believers particular.~~***

Though the names of individuals are not specified, their characters are delineated, and that too in such a way, that all who study the sacred oracles may read, as it were, their names in them. There are distinct promises made:  
to the humble, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2); [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6); [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15);  
to the weak, [Isaiah 42:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.3-4); [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11); [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-15); [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18); [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9); [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9);  
to the tempted, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13); [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18);  
to the backslidden, [Jeremiah 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.14); [Jeremiah 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.22); [Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4);  
and especially to those who trust God, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3); [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1); [Jeremiah 17:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.7-8). In that class is every rank and order of true Christians comprehended, "Truly it shall be well with the righteous! [Isaiah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10)."

These are "exceeding great and precious promises, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" and the people who correspond with the different characters, are at full liberty to apply them to themselves.

Having taken a short view of the promises, we may proceed to,

***~~II. Show the faithfulness of God in fulfilling them.~~***

***~~There is in the minds of all who have heard the Gospel, a general conviction of the truth and faithfulness of God.~~***

It is seen that God has already fulfilled all that he has promised in reference to the Church at large. Besides what he did for the Jews, [Joshua 21:43-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 21.43-45), he has sent his Son; he has poured out his Spirit; he has maintained his Church, notwithstanding all the efforts that have been used both by men and devils to destroy it. And from hence we feel a persuasion, that his Word shall be fulfilled in all other respects also. We do not indeed allow our convictions to operate as they ought; yet we revolt at the idea that "God should lie, [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)," and we know that "he cannot deny himself, [2 Timothy 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.13)."

***~~All who have ever sought after God at all, have had proofs of his veracity in their own experience.~~***

The Israelites "knew in all their hearts, and in all their souls," that God had fulfilled his promises to them. And are there any who have ever called upon him, or trusted in him, and not found him ready to hear their prayers, and to supply their needs? If we look back to seasons of peculiar trial, shall we not find some manifestations of his mercy, sufficient to show, that, if we have not received more from him—it has been owing to our own backwardness to ask, rather than to any unwillingness in him to give?

***~~Nor can the whole universe produce one single instance wherein his promises have failed.~~***

We can make the same appeal to you, as Joshua, after sixty years' experience, did to the Israelites. Bring forth every promise from the Bible; then search the annals of the world; and inquire of every creature in it—to find one single instance of God's violating or forgetting a promise; and if one instance can be proved, we will consent that his Word shall henceforth be called in question.

Tell us then: To whom has he "been a wilderness? [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.31)." What penitent, believing, and obedient soul has he ever forsaken? [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5); [Isaiah 49:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-15); [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10). He himself bids you to "testify against him, [Micah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.3)." But we defy the whole world to impeach his veracity, or to contradict our assertion, when we say, that "all which he has promised to us is come to pass; not one thing has failed thereof." God may have *delayed*the accomplishment of his promises, or fulfilled them in a *way*that was not expected; but not one of them has ever failed.

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who have not considered the faithfulness of God.~~***

In spite of the general conviction of God's truth that floats upon our minds, *there is a proneness in us to indulge a thought that his mercy will in some way or other interpose to prevent the execution of his threatenings*. But the veracity of God is pledged as much for the accomplishment of his threatenings as of his promises; and of this he labors in the most earnest manner to persuade us, [Ezekiel 24:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 24.13-14).*How many, alas! are now experiencing in Hell what they would not believe when they were on earth!*Let us learn to "tremble at God's Word." Let us remember, that though the antediluvian scoffers said, as others now do, "Where is the promise of his coming? [2 Peter 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.3-4)," he did come at last, though he bore with them a hundred and twenty years.

And in like manner he will overwhelm us also at last with the deluge of his wrath, if we enter not into the ark before the door is shut against us, "We are going the way of all the earth," whether we be old or young, rich or poor; and *as death finds us, so shall we remain forever!*Stay not then until death overtakes you; but join yourselves to the Lord, and to his people. "Come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel, [Numbers 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.29)."

***~~2. Those who are tempted to doubt his faithfulness.~~***

Let not *delays*lead you to harbor unbelieving fears. God sent not his Son until four thousand years after he had announced his purpose to the world; nor did he bring Israel out of Egypt until the time fixed in his promises was just expired. If a few more hours had elapsed, his promise to Abraham would have been broken; but God remembered the very day; and then inclined the rebellious Pharaoh to submit; yes, he disposed the Egyptians to "thrust his people out" from their land, on "the self-same day" that he had fixed four hundred and thirty years before, [Exodus 12:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.51).

Tarry then the Lord's timing. Take the promises of God as your support, and "claim them as your heritage forever, [Psalm 119:111](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.111)." Be not hasty in concluding that God will not accomplish them, [1 Samuel 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 27.1); [Ezekiel 37:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.11); but take them with you to the throne of grace, and plead them as the saints of old were accustomed to do, [Genesis 32:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.12); then you shall find them all to be "yes, and amen, in Christ, [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20)." "If things seem astonishing in your eyes, do not imagine that they must therefore be so in the eyes of God, [Zechariah 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.6);" for as "*there is nothing too hard for him" to do, so there is nothing too great, or too good, for him to give to his believing people!*

***~~3. Those who are relying on his faithfulness.~~***

It cannot but be a source of unspeakable comfort to observe in how many passages the faithfulness of God is expressly pledged for the performance of his promises. Does he promise:  
to forgive our sins, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9),  
to deliver us from temptation, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13),  
to further in us the great work of sanctification, [1 Thessalonians 5:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23-24),  
and to preserve us to the end, [2 Thessalonians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.3).  
We are told in each, that he is "faithful to do it" for us.

It is also delightful to reflect, that "his Word is tried, [2 Samuel 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 22.31)." Solomon's testimony was precisely that which is given in the text, [1 Kings 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.56); and, the more we trust in God, the more evidence shall we have that "he keeps covenant and mercy to a thousand generations, [Deuteronomy 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.9)."

But remember that his fidelity to you requires in you fidelity to him; it lays you under a tenfold obligation to "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, [Hebrews 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23)."

Labor to be found "children that will not lie; so will He be" your faithful and almighty "Savior [Isaiah 63:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.8)."

***~~#260~~***

***~~JOSHUA'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL TO SERVE THE LORD~~***

**[Joshua 24:21-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.21-27)**

But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD." Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied. "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him." On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD. "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

The pious servants of God may be disabled through age and infirmities from continuing their personal exertions, but they never will relax their zeal in the service of their Divine Master; and what they lack in effective labors, they will endeavor to supply by stimulating and confirming the zeal of others.

*Moses*, at an advanced age, renewed with Israel in the land of Moab the covenant which he had forty years before made with them in Horeb, [Deuteronomy 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.1); and *Joshua*in like manner, now that he was "waxed old and stricken in age," and was speedily "going the way of all the earth," convened all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, for the purpose of engaging them once more to give themselves up to God in a perpetual covenant; so that the good effects of his influence might remain, when he should have ceased to move them by his authority and example.

We shall,

***~~I. Consider the covenant which he made with them.~~***

***~~The covenant itself was, that they should serve the Lord.~~***

Not contented with requiring this of them in general terms, he specified the manner in which they must serve the Lord.

They must serve him sincerely. It was not sufficient for them to *call*themselves his people, and to observe his ordinances with hypocritical exactness; their hearts must be fixed upon him; their delight must be to do his will; they must have no secret reserves of unmortified corruption; but must serve the Lord "in sincerity and truth, verse 14."

They must also serve him resolutely. It might "seem evil to them to serve the Lord," yes, it might be accounted so by the whole nation; but they must be inflexible in their purpose, and determinately say with him, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, verse 15."

They must also serve him exclusively. The admonition in the 19th verse is variously interpreted. Some think it was an objection in the mouth of an adversary, to deter people from the Lord's service; others think it was a strong statement of the difficulties attending the Lord's service, suggested by Joshua for the purpose of stirring up the Israelites to more fixedness of purpose, and greater energy in their exertions. But we apprehend that the whole context determines the passage to a very different meaning. There were still among them some idols, which, though they did not worship, they valued and were averse to part with; and Joshua saw, that, if these were retained, the people would in time relapse into idolatry. He warned them therefore of the impossibility of their serving God acceptably while they retained these idols; and assured them, that God would never forgive them, if they did not put away the things which were sure to prove to them an occasion of falling. The following warning in the 20th verse, and the exhortation in the 23rd verse, show most satisfactorily, that this is the true meaning of the passage we refer to.

God must be served alone; his glory will he not give to another; he is a "holy" God, that will tolerate no secret lust; and a "jealous God, that will endure no rival in our hearts, or in our hands."

***~~Having stated to them the terms of the covenant—he calls them to ratify and confirm it.~~***

Covenants are usually signed by the parties themselves, and then attested by others, as witnesses. Thus on this occasion he calls the Israelites to confirm and ratify this covenant by their own express consent, which they give in terms no less plain than if they had annexed to the covenant their own name and seal. The manner in which they do this is peculiarly worthy of observation; they first express their utter abhorrence of the very idea of departing from God, verse 16; and then, assigning their obligations to Jehovah as a reason for their determination, they declare their fixed purpose to serve him, and him only, verse 17, 18. Upon Joshua's expressing the jealousy which he entertained respecting them on account of their backwardness to cast away their idols, they renewed their declarations with increased energy, verse 21. Then, when reminded that they will be witnesses against themselves, if ever they should turn aside from God, they voluntarily engage to be witnesses, and thereby affix, as it were, to the covenant their signature and seal, verse 22; and lastly, on being required to give evidence of the sincerity of their professions, they renew their protestations with more strength and energy than ever, verse 23, 24.

Joshua now calls other witnesses. He wrote their words upon the very copy of the law which Moses had deposited in the ark, that that might remain an everlasting witness against them; and then he "took a large stone, and set it up there under an oak, that that also might be a witness against them," if ever they should depart from God; thus taking care, that, the covenant being fully attested, they might be convicted, and condemned, and be forever without excuse before God and man, if they should ever forget and deny their God, verse 26, 27.

The zeal which Joshua showed on this occasion will be approved by all; we may hope therefore to perform an acceptable service to you, while, with an eye to that covenant:

***~~II. We propose the same to you.~~***

The duty of serving the Lord our God will be denied by none; and least of all by those who know the obligations which they owe to him for redeeming them from death by the blood of his only-begotten Son! But we beg permission to retrace, with application to yourselves,

***~~1. The engagements you have entered into.~~***

You are bound to serve the Lord your God, sincerely, resolutely, and exclusively.

There must be no dissimulation in this matter; you must have "truth in your inward parts;" to "call him 'Lord, Lord,' will be of no use, if you do not obey the things which he says."

His word must be the *rule*of your obedience.

His will must be the *reason*of your obedience.

His glory must be the *end*of your obedience.

You will find that many will account the service of God an "evil" thing; odious in itself, injurious to society, and contemptible in all who addict themselves to it. You will find also that *the great mass of nominal Christians are alienated from the life of God, as much as ever the Jews of old were.*For the truth of this we appeal to the lives of all around us. Yet you must "not follow a multitude to do evil," or forbear to walk in the narrow path of life, even though the whole world should urge you to accompany them in the broad road that leads to destruction. Nay; you must not only be steadfast yourselves, but must exert all your influence to animate and encourage others; you must adopt the noble resolution of Joshua, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"*

You must be on your guard too against harboring any "idol in your heart! [Ezekiel 14:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.3-4)." Sensuality, or covetousness, or any other unmortified lust, will provoke God to jealousy, as much as gods of wood and stone; and if any one sin is willingly retained, or any one service willfully neglected, or any sacrifice deliberately withheld—then we must say with Joshua, "The Lord will not forgive your transgression and your sin!" "An eye, or a hand or foot, retained in opposition to his command—will cause the whole body, and soul too, to be cast into Hell!" He alone who will "lose his life for Christ's sake, shall find it unto life eternal".

***~~2. The witnesses that will attest your violation of them.~~***

You must be "witnesses against yourselves;" your own *consciences*will testify, if, when you are convinced that it is your duty to serve the Lord, you continue to neglect him. Well are we assured that we have even now within your own bosoms a witness to the truth of all that we affirm.

But there will be other witnesses against you. The *Word*that we speak, the same will testify against you in the last day; for it is written "in the book of God's remembrance," and reserved in the sanctuary to be brought forth as the evidence of God's righteousness and the ground of his procedure.

I may add too, the very walls wherein we are assembled will testify against you; to use the strong language of our text, "they have heard all the words that have been spoken to you," the faithful declarations, the earnest entreaties, the rich encouragements; yes, "the stones out of the wall will cry out against you, [Habakkuk 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.11)," if you continue to violate your baptismal engagements, and indulge an indifference to all the subjects of your prayers.

Times without number have you prayed, that you might "live a righteous, sober, and a godly life, to the glory of God's holy name;" and yet, many of you at least, have either never set yourselves in earnest so to live, or have carelessly declined from the ways of God, and forgotten the vows that are upon you.

Finally, God himself also will be "a swift witness against you." Yes, "he searches the heart, and tries the thoughts, and will give to every man according to his works!"

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

"Choose now whom you will serve." To unite God and Mammon is impossible, "if Baal is God, serve him; but if the Lord be God, then serve him!"

**JUDGES**

***~~#261~~***

***~~ADONI-BEZEK'S PUNISHMENT~~***

***~~[Judges 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.6-7)~~***

"Adoni-Bezek fled, but they chased him and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Then Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there."

*There are times and seasons afforded to us for the performance of our duty, which, if they be once lost, can never afterwards be recovered.* It was thus with the Israelites in the invasion of Canaan; if they had followed up their successes with befitting zeal, their difficulties would have been comparatively light; but at no time did they advance with that ardor which they should have manifested in such a cause. Joshua had reproved them for their indolence [Joshua 18:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 18.3), and quickened them in some degree; but still, after his death, and fifteen years after their first invasion of Canaan, no one of the tribes had complete possession of the lot assigned to them.

The Israelites had increased, and now wanted the whole of their inheritance; but the Canaanites had increased also, and, possessing still their strongholds, were able to cope with Israel in battle. Now therefore the different tribes found the bitter consequences of their past indifference; and, as it would seem, were afraid to resume a warfare with such potent enemies. However, after having consulted God, Judah, by divine direction, took the lead, and, in conjunction with the tribe of Simeon, renewed the conflict with the Canaanites. God gave them success, and delivered into their hand Adoni-bezek, one of the most powerful of the kings of Canaan. They treated Adoni-bezek with great severity; and their conduct towards him forms the subject of our present consideration. We shall consider,

***~~I. The particular dispensation here recorded.~~***

***~~The conduct of king Adoni-Bezek had been most cruel.~~***

What occasions he had had for waging war against seventy kings, we know not; *ambition never lacks a pretext for its bloody projects*; but to insult over their misfortunes in such a manner as to maim their people, and compel them, like dogs, to gather up scraps from under his table for their subsistence, argued a degree of cruelty, which one could scarcely have conceived to exist in a rational being. One might suppose it possible that some particular provocation might have caused him to offer such an indignity to a single individual; but when such conduct was pursued towards so many vanquished kings, it manifestly proceeded only from *his barbarous and brutal disposition*.

Here we are constrained to acknowledge *how empty is human greatness; how uncertain the continuance of those honors in which men so vainly pride themselves; and how often it happens that pre-eminence in station leads only to a sad pre-eminence in distress and misery! Nor can we forbear to notice, what desolation and trouble one ambitious tyrant may produce in the earth!*

While we see the dispositions of this man exhibited in such awful colors, let us not suppose that we ourselves are altogether exempt from them. The truth is, that *these wicked dispositions themselves are common to every man, though they have not attained in all the same maturity, or brought forth in all such visible and deadly fruits*. We cannot but have seen that children feel a pleasure in vexing and tyrannizing over those who are weaker than themselves; and, as we grow up in life, a fondness for manifesting superiority and exercising despotic sway increases; and, *in proportion as our opportunities for displaying these hateful qualities are enlarged, our evil tendencies become augmented and confirmed*.

How conspicuous is this in the great men of the earth, who can spread desolation over whole provinces without remorse, and *invade, as we have seen, even neutral and friendly kingdoms for no other end than to gratify their own insatiable ambition!*

***~~But he in his turn was made to feel the judgments which he had so wantonly inflicted upon others.~~***

It was a law in Israel, that magistrates should punish offenders in a way of just retribution, [Leviticus 24:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 24.19-20); and doubtless it was by the direction of God, the righteous Governor of the universe, that the Israelites on this occasion maimed the body of their captive king. To insult over him indeed, as he had insulted over others, would have been inconsistent with those gracious affections, which Israel, as the Lord's people, were bound to exercise. In that part therefore the sentence was relaxed; but, as far as the law required, they "meted to him the measure which he had meted out to others." This brought his sin to his remembrance, and compelled him to acknowledge the equity of Jehovah, who in his righteous providence had so requited him, "As I have done, so God has requited me."

And though a feeling mind cannot but regret that such a judgment should be executed on a fallen prince—yet in this case we are constrained to acquiesce in it, and *even to feel a secret satisfaction, in seeing that the evils which he had so cruelly inflicted upon others were at last brought home to himself.*

Let us now turn our attention from the particular dispensation, to,

***~~II. The insight which it gives us into God's moral government.~~***

"God is still known by the judgments which he executes".

God has not relinquished the government of the earth; he orders and overrules everything now as much as ever; and in his former dispensations we behold a perfect exhibition of the government which he still administers. Still, as formerly, does he requite the wickedness of men; sometimes on the offenders themselves, as when he smote Uzziah with leprosy, [2 Chronicles 26:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.19); and sometimes on others upon their account; as when he slew seventy thousand of the people, to punish the sin which David had committed in numbering his subjects, [2 Samuel 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.15); 2 Samuel 24:17.

Sometimes he inflicts the judgment immediately, as on Herod who was eaten up with worms, [Acts 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.23); and sometimes after a long season, as on the sons of Saul for their father's cruelty to the Gibeonites many years before, [2 Samuel 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 21.1); [2 Samuel 21:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 21.6); 2 Samuel 21:9.

*Sometimes his judgments are sent as a prelude to those heavier judgments that shall be inflicted in the eternal world*, as in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, [Numbers 16:24-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 16.24-35); and sometimes after the offenders themselves have been forgiven, as was experienced by David in his family, [2 Samuel 12:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13-14), and by Manasseh, whose iniquities were visited upon Israel after he himself had been received up to glory, [2 Kings 24:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 24.2-4). Sometimes his chastisements had no particular affinity with the offence committed, as in the plagues of Egypt; and sometimes the offence was clearly marked in the punishment; as in the case of Joram, who had slain all his brothers, and whose children were all, with one exception, consigned to the slaughter [2 Chronicles 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 21.4); 2 Chronicles 21:17; and as David, whose wives and concubines were openly denied by his own son Absalom, just as he himself had defiled the wife of his faithful servant Uriah [2 Samuel 12:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.10-12); [2 Samuel 16:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 16.21-22).

So minutely is this correspondence marked in the Scriptures, that even the time and the place are noticed, as designed to manifest the very offence which God designed to punish; as Israel's wandering in the wilderness forty years on account of their murmuring at the reports which were brought them by the spies who had searched out the land forty days, [Numbers 14:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.33-34); and as Ahab's blood was licked up by dogs, on the very spot where dogs had licked the blood of Naboth, whom he had murdered! [1 Kings 21:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.19); [1 Kings 22:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.38).

We might further notice the correspondence between the spiritual judgments which God oftentimes inflicts for spiritual transgressions. Those who "will not hearken to his voice, he gives up to their own counsels, [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12);" those who abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness, he gives up to vile affections and a reprobate mind, [Romans 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.26-28); and those who "will not receive his truth in order to salvation, he gives up to their own delusions, that they may be damned! [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12)."

We have not prophets indeed at this time to declare the particular instances in which God intends this righteous procedure of his to be discovered; but we have no reason to think that he has altered his system of government, and consequently no reason to doubt but that he still displays his own righteousness in his dispensations, as he has done in every age and quarter of the world. If any imagine that this conduct of his was confined to the nation whose temporal Governor he was, we must remind them that he dealt precisely in the same way with the heathen nations, [Isaiah 33:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.1), and has taught us to expect that he will do so to the end of time, [Revelation 18:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 18.5-6).

***~~Wherever God fails to requite either good or evil in this life, he will requite it perfectly in the world to come!~~***

God inflicts some judgments here on earth on account of sin, in order that it may be seen that he governs the world; but he does not do it in all instances, in order that men may know that he will certainly judge all in the world to come! It often happens that the wicked prosper, and the righteous are oppressed; and yet God does not remarkably interpose to punish the one, or to reward the other; but in the last day, all will be made right; and every creature in the universe, the good and the evil, the oppressor and the oppressed, will receive at God's hands a just recompense! "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you!" [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.6-10)."

***~~From hence we may learn,~~***

***~~1. To investigate the reasons of God's dealings with us.~~***

Every dispensation of Providence has *a voice*to which we should give diligent attention. If we more carefully inquired into the design of God in his various dispensations towards us, we would find them an inexhaustible source of most instructive information. We might read in our afflictions:  
some *fault*which God designs to correct;  
some *mistake*which he intends to rectify;  
some *corruption*which he desires to subdue;  
some *grace*which he is anxious to confirm;  
or some *temptation*, against which he purposes to fortify our minds.

As in the instance before us, God brought to the remembrance of Adoni-bezek the sins which he had committed, and which perhaps in the fullness of his prosperity he had overlooked; so he often, by a particular chastisement, shows us the evil of some practice which we had justified, or revives in our minds the recollection of some which we had too slightly condemned. I would say unto you therefore, "Hear the rod, and Him who has appointed it." If you see not the reason of it, go unto your God, and say, "Show me why you contend with me?" Let no cross be allowed to escape from you, without having first paid to you that tribute of good, which by the order of Providence you are entitled to exact.

***~~2. To repent of particular sins.~~***

We cannot be too particular in calling to mind the sins which at any time we may have committed. Though we have not walked in the steps of this wicked tyrant, it is highly probable that we have lived in sinful habits, which custom has rendered familiar to our minds; and that we have in many things offended God, while we have not been conscious of committing any offence at all.

Possibly Adoni-bezek at first felt a consciousness of doing wrong; but after a season, he accounted his rival kings a legitimate prey, whom he might subdue, and torture in any way that he pleased. But at last God made him sensible of the enormity of his conduct.

In like manner we may learn hereafter to view many parts of our conduct with far different feelings than we have yet done. God has borne with us indeed; but *we must not consider his patience as any proof of his approbation; he is recording everything in the book of his remembrance, and will call us into judgment for it, whether it be good or evil.*Let us then search and try our ways; let us pray that he will not "remember against us the sins and transgressions of our youth." Let us, like Hezekiah, "humble ourselves for the pride" or any other evil passion that has at any time been in "our heart." In this way we shall avert many evils from ourselves which unlamented sin would bring upon us, and extract the sting from those which God in his providence may allot us.

***~~3. To abound in every good work.~~***

[Proverbs 11:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.31), "If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!"

[Proverbs 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.21), "Misfortune pursues the sinner, but prosperity is the reward of the righteous."

[1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8) "Godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

Look into the Scriptures, and you will find that there is nothing that you can do for God or for your fellow-creatures, to which God has not annexed an appropriate reward.

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

"Honor God, and he will honor you."

"Serve God, and he will gird himself and serve you."

Visit and relieve your sick neighbor, and "God will be with you in trouble, and make all your bed in sickness, [Psalm 41:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.1); [Psalm 41:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.3)."

"Nor shall even a cup of cold water given to a disciple, in any way lose its reward."

Would you then have testimonies of God's approbation here? endeavor to "abound in the work of the Lord;" and expect also, that, in proportion as you improve your talents now, shall be the weight of glory assigned to you in the eternal world!

***~~#262~~***

***~~THE DANGER OF INDECISION~~***

***~~[Judges 2:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.1-5)~~***

"The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you." When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD."

We admire the condescension of Jehovah towards his chosen people, in that he raised up prophets to instruct them, and frequently sent angels also to minister unto them. But the person who is here called "the Angel of the Lord," seems to have been no other than "the Angel of the Covenant," the Lord himself! It is certain that Jehovah did sometimes assume the appearance of an angel; as when he visited Abraham, and informed him of the judgments that were about to be inflicted on Sodom and Gomorrah. Just so, it is clear that the person spoken of in our text was no created angel; for if he had, how could he with any propriety use such language?

It was not a creature that brought the Israelites out of Egypt; but Jehovah.

It was not a creature that made a covenant with them; but Jehovah.

It was not a creature to whom they were accountable for their disobedience, or whose threatened dereliction they had such reason to deplore, but Jehovah. The circumstance of his being said to come up from Gilgal, which is supposed to militate against this interpretation, rather confirms it; for it was in Gilgal, near to Jericho, that this same divine person had appeared to Joshua, as an armed warrior. That he was Jehovah, cannot be doubted; because he allowed Joshua to worship him; and even commanded him to put off his shoe from his foot, because the very ground whereon he stood was, by reason of his presence, rendered holy. In his conversation with Joshua he had called himself "the Captain of the Lord's army;" and therefore there was a particular propriety in his appearing now to the people, to inquire, "Why they had not carried his orders into effect," and to threaten that he would fight for them no longer. Besides, at Gilgal the people had revived the ordinance of circumcision, and had kept a Passover unto the Lord; in both which ordinances they had consecrated themselves to God afresh, and engaged to serve him, as his redeemed people. In coming therefore as from Gilgal, the Angel reminded them of their solemn engagements, and humbled them the more for their violation of them.

The particular address of the Lord to them, together with the effect it produced upon them, leads us to consider:

***~~I. The DANGER of indecision.~~***

The command which God had given to the Israelites was plain and express; they were "utterly to destroy the Canaanites, and to make no covenant with them, [Deuteronomy 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.2);" and on their performance of this condition, was suspended the continuance of God's interposition in their favor. But they were not careful to execute the divine command; and therefore God threatened that the Canaanites, whom they had presumed to spare, should become a lasting source of pain to them; that they would gradually draw them into sin, and ultimately become instruments of inflicting on them the vengeance they had merited!

***~~Such is the sin which God's professing people still commit.~~***

The command to every one of us is to make no league with any one of our spiritual enemies.

Not with the world. On the contrary:

We are to "overcome it."

We are to "come out from worldly people, and be separate."

We are to be "dead to" all its cares and pleasures.

We are to be "crucified to it, and esteeming it as crucified unto us."

We are "not to be of it, any more than Jesus Christ himself was of it."

With respect to the flesh also and our corrupt nature, no truce must be made with it, even for a moment!

We must "mortify our members upon earth."

We must "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts."

We must not spare one evil desire, though it should be dear as "a right eye," or useful as "a right hand."

We must "pluck it out with abhorrence, or cut it off, and cast it from us."

We must *slay*our lusts.

We must "show them no mercy! [Deuteronomy 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.2)."

Our hatred of them must be irreconcilable and incessant.

But what is *our*state? Do we find this zeal in ourselves? Instead of proceeding to the utter extirpation of our spiritual enemies, are we not satisfied if they do not reign? Are we not contented to let them exist, provided they keep themselves concealed from public view?

What then is the declaration of God unto us? Does he not warn us, that the evils which we spare shall become "as thorns in our sides, and prove a snare unto our souls?" And do we not find that it is even so in our daily experience?

Let the person who still associates with the men of this world, say, whether he does not find that they are a clog to him in his spiritual course? Whether his endeavors to please them do not lead him sometimes into sinful compliances, and his fear of displeasing them do not keep him from testifying against their evil ways? Will any say that he has found it practical for "light to have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial;" or that the soul can flourish while it is engaged in such a foolish attempt as that of reconciling the services of God and Mammon?

Let the person who is still too deeply immersed in the cares or pleasures of the world, say, whether he has not often been led to do harm to his conscience in order to prosecute his ends, and to adopt some practices which in his heart he disapproved?

Let the person who harbors some besetting sin, ask, whether it has not often risen up with a force that was almost irresistible, and nearly, if not altogether, involved him in some flagrant transgression?

Let the person in whom pride, or lewdness, or covetousness, or passion is allowed to dwell, answer this question. He knows but little of his own heart, who does not know that sin is a flame, which, if not extinguished, may speedily "set on fire his whole nature, [James 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.6) with [Deuteronomy 32:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.22)," and "burn to the lowest Hell."

Lastly, Let the person who listens to the temptations of Satan, say whether there is any way of making him flee, but by perpetual resistance? [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7).

If such then be the danger of indecision, let us consider,

***~~II. The DUTY of those who are convicted of the sin of indecision.~~***

Two things were produced by the declarations of the Angel in the bosoms of all the congregation of Israel; which also our own experience calls for; namely,

***~~1. A humiliation of soul before God.~~***

The people "lifted up their voice and wept." And who among us has not abundant reason to follow their example? Whether we consider our sin or our punishment, we have but too much reason to weep. Indecision is not so light a sin as some imagine, [Job 31:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.25); [Job 31:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.28); it shows an insincerity of heart, which is most odious in itself, and most offensive to God. See in what a light the Israelites beheld it, when once a conviction of it was brought home to their minds! *Is not the sparing of inveterate lusts as wicked as sparing the wicked Canaanites?*Does it not betray an equal lack:  
of reverence for God,  
of love to his name,  
and of zeal for his honor?

Behold then, the *duty*of every one among us: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he shall lift you up! [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.9-10)."

Nor does the *threatened punishment*afford us less occasion to weep; for *a subjection to sin is the greatest evil that can befall us!*If God should once say, "He is joined to idols; let him alone;" it would be a heavier judgment to us than immediate death and immediate damnation; because we should live only to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath," and should perish at last under an accumulated weight of misery to all eternity! *O that the dread of such a punishment might humble us all in dust and ashes!*

***~~2. An application to God through the medium of sacrifice.~~***

"They sacrificed there unto the Lord;" and had recourse to the blood of sprinkling for the remission of their sin. Though their weeping was very general, and very bitter, insomuch that the name of the place, which was Shiloh, was called *Bochim*, or Weepers, from that circumstance—yet did they not hope to pacify their offended God with tears; they knew that an atonement was necessary; and they sought him therefore in his appointed way.

O that we might learn from them! *Humiliation*is necessary, but it is not sufficient! *Tears*, even if we could shed rivers of them, could never wash away a single sin. The blood of atonement is necessary, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." We must apply to the Lord Jesus Christ, and "go to God through him." We must acknowledge our obligation to his sacrifice for all the mercy and forbearance we have already experienced; and must look to it as the only means of our reconciliation with God. It is his blood, and "his blood alone, that can ever cleanse us from our sin!"

Here I would particularly remind you that the sin laid to the charge of Israel, was not of commission, but of *omission*; not some flagrant enormity, but a lukewarmness and neglect of duty; yet did they see the need of a sacrifice to atone for that.

In like manner, though we should have no guilt imputed to us but that of omission and defect—yet must we apply to the blood of sprinkling, and seek for pardon through that one Sacrifice which was once offered for us on the cross.

***~~Learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. The value of a faithful monitor.~~***

We do not like faithful admonitions, even from those whose special duty it is to reprove sin. We are ready to account them harsh and severe. But what is the office which a friendly monitor performs? Is it not that which the Angel of the Covenant himself executed, yes, and came from Heaven on purpose to perform? But it may be said that we alarm men, and make them melancholy. This is true; we show them their guilt and danger, and try to bring them to a state of humiliation on account of it, and to an affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ for the pardon of it. But is this an evil? If the whole congregation were affected precisely as the whole congregation of Israel were, every one weeping for his sins, and seeking the remission of them through the great Sacrifice—would it be a matter for regret? No! We would to God that this very place might this day deserve the name of *Bochim*; and that the remembrance of it might never be obliterated from your minds! We are sure that the congregation of Israel felt themselves deeply indebted to Him who thus sought their welfare; and we have no doubt but that, however an ungodly world may hate our reproofs, there is not a contrite sinner in the universe who will not regard his monitor as a father, and "receive him as an Angel of God, even as Christ Jesus, [Galatians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.14)." *They will not hesitate to thank him, who, by bringing them to weep here—has kept them from weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in Hell forever!*

***~~2. The danger of forgetting the admonitions that have already been given to us.~~***

During the days of Joshua and the elders that outlived Joshua, the Israelites maintained some measure of steadfastness in their duty to God. But afterwards they fearfully declined, and brought upon themselves the most afflictive judgments. The whole remainder of the chapter from whence our text is taken, elucidates this truth. The impressions which were now made upon them gradually wore away; and the people relapsed into their former state of supineness. Of the unreasonableness of their conduct they were fully convinced; for, when the Angel asked them, "Why have you done this?" they could not offer one word in extenuation of their guilt. But when they ceased to listen to the voice of conscience, they proceeded from one wickedness to another, "until there was no remedy! [2 Chronicles 36:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.15-17)."

And how often is this seen among ourselves! Many are deeply affected on some particular occasion; they will weep, and pray, and think of the Savior. But in process of time they lose all their good impressions, and "return with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to the wallowing in the mire."

May the Lord grant that it may not prove thus with us! May our "goodness not be as the dew, or as the morning cloud that passes away;" but rather as the sun, which shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day!

***~~#263~~***

***~~EHUD AND EGLON~~***

***~~[Judges 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 3.20-21)~~***

"Ehud then approached him (king Eglon) while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his summer palace and said, "I have a message from God for you." As the king rose from his seat, Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly!"

*God frequently is pleased to make use of his enemies for the correction of his own people; but when he has accomplished by them the purposes of his grace, he then calls them also into judgment for the acts which they have performed.* In executing his will they have no respect to him, but follow only the wicked inclinations of their own hearts; and therefore he recompenses them, not as obedient servants, but according to the real motives of their actions.

Thus he dealt with *Sennacherib*, who was only gratifying his own ambition, while, as a sword in Jehovah's hand, he was inflicting punishment on Israel. And thus he dealt with *Eglon*also, whom he had raised up to power for the purpose of chastising his offending people. Yet there is something very remarkable in the way in which God requited the wickedness of Eglon, and in which he delivered his people out of his hand. The man whom God raised up as his instrument, was Ehud; who, by a stratagem, effected the death of Eglon.

We will briefly set before you,

***~~I. The conduct of Ehud.~~***

Eglon, king of Moab, having subdued Israel, himself resided in Canaan, in the city of Palm-trees; and Ehud was sent, as the representative of Israel, to offer to him their accustomed tribute. But Ehud, hoping for an opportunity to assassinate Eglon, took a dagger with him; and, after having presented the tribute and left the city with his attendants, went back alone to Eglon, pretending to have a secret errand to him. Eglon ordered all other people to depart from his presence, and thus gave Ehud a good opportunity of accomplishing his design. Ehud availed himself of it with great success; being left-handed, he drew forth the dagger without any suspicion, and plunged it, even the handle together with the blade, into the belly of Eglon, who instantly fell down dead. Ehud then retired from the secret chamber where the transaction had taken place, and locked the doors after him, and went composedly away, as though nothing particular had happened; and thus effected his escape; and instantly stirred up Israel to cast off the yoke of Moab, before their enemies should have had time to concert their measures under another leader.

Now to form a correct estimate of this action, we must consider it in two different points of view:

***~~1. Ehud's conduct, as voluntarily undertaken.~~***

In this view it was altogether indefensible. *Treachery and murder can never be justified!*Though Eglon was a usurper and a cruel oppressor, still the Israelites professed subjection to him; and Ehud went as their messenger, to present to Eglon their acknowledgments of that subjection. If he had chosen to cast off the yoke of Moab, he was at liberty to do so in a way of open warfare; but he had no right to become an assassin; nor could the *end*which he proposed, sanctify the *means*he used; the means were wrong; and he had "no right to do evil that good might come."

***~~2. Ehud's conduct, as divinely commissioned.~~***

No created power could have authorized Abraham to slay his son, or Israel to plunder Egypt, and extirpate the inhabitants of Canaan; nor could any man have executed such things of his own mind, without contracting very heinous guilt.

But God is not bound by the rules which he has imposed on us; he may act towards his creatures as he sees best, and may employ instruments in any way that he pleases; nor would even an angel contract defilement in executing any commission that God had given him. An angel slew in one night all the first-born in the land of Egypt; and on another occasion, a hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians; yet no one thinks of imputing guilt to him on that account.

Just so, *Ehud*, if appointed to the work by God, might innocently effect it in the way he did. *Jehu*was commissioned by God to dethrone Ahab, and destroy his family; and, though he was punished afterwards because he was not actuated by a befitting zeal for the glory of God—yet for the action itself, he was rewarded even to the fourth generation. "The LORD said to Jehu: Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation," [2 Kings 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.30)."

Precisely thus may Ehud at this moment be receiving a reward from God for that act of his, which, under other circumstances, would have been highly sinful. And there is reason to believe that he was directed by God in that action; since not only were his wisdom, courage, and success, beyond all that could have been expected in a merely human enterprise; but we are expressly told that "God raised up this man to be the deliverer of his people, verse 15."

We must not however imagine, that his conduct is to be followed as a precedent; for no man can dare to follow it, unless he has infallible evidence that he is called of God to do so; but, as no man can expect such a call at this time, no man can without the deepest criminality presume to imitate his example.

Having thrown what light we can on the dubious conduct of Ehud, we proceed to suggest:

***~~II. Some reflections arising from Ehud's conduct.~~***

Supposing Ehud to have been divinely commissioned, he might well say to Eglon, "I have a message from God to you!" At all events his language leads us to observe,

***~~1. That God does send messages to mortal men.~~***

The whole *creation*is delivering to us, as it were, a message from God, and conveying to us the knowledge of his perfections, [Romans 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.20); [Psalm 19:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.1-4).

Every *providential dispensation*also has some important lesson to communicate. The mercies of God declare his goodness to us, and invite us to repentance, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4), and his judgments are intended to reveal to us some truths which we did not previously discern, "Hear the rod," says the prophet, "and Him who has appointed it! [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9)."

But it is in *his Word*more especially that God comes down to commune with sinful man. His Gospel is so called from the very circumstance of its being a message of mercy, or, as the word means, good tidings from God to man; and ministers are ambassadors from him, sent to beseech you in his name to accept reconciliation with him through the death of his Son. Indeed this message contains the substance of all that we have to speak to you in God's name; and from hence it is called by God himself, "the ministry of reconciliation."

Behold then this day we come unto you and say, "We have a message from God to you!" He sends us this day to invite you to come to him for all the blessings of salvation, and to receive them freely at his hands, "without money, and without price! [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3)."

***~~2. That, by whoever God's messages are delivered—we should attend to them with the profoundest reverence.~~***

Though Eglon was a king, and Ehud an oppressed servant, yes, though Eglon was a heathen that did not worship the true God—yet, the very instant that Ehud announced that he had a message from God unto him, he rose up from his seat, that he might receive it with the greater reverence.

And does not this idolatrous heathen reproach us, who, when God's servants are delivering messages to us in his name, scarcely pay any attention to them, or perhaps fall asleep in the midst of them? Behold, how Israel listened to the reading of God's Word in the days of Nehemiah, [Nehemiah 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.3); [Nehemiah 8:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.5-6); that is the way in which we should read or hear the Word of God at this time.

We should not come to the house of God as *critics*, to sit in judgment; or as curious people, to be entertained; but as sinners, to "hear what the Lord God will say concerning us." Beautiful is the example of Cornelius and his family, [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33); they did not regard Peter as a man, but as a messenger from God; and in like manner should we also "receive the Word, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God! [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)." O that the spirit of Samuel were more visible in us, [1 Samuel 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.10), and that we sought instruction from the word, only in order to obey it, [John 9:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.36)."

***~~3. That we should ever be prepared for whatever message God may send.~~***

Who can tell but that as his message to Eglon was a message of death, so he may send to us this day, saying, "Set your house in order; for you shall die and not live!" He needs not the aid of an assassin to take away our lives; there are millions of ways in which death may seize upon us!

As for our security, the more secure we are in our own minds, the more likely are we to receive such a *message*from God, [1 Thessalonians 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.3). It was when the *rich fool*was looking forward to years of enjoyment, that God said to him, "This night your soul shall be required of you!" And it was when *Job*fondly expected that he should "die in his nest," [Job 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.18) (see also [Psalm 30:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.6-7),) that God pulled down his nest, and despoiled him of all that he had!

Let us not then promise ourselves an hour's continuance even of life itself, [Proverbs 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.1); but be standing "with our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, that at whatever hour our Lord may come, he may find us watching".

***~~Application~~***

This may be more appropriate or more general; in the former case, a message may be delivered as from God himself to Oppressors, and the Oppressed; (to awe the one, as [Isaiah 10:5-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-18) and encourage the other, as [Isaiah 10:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.24-27).) In the latter case, an Address may be made to the Careless, the Backsliding, and the Faithful, with the prefatory remark to each, "I have a message from God to you!"

***~~#264~~***

***~~JAEL AND SISERA~~***

***~~[Judges 5:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 5.24-27)~~***

"Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk. Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell--dead!"

The subject of *assassination*, one would suppose, should not admit of much diversity of sentiment; but there are those even in the Christian world, who think that in extreme cases, where the death of a tyrant would put an end to grievous oppressions and desolating wars, that the dagger of an assassin might be employed. I am not aware that any would attempt to vindicate this sentiment by an appeal to Scripture; they would justify it rather on reasonings from expediency. But it is certain that, though in most cases where such actions are recorded they are mentioned with abhorrence, there are some instances wherein they are mentioned with approbation and applause. Such was the case of *Ehud*, who stabbed Eglon king of Moab; and such was the case before us, where *Jael*, the wife of Heber the Kenite, destroyed Sisera, whom she had received under her protection, and to whom she had administered every friendly aid.

The account which is given us of this transaction must be considered in a two-fold view:

***~~I. As a historic fact.~~***

***~~The fact itself is set forth in the foregoing chapter.~~***

Jabin, king of Canaan, had mightily oppressed the children of Israel for twenty years. At last they cried unto God; who directed Deborah, a prophetess, to take immediate measures for their deliverance. She commissioned Barak to raise ten thousand men; and promised in God's name, that Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, should be drawn to him and delivered into his hands.

The outcome corresponded with the prediction; Sisera was defeated; and he fled away on foot, and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, with whom he was at peace. Jael received him most kindly, supplied him with necessary refreshment, covered him with a mantle, and gave him every reason to expect safety under her protection. But, when he was asleep, she took a hammer, and drove a long nail through his temples and through his head; and then went out to the door of her tent, and brought in Barak to see his enemy dead upon the floor!

***~~And what are we to think of this fact?~~***

Supposing it to be unauthorized by any commission from God, we cannot hesitate to pronounce it one of the vilest crimes that ever was perpetrated! Some have endeavored to extenuate it, by saying, that she did not promise not to betray him. But this is a mere subterfuge; whether she promised or not in words, her whole conduct was equivalent to the strongest promise; and she was guilty of the basest treachery that we can find on record in the annals of the world! *She murdered a man who was at peace with her, and whom she had undertaken to protect!*

***~~Thus strongly have we spoken on the occasion, in order that our subsequent views may not be misinterpreted.~~***

Here a question naturally arises: If the action was so base, how does it come to be so highly commended? How does it befit a prophetess, to pronounce such an eulogy upon her, as to call her "the most blessed of women," for doing that which was in itself such a flagrant act of injustice and cruelty?

I answer, (as we before answered in the case of Ehud,) that God is not bound by the laws which he has given to us; and that he may dispense with those obligations which men owe to each other, in order to advance his own purposes in the way he sees fit. He may, as we before observed, order *Abraham*to slay his son; and therefore he might equally order *Jael*to slay Sisera; and might make known his mind with equal certainty to her as to him.

And, that he did give her this commission, we can have no doubt; for, on account of Barak's unbelief, Deborah told him that he should lose part of the honor which he might have acquired; and that "God would give Sisera into the hand of a woman." Moreover, this whole chapter is a tribute of praise to God on account of the transaction, wherein Jael in particular is celebrated as having performed a most acceptable service to the Lord.

Our proud hearts are apt to rise up in rebellion against God on this occasion; and to ask how such an order could consist with his perfections? But let us be careful how we presume "to reprove God, [Job 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2)." We forget that he is the Creator of all, and "may do what he will with his own, [Matthew 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.15);" and that "he gives no account of any of his matters, [Job 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.13)." Let us remember too, that *we are no more than mere worms, which, as creatures, have no claim to existence for one moment; and, as sinners, deserve to be in Hell; and that, consequently, it is not possible for God to do any injustice to us.*

If, however, we still are disposed to quarrel with this dispensation, the answer of Paul to such objectors must be resorted to, "Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" Consider the objections to which that reply was made; and it will be found abundantly sufficient for every other objection that can be raised, [Romans 9:16-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16-24).

Let us next consider this account,

***~~II. As an emblematic record.~~***

The words which close this divine hymn, clearly show that we are to consider the history in this view. Compare verse 31 with [Psalm 83:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 83.2-4); [Psalm 83:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 83.9-10).

***~~1. The transaction was an emblematic representation of the judgments that await God's enemies.~~***

Sisera's army was, humanly speaking, invincible, especially by such a handful of men as Barak could muster, and even the greater part of them unarmed, except with such weapons as they might hastily collect, [Judges 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.13) with 5:8. Indeed his mother and friends had not the least doubt of a successful outcome to the conflict. But when his time was come, he and his army were wholly destroyed; and the very steps which he took for the destruction of God's people, God himself overruled to effect his overthrow, [Judges 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.6-7).

Thus it shall be with all the oppressors and persecutors of God's Church and people; however potent they may be, and however secure they may think themselves, "their *judgment*now of a long time lingers not, and their *damnation*slumbers not! 2 Peter 2:3."

They exult in the thought of what they will effect; but God "laughs them to scorn, for he sees that their day is coming. Compare [Psalm 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.3-4) with 37:12, 13." The very plans which they concert for the destruction of the Church, God will often overrule for their own destruction, [Micah 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.11-12). Or, if no particular judgment comes upon them in this world, the time is quickly coming, when they would be glad to have "the rocks and mountains fall upon them, to cover them from the wrath "of an avenging God!" They think themselves strong now; but "will they be strong in the day that HE shall deal with them, and will they thunder with a voice like his?" O that they were wise and would consider this, before they "be suddenly destroyed and without a remedy!"

***~~2. The transaction was an emblematic representation of the triumphs that are prepared for the Lord's people.~~***

The Church at large, or individuals in it, may be reduced, like Israel of old, to great distress; but they shall surely triumph at last. However weak you may be in yourselves, you have no cause to fear; for God is on your side; and will allow neither sin nor Satan to have dominion over you, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14); [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20). You need not direction or assistance from man; you need not say to any human being, "If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go, [Judges 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.8);" for God is with you; and "through him you shall be more than conquerors." His voice to every one of you is like that of Deborah to Barak, "Up, for this is the day that the Lord has delivered your enemies into your hand! Has not the Lord gone out before you? [Judges 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.14)." The very "stars in their courses shall fight for you, verse 20," rather than that you shall be subdued.

This is the testimony of all the prophets; nor shall anyone that trusts in it be disappointed of his hope. See how the sun bursts through the clouds that obscured it in the early morn, and shines forth in its might; so shall you rise above all your enemies, and shine forth in everlasting glory! verse 31.

***~~The subject addresses itself particularly:~~***

***~~1. To those who are in affliction.~~***

What was the remedy to which Israel had recourse, when their affliction pressed sore upon them? It was prayer, "they cried unto the Lord." And is not the same remedy open to us? Is it not also as effectual as ever? Is the Lord's hand shortened that it cannot save, or his ear heavy that it cannot hear? He has given the direction, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear you, and you shall glorify me!" "Nor will he ever allow any to seek his face in vain."

**2. To those who have been delivered from affliction.**

Delay not to render thanks to your Almighty Deliverer. Whatever means he may have used, remember that HE is the first great Cause, "the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift." Stir up yourselves then to glorify him, like Deborah of old, "Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake; utter a song!" Call to mind also the various circumstances both of your affliction and deliverance; that nothing maybe omitted which may enhance the delivering mercy in your eyes, or give glory to your heavenly Benefactor.

This is a matter of great importance; if you rest in general acknowledgments, you will feel but weak emotions of gratitude. But if you search out occasions of praise, you will soon be filled with wonder and amazement at the mercies given unto you!

***~~#265~~***

***~~THE PRAYER OF DEBORAH~~***

**[Judges 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 5.31)**

"So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had peace forty years."

Of the victories gained by God's ancient people, many are so incredible, that we could never believe the histories that record them, if we did not know those histories to have been written by holy men, under the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The destruction of a mighty army by means of trumpets, and lamps in broken pitchers, seems altogether fabulous; yet was this effected by Gideon, in conformity with the direction given him, and in dependence upon God.

The overthrow of Jabin the king of Canaan, by ten thousand men under the command of a woman, was scarcely less miraculous, especially if we consider to what a low state the whole kingdom of Israel was reduced, and how exceeding powerful was the army of their oppressors. Yet was Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, routed by this little band, and not so much as a single individual of that mighty host survived the contest, [Judges 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.16). The hymn of thanksgiving, wherein Deborah celebrated this wonderful event, is recorded in the chapter before us; and she closes it with a prayer:

***~~I. For the destruction of all God's enemies.~~***

Imprecations, when personal and vindictive, are contrary to the mind of God; but when uttered as denunciations of God's determined purpose, they are not unsuited to the most holy character. Even Paul said, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed! Maranatha. [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22)." Thus, in imprecating destruction on God's enemies, Deborah must be understood to express:

***~~1. Her approbation of it as just.~~***

Who does not see, that those who rise in rebellion against their God, deserve punishment? There is not a creature suffering under the displeasure of the Most High, who must not say, "True and righteous are your judgments, Lord God Almighty! [Revelation 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 15.3)."

***~~2. Her desire of it as good.~~***

The Law of God, which denounces a curse against every transgression, is declared to be "holy and just and good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12)." In like manner, all considerate men are agreed in acknowledging it a blessing to live under laws wisely enacted and faithfully administered. What though the execution of the laws prove fatal to some? It is a benefit to the community, who are thereby enabled to live in peaceful security. So the execution of God's laws doubtless proves terrible to those who are called to sustain his vengeance; yet to the whole universe is it the means of displaying the justice and holiness of the Deity, which, if sin were unpunished, would be altogether compromised and eclipsed.

***~~3. Her expectation of it as certain.~~***

In fact, her imprecation has the force of a prediction; a prediction which shall assuredly be accomplished in its season.*Of Sisera's army not one survived; and of those who die in their sins, there shall not one be found at the right hand of God in the day of judgment.* "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished!"

To this she adds a prayer:

***~~II. For the advancement of all his loving and obedient people.~~***

Well is the distinction drawn between the enemies and the friends of God. The latter are described as "those who love him, [Ephesians 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.24)." If, between men, we could admit a medium between love and hatred, we can by no means admit of it between God and his creatures. Indifference towards God would be constructive enmity. Those alone who love him can be numbered among his friends. In behalf of these, therefore, she prays, that they may "be as the sun when he goes forth in his might." Under this beautiful image she prays:

***~~1. That they may shine with ever-increasing splendor.~~***

The sun in its early dawn casts but feeble light upon the world; but soon proceeds to irradiate the whole horizon, and to burst with splendor upon those who but a little before were immersed in darkness. Just so, the goings-forth of those who seek the Lord diffuse at first but an indistinct and doubtful gleam, [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.3); but, through the tender mercy of God, they advance; and "their light shines brighter and brighter to the perfect day, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18)." How desirable is this to be realized in us! Let us so walk, my brethren, that "our profiting may appear unto all."

***~~2. That they may diffuse benefits wherever they come.~~***

*The sun is the fountain of light and life to the whole world.* Look at the places where, for months together, the sun never bends its course; the whole face of nature wears the appearance of death; and nothing but the return of his kindlier influences restores her to life.

Just so, in countries where the friends of God are not found, the whole population are in a state of spiritual and moral death; but "in their light is light seen, [Psalm 36:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.9)," and from them is spread abroad a vital influence, to animate and fructify the sons of men. View the path of the Apostle Paul "from Judea round about unto Illyricum;" in all his way he was the instrument of "turning men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God! [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)." Such should we also be, my brethren, according to the ability which God has given us, and the opportunities he affords us. We should "shine as lights in a dark world, holding forth to all the word of life, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16)," for the illumination and salvation of all around us!

***~~3. That they may reflect honor upon God in the eyes of all who behold them.~~***

*Who ever contemplated the sun shining in his strength, and did not admire the wisdom and goodness and power of Him who created it?*"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handy-work; nor is there any speech or language where their voice is not heard, [Psalm 19:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.1-3)." Such should be the effect of the light diffused by the saints of God; it should constrain all to confess that "we are God's workmanship, [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10)," and "so to shine before men, that they may be compelled to glorify our Father who is in Heaven! [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)."

***~~ADDRESS.~~***

Inquire, brethren, to which of these classes *you*belong; for, however they may be confounded now, there will be a solemn difference between them before long; the one "awaking to everlasting shame and contempt, [Daniel 12:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2-3)," and the other "shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father! [Matthew 13:41-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.41-43)." On the one shall the justice of God be magnified; but in the other shall his love and mercy be glorified, to all eternity! [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.6-10).

***~~#266~~***

***~~GIDEON'S FLEECE~~***

***~~[Judges 6:36-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.36-40)~~***

"Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised-- look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew--a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew."

It is a comfort to know that *however afflicted and apparently desperate our state may be in this world, there is no just ground for despondency*. God can never lack instruments for effecting our deliverance; or fail in effecting it, however weak and inadequate those instruments may be.

We can scarcely conceive a more hopeless condition than that to which the nation of Israel was reduced at this time by "the Midianites and Amalekites and the children of the east." These enemies "came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their cattle were without number; and annually, for seven years, they entered into the land to destroy it; while the children of Israel hid themselves in dens and caves and strongholds in the mountains, destitute of any sustenance, verses 2-6," and incapable of resisting their invaders.

But in this extremity, God was pleased to visit them in mercy, and to raise up for them a deliverer, "even Gideon, while he was threshing out some wheat, to hide it from the Midianites, verses 11, 12." To satisfy the mind of Gideon, who pleaded his utter incapacity for the office devolved upon him, God gave him a sign; he accepted an offering of a young goat, prepared as for food with unleavened cakes, and caused "fire to rise up out of the rock, on which the flesh and cakes were placed, to consume them; and then departed out of his sight, verses 17-21. It is clear that "the Angel" was no other than Jehovah himself. See verse 14 and verses 22-24." But still, though further encouraged by the success of his endeavor to destroy idolatry in his father's house verses 25-32. and by the willingness which several of the tribes manifested to enlist under his banners, he yet needed to have his faith strengthened; and for that end, he desired a further sign from the Lord, so that he might be assured that the promise made to him would be fulfilled.

In this circumstance we see displayed before our eyes,

***~~I. The weakness of man.~~***

***~~Gideon could not give full credit to the Word of God.~~***

It had been declared to him by the Lord, "You shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have not I sent you? verse 14." On his expressing a doubt how this could possibly be effected by so weak an instrument as he, God had confirmed his Word, as with an oath, "Surely I will be with you; and you shall smite the Midianites as one man! verses 15, 16." To remove all doubt from his mind, a sign had been given to him, similar to that which had been given at the consecration of Aaron to the priestly office, [Leviticus 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.24). Yet still he wanted fresh signs, to convince him that God would indeed fulfill his Word; and even prescribed to God the signs that should be given, desiring that a fleece might be wet with dew, while all was dry around; and again, that the fleece might be dry, while on all around it the dew should rest.

***~~Do we not see in this the weakness of all mankind?~~***

*Abraham*repeatedly resorted to a base subterfuge in denying his wife, because he could not trust in God for his protection from Pharaoh, [Genesis 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.12-13), and Abimelech, [Genesis 20:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 20.13).

*Sarah*, too, though commended for her faith, could not believe that, at her advanced period of life, she should bear to Abraham a son, [Genesis 18:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.11-12).

When *Moses*was commissioned to bring Israel out of Egypt, no less than three successive signs were given to him, for the conviction of his own mind, and of the minds of those to whom he was sent:

his rod was turned into a serpent, and then restored from a living serpent to a rod again;

his hand was rendered both leprous, and then whole again;

and the water which he poured out was converted into blood, [Exodus 4:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.1-9).

*David*also, under circumstances of great trial, found doubts arise in his mind; but confessed, upon reflection, "This is my infirmity, [Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-10)."

And who among *us*has not, on many occasions, "staggered at the promises through unbelief?"

The *disciples*themselves, when a storm arose, were fearful that they should perish, notwithstanding their Lord and Master was embarked with them in the vessel, [Mark 4:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.38).

The intrepid *Peter's*heart began to fail him, when walking on the sea, because the wind became more boisterous than when he first descended from the ship, [Matthew 14:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.28-31).

Just so, in seasons of trial, *we*have found it exceeding difficult to place such confidence in God, as to dismiss all fear, and commit our cause to him without any anxiety about the outcome of it. We can know but little of the workings of our own hearts, if we have not discovered, that "there is in us an evil heart of unbelief," and that *to place perfect confidence in God is the highest of all attainments*. To say under such accumulated trials as Job sustained, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him! [Job 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.15)," is little short of perfection.

But this weakness of Gideon was the means of displaying,

***~~II. The condescension of God.~~***

***~~God, instead of being offended with his servant, acceded to his request.~~***

A fellow-creature, who had given such solemn promises, would have been quite indignant at finding his veracity called into question. How offensive was the request, "Then Gideon said to God: If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, [Judges 6:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.36-37)."

Nor did even this suffice. No, he must "prove" God a second time by reversing this request, before he can believe "that God will do as he has said." Yet, astonishing to behold! God, instead of being offended with him, gives him the satisfaction he desires, and accommodates himself to the wishes of his yet doubting servant.

A similar instance of condescension we behold in Jesus towards his unbelieving disciple. All the disciples had seen our Lord, except *Thomas*; and all bore the most decided testimony to his resurrection. But Thomas would not believe; no, the testimony of all his brethren was of no avail; he would not even believe his own eyes, if he should see his Lord. He would not believe, unless he should put his fingers into the print of the nails made in the hands and feet of his Lord, and thrust his hand into the side that had been pierced by the spear. How justly might he have been left to the perverseness of his own mind, and to all the bitter consequences of his unbelief! But no; the Savior appears to him also, and gives him the very evidence he desired.

***~~And the same condescension may we also expect.~~***

It is true, we are not authorized to specify the terms on which we will credit the divine testimony, or to expect any visible signs in confirmation of God's Word. Yet are we not a whit less assured of his condescension and grace, than Gideon and Thomas were. We shall find, in his very covenant which he has made with us, the very same condescension to our weakness, and the very same desire to satisfy our minds; for "he has confirmed his covenant with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have the stronger consolation, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)."

And, if we look at the promises, we shall find that they are made in a way purposely to counteract and sustain the weakness of our minds. Mark the repetitions:

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10)."

"Fear not, you worm Jacob; you shall thresh the mountains, [Isaiah 41:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-16)."

Mark God's answers to the objections arising in our minds, "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)."

We see, then, that at this day God is the same as in the days of old; and that still, as formerly, "he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, until he brings forth judgment unto victory, [Matthew 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.20)."

In all this, however, we discern,

***~~III. The efficacy of prayer.~~***

***~~It was prayer that prevailed in the instance before us.~~***

Gideon, with much humility and tenderness of spirit, besought the Lord; even as the Prophet Isaiah afterwards did in behalf of Hezekiah. God promised to Hezekiah that his disorder should be healed, and that he should "on the third day go up to the house of the Lord." A sign was then offered to him, and a choice was given him in relation to it; and he, thinking it a much harder thing for the shadow on the sun-dial to go back, than to advance, ten degrees, fixed upon that which he conceived to be the more difficult; and "the Prophet Isaiah," who in God's name had offered him the sign, "cried unto the Lord; and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz! [2 Kings 20:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.8-11)."

***~~To us, also, will God grant his mercies, in answer to our prayers.~~***

We are told that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." And in this respect *Elijah*is held forth to us as an example, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops! [James 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16-18)."

Thus also shall it be with us, under circumstances of peculiar trial. I do not mean to say that we shall have any miraculous answers to our prayers; for the age of miracles is past. But I must say, that, even in relation to temporal matters, our prayers shall not go forth in vain; and, in reference to spiritual mercies, they shall descend almost in visible answers on our souls.

Let us suppose the whole neighborhood where we dwell, to be in a state of spiritual barrenness, so far as it respects the blessings of salvation; if a man cries earnestly to God, the dew of his blessing shall descend upon him in the richest abundance; (a whole bowl-full shall, if I may so speak, be wrung out from his contracted fleece.) On the other hand, if God's judgments are poured forth on all around him, a merciful exemption shall be given to him; even as it is said, "A thousand shall fall beside you, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you! [Psalm 91:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.7)."

No man can conceive to what an extent God will magnify his condescension and grace towards a humble suppliant, until he has himself besought the Lord, and obtained an answer of peace unto his soul. "We may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us."

What now shall I further say to you? This only would I add.

***~~Let your faith in God's blessed word be firm and uniform.~~***

Think not of difficulties, "There is nothing too hard for the Lord." Were your enemies as numerous as the Midianites, and you had nothing with which to combat them but a pitcher and a lamp, they would all fall before you. Only be strong in faith; and you shall find, that "all things are possible to him who believes."

***~~#267~~***

***~~GIDEON'S VICTORY OVER MIDIAN~~***

***~~[Judges 7:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.19-22)~~***

"Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled. When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords."

We are so familiar with scripture history, that we cease to be struck with the most astonishing events. Great events in profane history are handed down from generation to generation, and are made subjects of universal admiration; but those which are related in the Bible are passed over with little notice.

How can we account for this? Is it that, in the one, the feats of men are seen, and in the other the feats of God? and that we are gratified with contemplating whatever advances the glory of man, but have no disposition to magnify and adore our God? We fear that this is the true solution of the difficulty. But, if we feel as we ought, we cannot be insensible to the display of God's *power*and *goodness*in the passage we have now read. Indeed the whole history of Gideon is so curious and instructive, that, instead of confining ourselves to the particular action specified in the text, it will be desirable,

***~~I. To notice the circumstances which led to this victory.~~***

Here we must notice,

**1. His call to his work.**

He was by nature qualified for the office of a deliverer, being "a mighty man of valor." Yet that circumstance would not have justified so hopeless an attempt as that which he engaged in, if he had not been called to it by God himself. But God (under the appearance of an angel) called him to it, and assured him of his presence in the undertaking, and of ultimate success in it, "You shall save Israel out of the hands of the Midianites; have not I sent you? Surely I will be with you; and you shall smite the Midianites as one man! [Judges 6:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.11-16)."

In confirmation of his call, God accepted his offering, which he caused to be miraculously consumed by fire out of the rock; and thereby gave him an undoubted evidence that he was that same Almighty Being, who had formerly commissioned Moses to deliver Israel from their Egyptian bondage, [Judges 6:17-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.17-24).

***~~2. His preparation for his work.~~***

The work to which he was called was exceeding arduous; and it was desirable that before he undertook it, he should have an *opportunity of proving his zeal for God, and of seeing the sufficiency of God to carry him through it.*God therefore ordered him to begin the work of reformation in his father's house; to cast down the altar of Baal, and cut down the grove where that idol was worshiped, and build an altar to Jehovah, and offer a bullock for a sacrifice upon it. This was impractical by day, because the worshipers of Baal would have interfered to prevent it; but he effected it by night; and executed in every respect the divine mandate. The people, as might be expected, demanded that he should be given up and put to death; but, notwithstanding his father was a worshiper of Baal, he was overruled by God to protect his son, and to threaten with death any that should take part with Baal; since, if he was a god, he was able to plead for himself; and, if he was not, his worship ought not to be upheld, [Judges 6:25-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.25-32).

Thus, by this successful effort, Gideon was prepared for that far greater work which he was now to undertake against the Midianites.

***~~3. His encouragement to his work.~~***

The attempt, according to human appearance, was madness itself; so dispirited was the state of Israel, and so great the power of their oppressors, [Judges 6:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.2-6). We do not wonder therefore that he should request of the Lord a sign, whereby he might be assured of success in his enterprise. He begged of God that a fleece of wool should be put out into the open air, and be filled with dew, while all the surrounding ground was dry; and on that sign being given him, he entreated permission to reverse the sign, the fleece being kept dry, while all the earth around it was wet. The events corresponding with his desires, he was assured, that God could make that distinction between the Midianites and him, which was necessary to a successful outcome of his contest with them.

Thus encouraged, he entered on the office that had been assigned him; and went with thirty-two thousand men whom he had assembled to attack the Midianites. But God knew that if so many were to go down to the attack, they would ascribe the victory to their own prowess; and therefore he ordered Gideon to dismiss from his army all who were afraid; in consequence of which no less than twenty-two thousand forsook his standard in one night. Still there was the same objection to his retaining ten thousand; and therefore God undertook to determine, by a particular test, who should go to the attack: those who on being taken to the water bowed down on their knees to drink, were not to go; but those who in a more temperate and self-denying way took up water in their hands and lapped it, as a dog laps, were to be the chosen band. But by this test no less than nine thousand seven hundred were cut off from his army, and he was left with only three hundred people to undertake this arduous work! [Judges 6:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.33-39); [Judges 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.8).

It should seem that this reduction of his numbers filled him with some secret misgivings. God therefore graciously offered him a further sign, whereby his faith should be confirmed, and his fear altogether dispelled. This was a sign that would be given to him by the enemy themselves. He was to go down with his servant to the enemy's camp, and hear what they themselves said. Accordingly he went, and heard one telling a dream that he had had, namely, that a cake of barley-bread had rolled down a hill into the camp, and had overturned a tent; which dream was immediately interpreted by his comrade, as importing that this cake was no other than the sword of Gideon, and that God had delivered Midian into Gideon's hand, verse 9-14. This perfectly satisfied the mind of Gideon; he had no doubt now but that God would fulfill his promise; and in a full assurance of faith he instantly arranged everything for the encounter, verse 15-18.

***~~4. His success in his work.~~***

The means he used were, no doubt, suggested to him by God himself. The little band were armed, not with sword and shield, but with a pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet. They were instructed to surround the camp, and, at a given signal, to break their pitchers, display their lights, and sound their trumpets, and, without moving from their places, to cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" This was executed in due order; and instantly a panic struck the whole host of Midian, who in their fright destroyed each other; and, when put to flight, were followed by the other troops that had been dismissed, and were thus entirely destroyed! verse 19-25.

Thus have we taken a connected view of the most important circumstances, in order that we may have our minds fully prepared for such observations as naturally arise from them.

We proceed then,

***~~II. To suggest some instructions arising from this narrative.~~***

Every part of the history is truly instructive; we may learn from it:

***~~1. To undertake nothing in our own strength.~~***

Though God addressed Gideon as "a mighty man of valor," Gideon did not presume upon his character, or think himself competent to the undertaking; yes, though commissioned by God himself, he shrunk back from the undertaking, saying, "Oh, my Lord, how shall I save Israel? Behold my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

We mean not to commend unbelief, but to express our approbation of humility. It is well to be diffident of ourselves, and to confide only in the Lord our God. We are all called to "wrestle, not only against flesh and blood, but against all the powers of darkness;" but "who is sufficient for these things?" Let us bear in mind that "we are not of ourselves sufficient even to think a good thought as of ourselves," and that "our whole sufficiency is of God!"

***~~2. To draw back from nothing to which we are called.~~***

When Gideon was assured that God had called him to the work, he cheerfully addressed himself to the performance of it. His *question*seems to have resembled that of the blessed Virgin, rather than of Zachariah, [Luke 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.18); [Luke 1:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.34), and to have flowed from a gracious, rather than an unbelieving, principle.

Thus should *we*act; our great labor should be to ascertain the mind and will of God; and being informed of that, we should, like Paul, when he was called to preach the Gospel, "not confer with flesh and blood," but set ourselves to discharge our duty to the uttermost. We indeed cannot expect our call to any particular office to be made as clear as Gideon's; but, *having discovered the duties of our respective callings, we should make no account either of difficulties or of danger, but determine instantly, and in all things, to approve ourselves faithful unto God*.

***~~3. To doubt of nothing wherein God promises his aid.~~***

Gideon is particularly commended for his faith, to which his success in this enterprise is more especially ascribed, [Hebrews 11:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.32-33). And what can we desire more than a promise of God's presence and cooperation? "If he is for us, then who can be against us?" God has said, "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!" Though therefore our enemies come forth like Goliath, and we be only like David with a sling and a stone, we need not fear the outcome of the contest; for "we shall be more than conquerors through Him who loved us".

***~~4. To take the glory for nothing which God does by us.~~***

God is a jealous God; and the ground of his reducing Gideon's army to three hundred men was, lest, if their numbers bore ever so small a proportion to the number of their enemies, they should ascribe to themselves the honor of the victory, instead of giving all the glory of it to God. In like manner has *God treasured up for us a fullness of all blessings in Christ Jesus, and required us to live by faith upon him, and to receive out of his fullness our daily supplies of grace and strength*. He would have us to glory in Christ alone, and to possess now the very spirit which we shall have in Heaven, when with all the glorified saints we shall cast our crowns at his feet, and ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb forever and ever!

***~~#268~~***

***~~GIDEON PACIFIES THE EPHRAIMITES~~***

***~~[Judges 8:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 8.1-3)~~***

"Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, "Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?" And they criticized him sharply. But he answered them, "What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?" At this, their resentment against him subsided."

We are apt to admire great military exploits, and to account men honorable in proportion to the victories they have gained; but *there is a victory over ourselves that far more dignifies a man*, than the most extended conquests over others. We certainly regard Gideon as one highly renowned in the feats of war; but his defeat of all the Midianite hosts with only three hundred men, armed with pitchers, lamps, and trumpets, is less worthy of admiration, than the self-possession he exercised towards the offended and unreasonable Ephraimites. Solomon has weighed as in a balance, the different characters, and has decided in favor of him whose victory is over his own spirit, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city, [Proverbs 16:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.32)."

In the transaction before us we see,

***~~I. Why it is that unreasonable men take offence.~~***

There is scarcely a society or even a single family to be found, where the different members walk in perfect harmony together; in most circles there are frequent disagreements; one or other of the members is unreasonable in his expectations, and by the unquietness of his own dispositions spreads dissatisfaction and disquietude all around him. The inquiry, "Whence come wars and fightings among you?" James answers by an appeal to our own experience, "Come they not hence, even from the lusts that war in your members, [James 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.1)." The chief sources of offence are discernible in the conduct of the Ephraimites. It arises,

***~~1. From the PRIDE of our own hearts.~~***

The Ephraimites had evidently a high conceit of their own dignity, and were offended that Gideon had not paid as much deference to them, as they supposed themselves entitled to. And from this root of bitterness it is that so many disputes arise. "Only by pride comes contention," is the testimony of God himself, [Proverbs 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.10). See the proud man, swelling with a sense of his own importance; if you differ from him in judgment, or act contrary to his will, yes, if you do not comply with his humor in everything, he is quite indignant, and bursts forth into a rage. Even the best meant endeavors cannot always please him:  
as an *inferior*, he cannot brook the least restraint;  
as a *superior*, he never thinks that sufficient homage is paid him;  
and as an *equal*, he cannot endure that others should exercise the liberty which he arrogates to himself, [Proverbs 28:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.25).

To what an extent this domineering principle will prevail, we may see in the instance of Nebuchadnezzar; who, because of the conscientious refusal of the Hebrew youths to bow down to his idol, "was full of fury; and the form of his visage was changed against them; and he ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual," in order to destroy them, [Daniel 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.19).*Truly there is no principle in the heart more adverse to the peace and happiness of mankind, than pride!*

***~~2. From ENVY at others.~~***

Great honor accrued to Gideon and the Abiezrites from the victory that had been gained; and the Ephraimites were grieved that others should possess a glory, in which themselves had no share. Hence they broke forth into revilings against Gideon.

The same principle also prevails more or less in all, "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy, [James 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.5);" and how nearly it is allied with wrath, we see from those words of Eliphaz, "Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple, [Job 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.2)." The examples of *Cain*, [Genesis 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.5), and *Joseph's brethren*, [Genesis 37:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.11); [Genesis 37:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 37.18), and *Saul*, [1 Samuel 18:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.8-9), sufficiently mark the murderous tendency of this malignant passion. One evil peculiar to envy is, that it makes excellence itself the object of its attack; as Solomon has observed, "For every right work a man is envied of his neighbor, [Ecclesiastes 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 4.4)." Hence that pointed question, "Who can stand before envy? [Proverbs 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.4)." Not the benevolence of the Apostles, nor the blameless conduct of our Lord himself, could ward off envy's malignant shafts; and wherever it exists, it will be attended with "strife, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings! [1 Timothy 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.4); [James 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.16)."

***~~3. From IMPETUOSITY of spirit.~~***

The *Ephraimites would not give themselves any time for reflection or inquiry, but instantly began with violent invectives*. It would seem that they were a hasty people, full of pride and anger; and on another occasion precisely similar to this, they suffered for it in no slight degree; for no less than forty-two thousand of them were slain in consequence of it, [Judges 12:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 12.1-7).

Had they taken the effort of making inquiry, they would have found that Gideon had committed no offence at all; he had acted altogether by the direction of God; and so far was he from being at liberty to increase his army by the accession of the Ephraimites, that he was necessitated to reduce the thirty-two thousand troops which he had raised to three hundred.

Thus it is that innumerable quarrels arise, when a moment's inquiry would show, that no reason for them exists, or at least no reason for such resentment as is felt by the offended person.

Behold *David*, when Nabal had refused him the refreshments which he desired; nothing short of the death of Nabal and all his adherents was deemed a sufficient atonement for his offence. But when Abigail had brought David to reflection, he found that his vindictive purposes were highly criminal; and that, if his anger was not groundless, it far exceeded that which the occasion called for, [1 Samuel 25:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.32-35).

***~~In a word, this hastiness of temper prevents men from listening to the dictates of reason, and makes them deaf to every consideration of truth and equity.~~***

The readiness with which unreasonable men take offence, makes it important to inquire,

***~~II. How judicious men may pacify it.~~***

Truly admirable was the conduct of Gideon on this occasion; and his success may well recommend it to our imitation. Indeed the general rules deducible from it are as good as any that can be suggested. When a person is offended at us without a cause, we should endeavor, as far as circumstances will admit of it, to calm his mind:

***~~1. By patience and forbearance.~~***

Not a word of recrimination dropped from the mouth of Gideon. He might perhaps have justly said, that when the Ephraimites knew his determination to oppose the Midianites, they had never offered their services, or come forward to assist him in the undertaking; but, when the danger was over, they were ready to impute evil to him for omissions which were chargeable only on themselves. But he did not so much as glance at anything that might either betray irritation in his own mind, or strengthen it in theirs. Though "they did chide sharply with him," he bore it with a meekness that was truly amiable and praiseworthy. Now this was an excellent way to conciliate their minds, even if he had deserved all the blame that they imputed to him.

Solomon justly observes, that "calmness can lay great errors to rest, [Ecclesiastes 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 10.4)." *It is recrimination that fans the flame, and causes it to burst forth into destructive quarrels!*

The common progress of disputes may be seen in the case of Israel and Judah after the death of Absalom; where, each of them justifying his own cause, the result was, that the dispute on both sides grew, until the accused were more incensed than even the accusers; and "the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel, [2 Samuel 19:41-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 19.41-43)." Silence therefore is the best remedy, at least until the offended person is so far calmed as to listen readily to the voice of reason. And though the advice of Solomon appears at first sight as paradoxical and absurd—yet it is the best that can be offered, "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);" for it will be difficult enough to leave it off when once it is begun.

***~~2. By humility and self-denial.~~***

Gideon might justly have said, "If God has been pleased to honor me, then why should that give any umbrage to you?" But he forbore to take to himself the credit that was his due, or to claim from them the approbation he had merited at their hands. Thus he hid from them the light which had pained their eyes, and cast a veil over the actions which had provoked their jealousy. This was a striking instance of that "charity which does not boast, and seeks not her own, [1 Corinthians 13:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.4-5)." This is a disposition which tends no less to the preservation of our own happiness than it does to the conciliating of those who are offended at us; for when once we are willing to forego the honor to which we are entitled, it will appear a small thing to us to be censured without a cause; seeing that such censures only reduce us to the place which we were previously in our own minds prepared to occupy. And it will almost invariably be found true, that, *as men are ready to despise those who arrogate honor to themselves, so will they be more easily reconciled to those who are humble and unassuming.*

***~~3. By commendation and love.~~***

Gideon, instead of loading his adversaries with blame, was glad to search out causes for commending them. The Ephraimites, though they offered not themselves in the first instance, were of great service in pursuing and destroying the routed foe. They took the two hostile princes, Oreb and Zeeb; and though this was only the gleaning of Gideon's vintage—yet does Gideon speak of it as incomparably greater than anything that had been done by him. And it is particularly deserving of notice, that this was the word which produced the desired effect, "Then their anger was abated, when he had said that."

Thus it appears, that "a soft answer turns away wrath, [Proverbs 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.1);" and that, if we would blunt the edge of other men's displeasure, we should study to conform ourselves to that sublime precept, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves, [Philippians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3)."

***~~On this subject we would found a word or two of advice.~~***

***~~1. Be cautious to not too hastily take offence.~~***

Innumerable circumstances may exist, which, if known to us, would, make us form a very different judgment of men and things, from that which at first sight we have entertained. See this illustrated in [Joshua 22:11-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 22.11-34). *To weigh, and consider, and inquire, is the part of true wisdom; but to be precipitate is a certain indication of folly*, [Ecclesiastes 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.9).

***~~2. If offence is taken at you, labor to the uttermost to pacify it.~~***

This was a leading feature in the character of Jesus, [James 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.19-20); and it must be so in that of all his followers, [Ephesians 4:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1-3) and [Colossians 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12-13), "To feed our enemies, and heap coals of fire on their heads," is the Christian's duty. Therefore, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good! [Romans 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.20-21)."

***~~#269~~***

***~~FAINT, YET PURSUING~~***

***~~[Judges 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 8.4)~~***

"Faint, yet pursuing!"

There are those who speak of Gideon as a type of Christ. But, excepting as a deliverer raised up in an extraordinary manner to Israel, there is scarcely sufficient correspondence between him and our blessed Lord to justify such a representation of him.

As an example to the Church in all ages, and especially as illustrating for our benefit the power and efficacy of faith, we can have no hesitation in commending him to your most particular attention; for he is not only set forth in Scripture under that character in common with many other eminent men, but, together with David and Samuel, he is proposed to us as a pattern which we are bound to follow, "Seeing that we are encompassed with such 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, [Hebrews 11:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.32-33); [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1)."

I would notice him, therefore, under the two-fold character of:  
  a deliverer to Israel,  
  and a model to us.

Or, rather, instead of separating the two, I will combine them; so that the whole subject may come before us in a more luminous and useful point of view.

Let us, then, notice respecting Gideon,

***~~I. His ready obedience to the divine call.~~***

***~~When convinced that God had called him to fight for Israel, he delayed not to execute his commission.~~***

The Midianites had grievously oppressed Israel. By a kind of predatory warfare, they annually desolated the whole land. Gideon was threshing out some corn, in order to hide it from the Midianites; and God sent an angel to inform him, that, through his instrumentality, the country should be delivered from its invaders. This seemed to be a hopeless and almost impossible event; but when God had shown him, by repeated signs, that the office of delivering Israel was committed to him, he cheerfully obeyed the call, and addressed himself to the work assigned to him, [Judges 6:1-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.1-35).

***~~The same promptitude, brethren, is expected at your hands.~~***

You are called to war against the enemies of God and his people. Satan has exercised a most tyrannic sway over the whole world, "leading them captive at his will." But the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the trumpet to be sounded throughout all your coasts, that you may flock to his standard, and arm yourselves for the combat. Let none say: The enemy is too powerful for me; I cannot venture to oppose him. The command is absolute; and every one of you must gird on his armor, and prepare to "war a good warfare."

Let there be no reluctance, brethren, no timidity, no "conferring with flesh and blood." It is a disgraceful bondage to which you have been subjected; and the time is come for you to free yourselves from it. I call on all of you, therefore, to obey the summons, and in every possible way to approve yourselves "good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

But be sure to follow Gideon in this,

***~~II. His simple dependence on divine aid.~~***

***~~Admirably did Gideon's faith display itself on this occasion.~~***

Most particularly is this noticed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "By faith Gideon and the others subdued kingdoms, [Hebrews 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.33)." There came, in obedience to his summons, thirty-two thousand men. But God directed him to dismiss from among them all who were timid; and instantly was his army reduced to ten thousand men. But even these were more than God chose to employ; and therefore Gideon was ordered to bring them down to a stream, and to separate those who lapped like a dog, from those who bowed down to drink like cattle; and to reserve the former only for his companions in arms. Of those who lapped, there were only three hundred; and these were all who were left to him to go against the Midianites, who amounted in all to one hundred and thirty-five thousand men.

But not even these were to be employed in one compact body; no; scarcely two of them were to be together; they were to occupy an immense tract of ground, surrounding the whole camp of Midian. Nor were they to make a simultaneous attack; but every one of them was to take a pitcher and a lamp and a trumpet, and to break their pitchers and blow their trumpets, and to stand in their place, crying, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

What an armament, and what a disposal of the troops, according to the judgment of sense, was this! It was the direct way to have every soul among them slain in an instant; for not one of them could escape through darkness; since every one held his lamp, as it were, for the express purpose of making himself a mark for the spear or sword of his enemy, [Judges 7:1-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.1-21). But Gideon presumed not to sit in judgment on the directions given him. It was sufficient for him to know what God's appointment was; and to that he submitted, without hesitation or delay.

***~~It is also the good fight of faith which you are now called to fight.~~***

There must be no dependence on an arm of flesh. You must "go forth in the strength of the Lord," and of him only. To overcome through the simple exercise of faith, may appear strange; but it is the way appointed by God himself, who will have all the honor of your success, and will allow "no flesh to glory in his presence." "To stand still, and see the salvation of God" with you, may appear to savor of presumption; but it is infinitely greater presumption to invade the prerogative of God, and to take on ourselves the work that belongs to him alone.

The proclamation of his name, and the exhibition of his light, are doubtless proper, as his appointed means for advancing his own glory; but of themselves they can effect no more for the subjugation of our enemies, than could the blowing of trumpets to destroy the walls of Jericho, or the breaking of pitchers to subdue the armies of Midian and of Amalek. It is "by faith you are to walk, and not by sight;" and "according to your faith, it shall be done unto you."

You must further imitate Gideon in,

***~~III. His full determination never to relax his efforts.~~***

***~~Gideon, "though faint" from the excess of his exertions, "yet pursued" his enemies.~~***

A panic having struck the Midianites, they, by mistake, slew one another, so that not less than one hundred and twenty thousand of them fell that night. The remaining fifteen thousand fled. Now Gideon might well have said: The enemy is so weakened, that they cannot invade us any more; I will now, therefore, with my little band of soldiers, take my rest. But he would not on any account act thus. As long as there were any of his enemies remaining, he would pursue them. Though he was quite "faint" with fatigue, he would not cease from his exertions; but followed them, and fell upon them, and slew them, and took captive both their kings, both Zebah and Zalmunna.

***~~What a bright example Gideon is for us!~~***

There must, of necessity, be times and seasons when we are ready to faint in our great warfare, and to wish, as it were, for some relaxation from our labor. Who has not experienced both weariness in duties, and dejection of mind, too, in the conflicts which he has had to sustain? But *it will be time enough for us to rest when we get to Heaven.*Paul was "troubled on every side—yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed, [2 Corinthians 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.8-9);" "for which cause he fainted not, 2 Corinthians 4:16." So must it be with us; whatever progress we have made, we must "forget the things which are behind, and press forward to that which is ahead." "We must never be weary in well-doing," or, if weary in it, we must never be weary of it. Whoever sees us, must see us still "pursuing," and determining never to rest, until every enemy be subdued, and "Satan himself be forever bruised under our feet!"

Above all, we must follow Gideon in,

**IV. His assured expectation of ultimate success.**

**This was very conspicuous.**

His own countrymen, both of Succoth and Penuel, refused even to administer food to his weary soldiers, lest the Midianites should visit it with signal judgments, after having recovered from their present panic. They even ridiculed the optimistic expectations of Gideon, saying, "Are Zebah and Zalmunna yet fallen into your hands, that I should incense them by giving relief to you?" But, notwithstanding that the Midianites were fifty times as numerous as he, he expresses no doubt of final victory over them, and declares to his ungrateful countrymen how he will punish their ingratitude on his return from the expedition.

***~~Thus should we also "hold fast our confidence firm unto the end".~~***

Whatever victories we may have gained, our enemies would soon vanquish us, if we were left to ourselves. But we should never for a moment give way to unbelieving fears. We should neither consider our own weakness, nor the strength of our enemies; but should regard the mightiest foes merely "as bread for us;" as bread, which we shall devour, even "as the ox licks up the grass of the field." We should "know in whom we have believed;" and "be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun the good work in us will carry it on, and perfect it until the day of Christ." However powerful our adversaries may appear, we should say to them, "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!" Has God said, "No weapon that is formed against us shall prosper?" We should go on in full anticipation of victory, and in a certain assurance, that, whatever conflicts we may have to maintain, we shall be "more than conquerors, through Him who loved us!"

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

Are any of you faint, my beloved brethren? I will not act the part of the men of Penuel or Succoth, but will most gladly set before you all the richest provisions which we possess. Here is bread of the finest quality, "the very bread that came down from Heaven," that will not only strengthen and refresh your souls, but actually give life to the dead; and, if you eat to the full of that, you shall go on in the strength of it to the last hour of your lives.

1. Consider whose banners you fight under; even under the banners of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

2. Consider with whom you are contending; they are vanquished enemies; as our Lord himself has told us, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!"

3. Consider where your strength lies; not in yourselves, but in the Captain of your salvation, who has said, that "his grace shall be sufficient for you," and "his strength be perfected in your weakness!"

4. Consider, finally, what will be the fruits of victory; even glory and honor and immortality in the presence of, and in the bosom of your God!

Will you, then, draw back? God forbid! Let me rather urge you to proceed; for as faint as you are, you shall surely overcome. Of Gideon's army, so far as we know, not one died; while the entire host of his enemies were slain. So shall all the powers of darkness fall before you, and not so much as a hair of your head shall perish. "It is not the will of your Father that one of his little ones should perish." In a word, "Do not be weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not!"

***~~#270~~***

***~~GIDEON CHASTISES THE MEN OF SUCCOTH AND PENUEL~~***

***~~[Judges 8:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 8.15-17)~~***

"Then Gideon came and said to the men of Succoth, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me by saying, 'Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your exhausted men?'" He took the elders of the town and taught the men of Succoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briers. He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town!"

[Preached at the time of the French Revolution.]

*Consistency is essential to the character of a child of God.* But pious people are very apt to err in judging of the consistency of others; they would have been ready to condemn the conduct of Paul in relation to many things which he did at one time and forbore to do at another. We do not in general make sufficient allowance for a change of circumstances, which may not only warrant, but demand, a change of conduct.

All would admire the gentleness and forbearance of Gideon, when the Ephraimites blamed him so vehemently for not summoning them to the battle against the Midianites, verse 1-3; but probably they would accuse him of severity and injustice towards the men of Succoth and of Penuel; whereas his firmness in chastising these was no less proper under his peculiar circumstances, than his kindness in forgiving them.

The two cases were not at all parallel; the Ephraimites at least thought honorably of the cause in which Gideon was embarked; but the men of Succoth and of Penuel treated it with contempt. Now the cause was that of God himself; and for despising it, the men of Succoth and of Penuel deserved all that they suffered. Let us consider,

***~~I. The punishment inflicted on the men of Succoth and of Penuel.~~***

***~~The provocation they gave was exceeding great.~~***

Gideon had already destroyed one hundred and twenty thousand of the Midianite army; and was now pursuing with his three hundred men the remnant, who had escaped the general carnage. He had crossed over Jordan, and was following them with all possible ardor; but his men having been engaged all the preceding night and day without any intermission or any refreshment, were faint. Gideon therefore, in passing through Succoth, a city of the tribe of Gad, requested in the kindest manner some provisions for his men; but the elders of the city only insulted him, and endeavored to weaken his hands by deriding the vanity of his attempts. Gideon would not lose any time in debating the matter with them, but warned them that when God delivered the Midianites into his hand, he would return and scourge them all with briers and thorns, verse 7.

He then went forward to Penuel, a neighboring city; but was insulted by its elders precisely as he had been by the men of Succoth. It should seem that the men of Penuel confided in a tower which they had, and thought themselves safer in that, than they could be by any efforts of Gideon, or of God himself in their behalf. Gideon therefore threatened them with heavier vengeance, when God delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into his hands; for, though their ingratitude was the same with that of the men of Succoth, there was in their answer somewhat more of atheistic impiety, which was the ground of a severer sentence against them, verse 9.

***~~The punishment he inflicted on them was just.~~***

Gideon pressed forward, weak and faint as he was, and came upon the Midianites when they conceived themselves to be perfectly secure; and God blessed his efforts, so that the fifteen thousand Midianites were destroyed, and their two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna captured, without the loss of a man belonging to the host of Gideon. Instantly did Gideon return, with his royal captives, to the two ungrateful cities which had refused him sustenance; and executed on their elders the vengeance he had threatened; he punished those of Succoth with briers and thorns; and those of Penuel with death, and the destruction of their boasted tower.

Now we say that this was just. Had the injury which he had sustained been purely *personal*, it would have befit him to pass it by, and to leave the punishment of it to a righteous God, who says, "Vengeance is mine! I will repay!" But he acted as a magistrate who was authorized to punish the treason of which these people had been guilty.

Considered as an act of ingratitude only, it was exceeding sinful; for what could be more base than to refuse a meal to those who had at the peril of their own lives delivered the whole nation from the yoke of Midian; and were now, though only three hundred in number, following the remaining fugitives, fifty times as numerous as themselves, in order to extirpate them entirely?

But it was treason, both against the state, and against God; it was the very way to prevent the execution of Gideon's designs against the enemies of God and his people. And if God had not miraculously renewed the strength of the victors, this refusal of food to them would have done more to vanquish them than all the hosts of Midian had been able to effect.

If Gideon had demanded that the men of Succoth and of Penuel should join in the pursuit, he would have required no more than he was authorized to do. The Ephraimites had not only acknowledged this, but had thought themselves slighted because it had not been done, verse 1; and he might justly, considering whose cause he was engaged in, have punished them severely for a refusal, see [Judges 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 5.23); but when his request was so moderate, and his necessity so urgent, and the probable consequences of their refusal so injurious to the whole nation, he did right in making an example of such wicked traitors.

Having vindicated this act of justice, let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. The lessons it suggests to us.~~***

It is very instructive to us both,

***~~1. In a civil view.~~***

The men of Succoth and of Penuel well illustrate the character and conduct of many among ourselves. The burdens of war must of necessity be borne by all the nation. But it will be found generally applicable in a time of war; and methinks they should be cheerfully borne by every member of the community; for, to whom do we owe our security, but to those who are standing forth in our defense, and, under God, are combating our enemies with success? It is true, we feel the pressure of the taxes as a burden; and by means of them we are deprived of comforts which we might otherwise enjoy; but what are our privations in comparison with those which are experienced by our fleets and armies? Little do we think what they have to bear; or what obligations we owe to them for exposing themselves to so many fatigues and dangers in our defense. Shall we then grudge to the state whatever is necessary for their support? Is not the murmuring on account of our burdens, and the striving to elude them, highly criminal?

The men of Succoth and of Penuel had some excuse for their ungenerous conduct; for they intimated that by contributing to aid Gideon in the pursuit, they should only bring on themselves the heavier vengeance from the Midianites, as soon as ever they should have recovered from their panic.

But what excuse have we? Their interest seemed to lie on the side of neutrality; but ours is altogether on the side of energy and exertion. Let us only consider what our enemies would exact of us, if they were to reduce us under their power; truly "their little finger would be heavier than the loins" of our own governors; instead therefore of grudging what is necessary for the support of our government, we should rejoice and bless God for the security that we enjoy under their watchful care.

***~~2. In a religious view.~~***

The whole of that astonishing transaction tends to inspire us with confidence in God, and to encourage our exertions in his cause. But there are two lessons in particular which we shall do well to learn from it:     
  1. To prosecute the spiritual warfare under all discouragements ourselves.

  2. To put no discouragements in the way of others.

That we shall find discouragements in our warfare is certain:  
sometimes from the number and power of our enemies;  
sometimes from the fewness and weakness of our friends;  
sometimes from the inefficacy of our past exertions;  
and sometimes from the protracted continuance of a struggle which we had fondly hoped to have seen terminated long before.

But we must go forth, like Gideon, in the strength of the Lord, and, though "faint, we must yet be pursuing, verse 4;" nor must we ever look for rest, until we have gotten the final victory over all our enemies.

We must remember:

1. Whose cause it is.

2. Under whose banners we are enlisted.

3. Whom we have for our Guide and Protector.

4. Whose word is pledged for our final success.

What though God reduces the number of our friends to ever so low an ebb?

What though God sends us forth with no better armor than a trumpet and a lamp?

What though our enemies are so great and numerous, that, after having been vanquished by us a thousand times, they still appear, according to human apprehension, invincible by such an arm as ours?

What though we are so feeble that we seem incapable of continuing the contest any longer?

Shall we give up? No! We must still fight on, assured of victory; knowing, that "when we are weak, then we are strong;" that "God will perfect his own strength in our weakness;" and that, "if God be for us, none can" possibly succeed "against us!"

At the same time that other lesson must be attended to: Not to put any discouragement in the way of others. Almost all people are ready to obstruct, rather than to aid, the Christian in his spiritual progress. Those of the same family and kindred will discountenance his zeal; and even some who profess to be of the true Israel, will represent his duties as impractical, and his efforts as hopeless.

But God is indignant with those who would weaken the hands of his people. He would have us rather encourage one another to the utmost of our power. His command is, "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; say unto them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; your God will come and help you! [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4) and [Hebrews 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.13)."

It is said of our Lord, that "he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory!" Let us, like him, "carry the lambs in our bosom, and gently lead those that are with young;" yes, let us so unite our efforts with theirs, that we may be sharers in their triumphs, and partakers of their glory!

***~~#271~~***

***~~JOTHAM'S PARABLE~~***

**[Judges 9:7-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 9.7-15)**

"When Jotham was told about this, he climbed up on the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted to them, "Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen to you. One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' "But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?' "Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' "But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' "Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' "But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?' "Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.' "The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'"

The method of instructing by *parables*is of great antiquity; it prevailed among the Jews from the earliest period of their history; but the first parable that is recorded, and indeed the first extant in the world, is that which we have just read. The peculiar excellence of that mode of instruction is, that it arrests the attention more forcibly, and conveys knowledge more easily, than a train of reasoning could do; and convinces the judgment, before that prejudice has had time to bar the entrance of truth into the mind.

The parable before us is exceeding beautiful, and admirably adapted to the occasion on which it was spoken. That we may open it fully, we shall consider,

***~~I. The occasion of it.~~***

Gideon had refused the promotion which all Israel had offered him.

After the expulsion of the Midianites, "the men of Israel proposed to make Gideon their king, and to perpetuate that honor in his family; but Gideon, having no reason to think that this invitation was from God, and being desirous that God alone should be the king of his people, declined the honor, saying, "The Lord shall rule over you! [Judges 8:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 8.22-23)."

At the same time, wishing to preserve the remembrance of those astonishing victories which God had wrought for them by him, he requested his victorious soldiers to give him the golden earrings which they had taken from the Midianites, together with the chains which were about the necks of their camels; and with them he made a very splendid ephod, which was consecrated unto God. Whether he intended to make use of this ephod in the place of that which had been made for Aaron, [Exodus 28:6-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.6-12), we cannot say; but we have no doubt of his having sincerely intended to honor God by it; though, alas! through the proneness of the heart to superstition and idolatry, "it became a snare to him, and to his house! [Judges 8:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 8.27)." In a word, he affected not honor for himself and his family, but desired only that God should be glorified.

After his death however, his son Abimelech aspired to, and gained, the throne of Israel.

Gideon had seventy sons by many different wives; and, by a concubine, one, whom he called Abimelech. This bastard son, being of an ambitious mind, made use of his mother's relations to impress the minds of the Shechemites with an idea that all the seventy sons of Gideon would be so many petty tyrants among them; and that it would be better for them to have one king over them, than so many; and that, if they were of that opinion, they would do better to choose Abimelech, who was related to them, than any of the others, who had no particular interest in their welfare.

Having thus insinuated himself into the favor of the Shechemites, he prevailed upon them to supply him with money out of the treasury of Baal-berith, their idol; and with that "he hired reckless people" to go with him and murder all his seventy brethren.

What a solemn proof is this, of the cruel nature of ambition, which could instigate him to such an inhuman act; and of the ease with which instruments may be procured to perpetrate any evil that the human heart can conceive! The deliberation with which this bloody man executed his project, was truly astonishing; one would have supposed, at least, that he would murder them all hastily in their beds; but, as though he delighted in that accursed work, he brought them all forth, and "slew them all on one stone, verses 5, 18."

*Jotham*alone, the youngest of them all, escaped; and, when he was informed that Abimelech had been made king, he availed himself of an opportunity which some public meeting of the Shechemites afforded him, to stand on Mount Gerizim, and address the principal inhabitants. His address was short, as one would naturally expect; but it was much to the purpose; and it was contained in the parable which we have read, together with a brief application of it to their own conduct.

Such was the occasion of the parable; we proceed to explain,

***~~II. The import.~~***

Two leading truths are contained in it:

***~~1. That worthless men desire the honors which the wise and good decline.~~***

The character of the wise and good is fitly represented by those valuable trees, the olive, the fig, and the vine. The *olive-tree*was useful for the honoring of God in the sacrifices, and man in his attainment of royal or priestly honors; the *fig-tree*was productive of most delicious fruit; and the *vine*, by its generous juices, cheered the heart of man, at the same time that it afforded acceptable libations unto God.

What more beautiful images could have been found, whereby to portray the character of a man who lives only to honor God, and to benefit his fellow-creatures? Such a man was Gideon; who, sensible of the snares and difficulties of royalty, was desirous rather to do good in the station in which God had placed him, than, by an elevation to a higher sphere, to encumber himself with anxious and unproductive cares.

On the other hand, the *bramble*fitly represented a worthless person, who, grasping at power, is ready to obtain it by any means; and, while he is extravagant in his demands of confidence, is cruel and oppressive to all who are not subservient to his will.

Such exactly was Abimelech; he promised great things to Shechem, while he gave them, in the first moment of his advancement, an evidence of his atrocity, and a sure pledge of his future tyranny!

What was primarily intended to mark the characters of Gideon and Abimelech, is applicable to man in every age.

The wise and good are unambitious. If clearly called of God to any office, they undertake it, as Gideon did, for the Lord's sake; but they do not seek advancement for themselves; they do not affect situations of dignity and power; they cultivate a humble and contented mind; and study rather to be *good*than *great*.

Not so the noisy demagogue, who depreciates and defames others, only the more effectually to exalt himself.

***~~2. That they who unduly desire honor, and they who unjustly confer it, will prove sources of misery to each other.~~***

This was intimated in the parable, but more fully explained in the subsequent application of it. Jotham appealed to the consciences of the men of Shechem, whether they had acted as they ought to have done towards Gideon and his family; if they could say they had, he wished them every benefit from Abimelech's administration, which they themselves could desire; but, if not, then he warned them that they would prove a curse to each other, verse 16-20.

And this also is a general truth, that *usurpers seldom fail of being a curse to the people whom they govern*, and that those who aided them in their usurpation rarely continue faithful to them in a day of adversity. Were an instance wanted to confirm this truth, we need only look at all the powers of Europe who have been successively cajoled and injured by the great oppressor of the continent; who, having waded to his throne through seas of blood, stops not at any measures that may consolidate or extend his ill-gotten authority. And what returns he will receive from those who have contributed to his exaltation, time will show; but, as he is even now regarded by them as a plague to the earth, it will be a miracle if they do not, when a fit opportunity occurs, prove also a plague to him!

This parable was in the nature of a prophecy; of which we now proceed to consider,

***~~III. The accomplishment.~~***

Never was a prophecy more exactly fulfilled. "The triumph of the wicked is short!" For three years Abimelech enjoyed the fruit of his wickedness; but then God "sent an evil spirit between him and the Shechemites," and stirred them up to "deal treacherously with him, verse 23." What the cause of their disaffection was, we know not; but they so hated him, as to set assassins to lie in wait for him, and destroy him, verse 25. Their disloyalty appearing, one soon rose up to foment the division, and to head the conspiracy. *Turbulent people are never lacking to fan the flames of discord, and to seek their own elevation on the ruin of others*. Such a one was Gaal, who, though probably a Canaanite, proposed himself as the fitter person to govern the state, and encouraged them at a drunken revel to curse and execrate Abimelech.

Zebul however, a chief officer in the city, retained, though covertly, his allegiance to Abimelech; and sent him word of all that passed, together with directions for crushing the conspiracy. At the same time he endeavored to lull asleep the fears of Gaal, so that he might be taken by surprise; and, when Gaal could no longer be deceived, he urged him, in the same derisive strain, to go forth and meet his adversary in the field of battle; but no sooner had Gaal gone forth, than Zebul interposed to cut off his retreat to the city, verse 26-38, 41.

The plan of Zebul succeeded; Abimelech speedily overthrew Gaal and his adherents; then he proceeded to fight against the other conspirators in the city; and, having taken the city, he slew all its inhabitants. Some indeed took refuge in a tower; which however, by cutting down branches of trees from an adjacent wood, and setting them on fire, he instantly destroyed, together with a thousand people that were in it. Having desolated thus the whole place, he beat down the city, and sowed it with salt, in token that its destruction should be perpetual, verse 39-49.

The revenge of Abimelech, one might have supposed, would by this time have been satisfied; but it was not so; for, as there were many dissatisfied people at Thebez also, a neighboring city, he went and slew them also; and, when some of them also took refuge in a tower, he proceeded to use the same stratagem against them; but being grown incautious from success, he went too near the tower, so that a woman threw a piece of a millstone upon his head, and broke his skull; and he, indignant at the thought of being killed by a woman, "ordered his armor-bearer to slay him, that it might not be said: A woman slew him! verse 50-54."

Behold now how exactly the parable was verified! "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and his subjects," on purpose that their ingratitude to Gideon and his family might be punished, verse 23, 24; and the outcome of the contest, as the historian remarks, was a literal accomplishment of Jotham's prediction; Abimelech and the Shechemites mutually proving a scourge and a curse to each other, verse 56, 57.

***~~From this history then we may learn,~~***

**1. To be unambitious in prosperity.**

Never had man a better opportunity to gratify ambition than Gideon; yet he forbore to do it, and preferred the station which God in his providence had assigned him. In this he was truly wise. The acquisition of power is, in fact, the dereliction of ease. The increase of comforts by means of it, bears no proportion to the increase of cares. Solomon in all his grandeur found nothing but "vanity and vexation of spirit." Jeremiah's advice to Baruch is worthy the attention of all, "Are you seeking great things unto yourself? Seek them not!"

***~~2. To be patient in adversity.~~***

Great indeed was the cause of complaint which Jotham had both against Abimelech and the Shechemites; yet behold, here were no invectives against them; he contented himself with simply declaring in God's name his testimony against them. Had he been an uninterested person, he could not have borne his testimony in milder terms. This is a pattern which we shall do well to follow. Let us therefore "not render evil for evil, or railing for railing," but "commit ourselves to Him who judges righteously."

***~~3. To look forward to a future time of retribution.~~***

*We may appear for a season to succeed, and to reap a pleasant fruit from the iniquities we have sown.* But what did Abimelech's success avail him at the end of three years? What does he think of all his murders at this hour? Just so, we may appear to succeed in the acquisition of unlawful pleasures or dishonest gains; but what shall we reap from such practices in a little time? and what comfort will our confederates in iniquity afford us at the last day?

Now the vile seducer or the base adulterer may rejoice in, and with, his guilty companions; but what execrations will they mutually vent against each other, when God's time is come! Know , Beloved, that "evil pursues sinners;" and "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished!"

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***~~JEPHTHAH'S VOW~~***

***~~[Judges 11:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 11.30-31)~~***

"And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

*Vows*were common under the Mosaic dispensation; they were even encouraged by God himself, in order that his people might have opportunities of manifesting the love that was in their hearts by offerings that were not enjoined, and services that were not commanded. In cases of difficulty, where it appeared of more than ordinary importance to secure the divine favor and protection, the patriarchs had resorted to vows, and bound themselves, in case God should grant to them the desired blessing, to render unto him according to the benefits he should confer upon them.

Thus *Jacob*, when he had just left his father and family in order to seek in a foreign land a refuge from his brother's vengeance, vowed, that, if the Lord would be with him and restore him to his home in peace, he would take God entirely for his God, and devote to him a tenth of all that he should possess, [Genesis 28:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.20-22).

In the time of *Moses*, the whole people of Israel resorted to the same measure, in order to obtain success against the Canaanites, [Numbers 21:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.2). This, it must be confessed, has a legal appearance, and looks like offering to make a bargain with God; but vows may certainly be made in perfect consistency with the liberal spirit of the Gospel; for it is intimated, that under the Gospel, yes even in the millennial age, such a practice should prevail, [Isaiah 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 19.21).

We know that *Paul*both made a vow himself, [Acts 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.18), and united with others in services to which by a voluntary engagement they had bound themselves, [Acts 21:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.23-24).

The vow of Jephthah has engaged the attention of learned men in all ages; but they are by no means agreed as to the import of it. We propose,

***~~I. To explain Jephthah's vow.~~***

It must be confessed, that the Jewish writers in general, together with their great historian Josephus, were of opinion, that Jephthah offered his daughter to the Lord as a burnt-offering. Of the same opinion also were the generality of writers in the early ages of the Christian Church. Multitudes also of the most approved authors among the moderns take the same side of the question.

But we are constrained to differ from them; and the more attentively we have weighed their arguments, the more fully are we persuaded that Jephthah did not offer up his daughter as a burnt-offering, but only devoted her to the service, the exclusive service, of the Lord.

In confirmation of this opinion, we would call your attention to the particular circumstances of the vow:

***~~1. The making of Jephthah's vow.~~***

In opposition to the idea of his offering her up for a burnt-offering, we say, that no pious man would have made such a vow. Jephthah was undoubtedly a pious man, as his whole history declares; for at his first acceding to the proposals of his countrymen to stand forth for their deliverance, he laid the matter before the Lord, verse 11; and his vow was expressive of his affiance alone in God for success; besides which, he is celebrated by Paul as one of those eminent men who obtained a good report through their faith, [Hebrews 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.32). Moreover, he was at this time under the influence of the Spirit of God, verse 29.

Now can we suppose that such a man, under such influence, should deliberately vow to God that he would commit murder? that he would murder the first person who should come forth to congratulate him, whether it might be man, woman, or child, yes even if it should be his own, his only daughter? Or, if a dog or other unclean animal should come forth, he would offer it up for a burnt-offering? Could he conceive that this would be pleasing to God, and that such a vow as this would be likely to procure success? Had not the law said, "You shall not kill! [Exodus 20:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.13)." and had not God expressly forbidden his people to imitate the heathen in offering human sacrifices? [Deuteronomy 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.31). Had not the law prescribed, that if a man should unintentionally kill his slave, he should be punished? [Exodus 21:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.20). And could he imagine that the law permitted him intentionally and deliberately to kill his own daughter? It may be said, that the Spirit ordered him to offer up this sacrifice, just as God commanded Abraham to offer up his son Isaac; but I ask, Where is any such thing expressed in this history? And why, if the Sprit of God had ordered a human sacrifice to be made, and he under the influence of the Spirit had vowed to offer one, whence came the rending of his garment, and all his vehement lamentation, upon finding that his daughter was the appointed victim? If he had been called to Abraham's trial, we may well suppose that God would have given to him the faith of Abraham; or at least, that, if he had so greatly failed in this duty, he would not have been so highly commended as an example of faith.

But we say again, that there is not the smallest intimation that the Spirit of God did give any such order to him; nor can we conceive that if, for the trial of his faith, God had given it, he would have ever allowed it to be carried into execution; but would rather have interposed to prevent it, as he did in the case of Isaac.

But, as no pious man would have made such a vow, so, if Jephthah had made it, the law itself had provided a ransom for her. We have before said that vows were encouraged under the law; and people, as well as things, might be devoted to God. But if either people, or things, were devoted to him, the law permitted that a valuation should be made of the devoted thing or person, and that the money should be regarded as a ransom for it, or an offering be presented in its stead. If a human being were devoted, the estimation should vary according to the gender and age of the person; but if it were a beast, then the offerer should give in addition one fifth more than the estimated value as the price of its redemption, [Leviticus 27:2-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 27.2-13).

When the enemies of God and their cities or possessions were, as accursed things, devoted to destruction, they were not to be redeemed at all; they were accursed of God himself, as the Amalekites and Canaanites were, and were therefore not to be spared, [Leviticus 27:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 27.29); and Saul, in sparing Agag, whom God had devoted to destruction, sinned as much as if he had murdered one whom God had ordered to be spared, [1 Samuel 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.3); [1 Samuel 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.9); [1 Samuel 15:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.22-23); [1 Samuel 15:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.32-33).

Now, if we call to mind how eminently conversant Jephthah was with the history of Israel, so as to be able to refute all the claims of the king of Ammon, verse 12-27, we can feel no doubt but that he was well acquainted with the law that prescribed the mode in which devoted things were to be redeemed; indeed his vow was evidently founded on the knowledge of that law; for if a dog had met him first, he would never have dared to offer that in sacrifice to God; consequently he would never have made his vow so indefinitely, if he had not known that the law admitted of an exchange, in case the devoted thing should be improper to be offered.

But supposing that he was ignorant of this law, were the high-priest and all the priests in the kingdom ignorant of it? And, when the execution of the vow was postponed for two months, and great lamentation was made all that time throughout the kingdom on account of the vow, was there no person in all Israel who once thought of this law? If but one person had thought of it, would he not have been very glad to mention it? And would not the mention of it have been most acceptable to Jephthah, when it would have put an immediate end to all his mourning and lamentation? Would he not have been glad enough to pay thirty shekels, the sum prescribed by the law, to save the life of his daughter?

But it may be said, that this was a period of gross darkness; and that idolatry with all its horrid rites prevailed to a great extent, [Judges 10:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.6). To this I answer, that though idolatry had recently prevailed, this was a time of singular reformation; for the people had put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord, [Judges 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.16)." And in such a state of mind, considering what obligations they felt to Jephthah, even if they had not thought of this law, they would have interposed to rescue his innocent daughter from destruction; just as the people, at a later period of their history, rescued Jonathan from the hands of Saul, when the sentence, to which his father's oath had doomed him, was just ready to be executed, [1 Samuel 14:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 14.45).

These arguments, we grant, would have no weight against an express declaration of Holy Writ; but it is nowhere said that such a vow as doomed her to death was ever made. On the contrary we affirm that the terms used by Jephthah do not imply any such thing. The word that is translated and, is frequently used in a disjunctive sense, and should be translated or. In many places it must of necessity be translated or, and actually is so translated in our Bible. See [Exodus 21:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.16-17); [Leviticus 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.3); [Leviticus 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.5); [2 Samuel 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 2.19); and in the margin of our Bibles it is so translated in the very passage before us. Thus translated, the words of Jephthah involve no difficulty; he says, Whatever comes forth of the doors of my house to meet me, shall surely be the Lord's, or I will offer it up for a burnt-offering;" that is, it shall be consecrated to the Lord; or, if it be fit to be offered in sacrifice to the Lord, (as a lamb or goat would be,) it shall be offered to him as a burnt-offering. It is really strange, that, when so easy and obvious a translation occurs, anyone should prefer one so replete with difficulties, as that which has been usually received.

Thus in relation to the making of the vow, we have shown:  
1. that no godly man would make such a vow as this is supposed to be;  
2. that, if made, the law admitted of an exchange;  
3. and that the terms used on the occasion do not imply that she should be put to death.

***~~2. The execution of Jephthah's vow.~~***

Observe the language used by all parties on this occasion, and it will manifestly lead to a very different conclusion from that which has been usually adopted.

Observe the language of his daughter's acquiescence. There is a delicacy in it which throws considerable light on the subject. In noticing the effect of the vow upon herself, she studiously avoids the mention of it. This, if we understand the vow as subjecting her to a state of perpetual virginity, is what might have been expected from her; but, if she was to be offered in sacrifice to God, there is no reason whatever why so solemn an event should not have been expressed in plainer terms.

In requesting a respite of the sentence, which involved in it a seclusion from the world, somewhat like that which has been practiced by Nuns in later ages, she does express what in the first instance she had only glanced at, "But grant me this one request: Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry, [Judges 11:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 11.37)."

Here she mentions that which constituted the substance of the vow. Had she been consigned to death, she would rather have bewailed her premature death, and not merely her virginity. If it is thought, that her piety kept her from bemoaning her death, and that she bemoaned her virginity merely as a circumstance that seemed to render her death opprobrious; I answer, that the same piety that reconciled her to death, would certainly have reconciled her to the opprobrium of dying in a virgin state; exactly as Isaac was willing to forego his prospects in relation to the promised Seed, when he yielded up himself to be slain in sacrifice to God.

If it be said, that, on a supposition she was doomed only to a state of perpetual virginity, there was no occasion for her having two months given her to bewail her fate, since she would have had her whole life wherein to bewail it. I answer, that, in the apprehension of Jewish women, it was a great calamity to be childless, since they had not the honor of increasing the number of the Lord's people, or a hope that the Messiah might spring from them; and this was a peculiarly heavy calamity to her, because she was the only child of Jephthah, verse 34; and her doom cut her off from all prospect of raising up a seed who should inherit his honors, and follow his example.

Therefore it was proper that there should be a public kind of mourning observed, not only in honor of her who thus freely sacrificed all her prospects in life, but in honor of Jephthah also, who in this instance exercised most eminent self-denial, and might be considered as almost dead.

Next observe the language in which is recorded his performance of his vow, "Her father did with her according to his vow which he had vowed; and she knew no man." Why is this latter circumstance mentioned, but to show wherein the accomplishment of the vow consisted? Is it not strange that this should be mentioned so often, and her death be never once noticed, if indeed she was put to death? But, if she was only doomed to a state of perpetual virginity, the reason of the expression is clear enough.

In addition to all this, observe the language in which the commemoration of the event is mentioned, "It was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year." If she was dead, there was scarcely any adequate reason for the daughters of Israel to go four times a year to one particular place to lament her; for they might as well have lamented her at home; but if she was alive, and secluded from company all the rest of the year, there was reason enough why they should visit her then. But the word which we translate to lament, is in the margin of the Bible translated to talk with; and this assigns the true reason of those stated convocations; her female friends went to condole with her on the occasion, and to do her honor.

Even the manner in which she is mentioned in this passage seems to bespeak her a living person; they went to talk with "the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite." Had she been offered in sacrifice to God, there would probably have been something more descriptive of her character; but, if she was still living, this is the only description of her that we should expect to find.

But there is yet a third source from whence we may derive arguments in confirmation of this point. We have noticed the vow in reference both to the making, and the execution of it; let us now proceed to notice,

**3. The honor God put upon Jephthah's vow.**

In consequence of this vow, "God delivered the Ammonites into the hands" of Jephthah, verse 32, 33. But would God have sanctioned in this manner a gross act of deliberate murder? Would not this have been the very way to deceive his people, and to make them think that he was pleased with such offerings as the heathen presented unto Moloch? And when in future ages he punished his people for offering human sacrifices, might they not justly have pleaded, that he in this instance had both approved and rewarded them?

Again, Paul, in his catalogue of eminent believers, particularly mentions Jephthah, and with an express reference to this event. Jephthah had shown his faith by looking to God for victory, and by going forth against the Ammonites in an assured dependence upon him, as the protector of Israel, and the rewarder of all who trust in him; and this act of his is a subject of high commendation with God himself. Now I ask: Would this act have been so commended, if it had been ushered in with such an impious vow, and been followed by such a deliberate murder? But if the vow imported only that whatever met him first at his return should be *consecrated*to God, and if, in consequence of that vow, he did with such steady self-denial proceed to the performance of it—then is God's approbation easily accounted for, even while we condemn the indefiniteness and rashness with which the vow was made.

It may be objected to this, that no other instance of devoting a person to virginity occurs. It is true; but neither does any other instance of devoting a person to death. The instance of Abraham and Isaac is not at all in point; for there the determination to offer Isaac was not the result of a rash vow, but of a divine command; and God had a right to dispose of Isaac's life in any way he pleased; but Jephthah had no right whatever over his daughter's life.

The right usurped by wicked Saul over his son Jonathan (which however was properly and successfully resisted) will scarcely be brought in justification and support of such a claim.

It may further be objected, that parents had no right to devote a daughter to perpetual virginity. This also may be true. Some right of this kind however seems to be acknowledged; 1 Corinthians 7:37-38; but much less had they any right to devote her unto death.

The most specious objection however against our interpretation is, that, supposing he only devoted her to God, there was no reason why she should remain unmarried; since Samson and Samuel, both of whom were devoted to God from the womb, were both married. But the case is extremely different between a man and a woman; they were at liberty to serve God in any way that they judged to be agreeable to his will; but she, if she had married, would have been under the control of her husband, who might in a variety of ways have interfered with such a discharge of her duties as the vow implied; and therefore it was necessary that she should remain unmarried, and that she should also be secluded in a great measure from society itself; that being the way in which a woman might serve the Lord, as men served him by waiting on him continually in the tabernacle.

As to the objection, that if he had only devoted her in the sense that we maintain, he would not have so deplored her fate, it has no weight; for as she was his only child, all the distress occasioned to her came with double force on him, who was thereby doomed, and by his own folly too, to have his name and posterity cut off from Israel.

Such, we are persuaded, was the vow that Jephthah made; we proceed,

***~~II. To suggest some instruction from Jephthah's vow.~~***

Both the father and the daughter afford us very instructive lessons. We may learn,

**1. To avoid the rashness of Jephthah.**

We cannot be wrong in condemning this, since Jephthah himself lamented it. It may be thought that we are in no danger of imitating it; but what do we do in rash oaths? Do we not tread in the very steps of Jephthah? There is scarcely an office to which we can be introduced, whether civil or religious, that is not entered upon by first taking an oath to fulfill the duties of it. Yet if there be a post of honor or profit to be obtained, how little do men in general think of the oaths by which they are to gain access to it! Would to God that this matter were considered by the legislature; and that penalties were substituted in the place of oaths! Truly "by reason of oaths the land mourns," and the consciences of thousands are greatly burdened. I cannot but consider the *frequency*of oaths, the *ease*with which they are administered, and the *indifference*with which they are taken, as among the most crying sins of the nation.

There is another way also in which we follow the steps of Jephthah, namely, by undertaking so lightly the office of sponsors for the children of our friends. The providing of sponsors to supply the place of parents who shall be removed, or disqualified for the instruction of their children in the fear of God, is excellent; but the engaging solemnly before God to perform their office is no light matter. Let anyone read the baptismal service, and see what it is that he undertakes; and then let him see what little attention is paid to these vows in general, or, perhaps, what little attention he himself has paid to them. It will be well if we lay this to heart in the future.

Perhaps we have, like Jephthah, inconsiderately opened our mouths to the Lord; let us then at least, like Jephthah, proceed to the performance of our vows. The duty we have undertaken may be difficult and self-denying; but if he, after having unintentionally devoted his only daughter to the Lord, would not go back, notwithstanding the sacrifice was so exceeding great, so neither should we hesitate to perform the most difficult of our vows.

But there is yet another way in which we follow the steps of Jephthah. Who has not in a time of sickness, or danger, or trouble, or alarm, determined with himself, that, if he should be delivered, he would devote himself more unto the Lord, and to the pursuit of heavenly things? Look back, all you who have been restored from sickness, you who have been delivered from the pangs of childbirth, you who have seen your friends or relatives cut off by death, you who have been in a storm at sea, or been alarmed by thunder and lightning! Look back, and call to mind the vows that are upon you; and see how Jephthah will rise up in judgment against you for your violation of them.

How this subject applies to the vows taken by *ministers*, I need not say; but if I were addressing them, methinks the subject would apply with ten-fold force to them, seeing that their vows were all taken with foresight and solemnity, and involve duties more important than pertain to any other situation under Heaven.

But, whatever be their office or character, two things I would say to all:  
  1. Be cautious in *making*vows.  
  2. Be conscientious in *performing*them.

Inquire into the nature and extent of any engagements before you enter into them; for, as Solomon says, "It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows, [Proverbs 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.25)."

If we have rashly engaged ourselves to do what the law of God positively prohibits, we must recede from our vow, and humble ourselves before God for our temerity. The forty conspirators who swore that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul, and Herod who swore that he would give his daughter whatever she should ask of him—had no right to bind themselves to such an extent, and would have sinned less in violating, than they did in keeping, their engagements.

But where our vows are practical, they must be kept, even though the observance of them be attended with great cost and trouble, [Deuteronomy 23:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 23.21-23); and the attempting to set them aside by the plea of inadvertence or of difficulties attending the observance of them, will only deceive our own souls, and bring upon us the heavy displeasure of our God, [Ecclesiastes 5:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.4-6). We remember the judgments which God inflicted upon the whole Jewish nation in the time of David, for Saul's impiety in violating an engagement which had been hastily contracted by Joshua four hundred years before in favor of the Gibeonites, [Joshua 9:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 9.19) with [2 Samuel 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 21.1); and much more will God visit upon us in the eternal world the violation of engagements entered into by ourselves. "Vow then unto the Lord," if you see it good, "but pay it, [Psalm 76:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.11);" and say with David, "I will go into your house with burnt-offerings; I will pay you my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth has spoken, when I was in trouble, [Psalm 66:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.13-14)."

***~~2. To imitate the piety of his daughter.~~***

Very eminent was her deportment on this occasion.

Great was her love of her country,  
great her love towards her father,  
great her reverence for an oath,  
and great her zeal for God.

O that there were such a spirit in all the daughters of our land! Assuredly the conduct of this pious female may lead them to consider how much they are bound to consult the judgment of their parents in relation to marriage; for though we do not think that a parent's authority extends to a prohibition of marriage, which is an ordinance instituted by God himself—yet we have no doubt but that it is the duty of children to pay a deference to the judgment of their parents, and never, unless in extreme cases, to form a marriage connection contrary to their commands.

Need I say however, that when engagements are formed, they are not to be broken. The whole world unites in condemning so base, so iniquitous a conduct, as that of repudiating a person betrothed. But it has been thought by some, that if one who has in his unconverted state formed an engagement, becomes converted, he may then break his engagement, because he is "not to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever." But does religion justify the violation of our vows? God forbid! The very thought is a libel upon God himself. None but the person with whom the engagement is made, can liberate us from our vows. If indeed a woman to whom one was engaged, were to disgrace herself by some gross immorality, it might be a reason for refusing to continue the engagement with her, because she has ceased to be the person with whom the engagement was formed.

So, if an engagement were formed with a person on account of his supposed piety, and he were to cast off all regard for piety, his change of character would warrant a termination of the contract that had been made with him; because the very grounds of the engagement are subverted. But where, for the gratifying of our own inclination, excuses are sought out for receding from an engagement, God himself will be the avenger of the injured party.

There is one point in particular which the conduct of this pious virgin may well impress on the minds of all who belong to the Established Church. I mean, the observance of those vows which were made for us in baptism; Of those vows our parents will never have reason to repent; nor can we ever regret that they were made for us. No mournings, no lamentations will ever be excited by our performance of them. The ungodly world indeed may regret that we have renounced its ways and vanities; and Satan may regret that we have cast off his yoke; but all the saints and angels will rejoice; yes, "there is joy among the angels in the presence of God over one sinner who repents." Even God himself will "be glad and make merry with us," and will "rejoice over us to do us good." True it is, that such a consecration of ourselves to God is difficult and self-denying; but it is our truest wisdom, and our highest joy. To all of you then I say, "Dedicate yourselves to God by a perpetual covenant not to be forgotten! [Jeremiah 50:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.5)." Yes, "I beseech you by the mercies of God that you yield yourselves to God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

***~~#273~~***

***~~MANOAH'S VISION~~***

***~~[Judges 13:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.22-23)~~***

"We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!" But his wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this."

After a brief mention of several judges who successively bore sway in Israel, we are led to the contemplation of one whose birth, as well as life, deserves particular consideration. To his parents a revelation was made respecting him; which revelation, together with the effects of it on their minds, will form the subject of our present discourse.

Let us notice,

***~~I. The revelation made to them.~~***

The Israelites for their iniquities were brought under the power of the Philistines, who oppressed them sorely and for a long period. But God of his own grace and mercy raised up unto them a deliverer. Other deliverers had been raised up at once, and at the precise time that the deliverance was to be effected; but, in the present instance, the person who was to be God's instrument of good to the nation, was not even conceived in the womb. He was to be born, as Isaac and Jacob had been, of a mother who was barren; in order that he might more eminently appear to be a special gift of God. "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines, [Judges 13:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.1-5)."

The law relating to Nazarites required a total abstinence from wine, or strong drink, or from anything unclean, [Numbers 6:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.2-8); And as his consecration to this state was to commence from his first formation in the womb, his mother was immediately to observe all that kind of abstinence which was required of the Nazarite himself, and to continue it until the child should be both born and weaned. This occurrence she mentioned to her husband, together with the charge given to herself respecting the abstinence that was required verse 6, 7. Manoah, being strong in faith, entertained no doubt respecting the accomplishment of the Angel's words; but being desirous that the mercy intended to the nation should not be obstructed by any error or neglect on his part—he besought the Lord that the same person should be sent to them again, to teach them more fully whatever was necessary for them to know, or do, respecting the child.

The visit was repeated, according to his desire; and the testimony was confirmed by a visible display of the divine power. Manoah, not knowing who this angel was, whether he was only a man, or an angel in human shape, or whether he was not the Angel of the Covenant, even the Son of God himself in human shape, requested permission to set before him a banquet, or an offering, as might be most suited to his character; but when he had presented an offering, fire, probably from the rock or from Heaven, consumed the sacrifice; and the Angel ascended in the flame to Heaven; and thereby testified the acceptance both of their persons and their sacrifice.

Let us now notice,

***~~II. The effect produced upon them.~~***

Great was the faith both of Manoah and his wife; but she, being the more eminent of the two, experienced a very different effect. The revelation produced:

***~~1. In Manoah, fear.~~***

He now perceived and knew, that the person who had announced these tidings to him was God, in human shape; and Therefore he conceived that both he and his wife must die.

This idea was not without some foundation; for, when *Moses*had entreated the Lord to show him his glory, the Lord said to him, "You cannot see my face; for no man shall see me and live;" and for this very reason God put him into a cleft of a rock, and permitted him to see, as it were, only "his back parts, [Exodus 33:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.20-23)."

When *Jacob*had been favored with a visit from the same divine person in the shape of an angel, he expressed his astonishment that "his life was preserved, [Genesis 32:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.29-30)."

Indeed, when only an angel has appeared to some of the most distinguished servants of the Almighty, they have been so agitated, as scarcely to retain possession of their minds, [Judges 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.22); [Revelation 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.10). We do not wonder therefore at his apprehensions; but we the more admire the composure of his wife.

***~~2. In his wife, confidence.~~***

She argued in a very different way. She considered the mercies already given to them as tokens for good; for why should God confer such singular honor upon them, if he intended to kill them? Why did he accept at their hands the burnt-offering? Why did he stoop to give them such information? Why give them such gracious promises? Was all this done to mock them? Indeed, if he should kill them, how could the promises be fulfilled? Or for what purpose were they given?

This was a just mode of arguing; for such mercies were both evidences, and pledges, of his love; and therefore were rather to be considered as pledges of future blessings, than as harbingers of ill.

This was precisely the view which Paul entertained of the mercies conferred on him by God, "who," says he, "delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us, [2 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.10);" and it is the true light in which every instance of his goodness should be considered.

***~~Let us learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. To guard against low and unworthy thoughts of God.~~***

It is a common thought, even among good people, that their blessings are too great to be of any long duration. This sentiment does not arise from a view of the instability of human affairs, but from an apprehension that a continuance of their blessings is too great a thing to expect even from God himself, and that his grace, though rich, is not sufficiently extensive for such a gift.

But how dishonorable is this to God! and what an unworthy return for all his goodness to us! Why should we entertain such a suspicion? why should we harbor such ungenerous thoughts? why should we so limit his glorious perfections? Let such apprehensions be checked in their very first rise; and let us remember that his disposition to give, exceeds our utmost capacity to receive, [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20).

***~~2. To make a just improvement of the mercies he bestows upon us.~~***

We shall do well to magnify the grace of God in our thoughts, and to inculcate upon others the same heavenly disposition. See how David argued on a review of his past mercies, "You have delivered my soul from death; will you not 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, when under peculiar temptation he was led to doubt the continuance of God's goodness to him, he checked himself, by calling to mind the marvelous mercies that had already been given unto him, [Psalm 77:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-11).

Nor is it for the comfort only of the person himself that God imparts these glorious hopes, but for the encouragement of others also; and this was the improvement which Paul made of his own happy experience, [2 Corinthians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.3-4). Only let it be recollected what God has done for us, in giving up his Son to the accursed death of the cross; and can we then limit his tender mercies? Can we doubt his willingness to give us anything else, [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32).

Whether therefore it is for the comfort of our own minds, or for the encouragement of others, this is the thought which we should ever bear in remembrance, and enlarge our own expectations from God in proportion as he multiplies his benefits to us; we should look on all present blessings as the first-fruits that precede the harvest, or as the drop before the shower!

***~~#274~~***

***~~SAMSON'S RIDDLE~~***

***~~[Judges 14:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 14.12-14)~~***

"Let me tell you a riddle," Samson said to them. "If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. If you can't tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes." "Tell us your riddle," they said. "Let's hear it." He replied, "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet."

*Of all the Judges that were in Israel, there was not one who committed so many faults, or by whom God wrought so many miracles, as Samson*. His character is dark and inexplicable; insomuch that, if he had not been celebrated in the New Testament as an eminent believer, we might reasonably have doubted whether he was possessed of any true piety. It must be recollected however, that his history is very short, and that the peculiarity of the dispensation under which he lived may account for many things, which, if done at this time and without the special appointment of Heaven, would be highly criminal. Besides, there might be in him many exercises of true piety, which, if they had been recorded, would have reflected a different light upon his character. The circumstances of his birth we have noticed; those of his marriage are next to be considered.

We cannot approve his conduct in connecting himself with a Philistine woman, though we commend it highly in not forming that connection without having first obtained the consent of his parents. It would seem as if his choice was sanctioned by God, because we are told, that "it was of the Lord that he sought an occasion against the Philistines, verse 4." But this circumstance does not necessarily make the action good; *it may be that God only overruled the evil propensities of Samson, to accomplish his own purposes against the oppressors of his people*. See [Joshua 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 11.20); [1 Kings 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.15).

However, in going down with his parents to Timnah, where the woman lived, he turned aside from them into a vineyard, and, when separated from them, was attacked by a young lion; whom, though unarmed, he tore, as easily as he would have torn a goat, verse 6. This he did through the mighty power of God. Yet though the exploit was so astonishing, he concealed it utterly from his parents, and proceeded with them as though nothing particular had happened unto him, verse 6. What a rare instance of modesty was this! How few people are there in the world, who, if they had performed such an act, could have allowed it to remain hidden from their dearest friends!

Having obtained the consent of the woman, he returned home, and, after a time, went to Timnah with his parents again, in order to take her for his wife and complete the nuptials. In his way, he turned aside again, to view the lion, whom he had slain. His intention probably was to revive in his soul a sense of the divine goodness to him, in having given him so signal a deliverance; but behold, to his utter astonishment, he found a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion! verses 8, 9. Upon this he took of the honey, and ate it, and gave it to his parents; but still concealed the miracle which had been wrought in his favor.

Everything being prepared for the nuptials, he, according to the custom of the country, made a feast of seven days' continuance, at which thirty young men of the Philistines attended as his friends and companions. On this occasion he proposed to them a riddle, which will be profitable for our present consideration.

We will consider it,

***~~I. As proposed on that occasion.~~***

***~~In the proposing of it we see no evil whatever.~~***

There was nothing improper in the riddle itself; it had nothing of an unfitting nature couched under it; and it served as a trial of their ingenuity, and as an occasion of innocent mirth. Indeed its ultimate design was good, inasmuch us it would of necessity lead to a disclosure of the miracle that had been wrought, and consequently to a display of the power and goodness of Israel's God.

***~~But the manner of proposing it was replete with evil.~~***

A wager was laid with all the thirty companions respecting it; and that wager was in itself evil, as being both the root and fruit of covetousness. But, if anyone is disposed to deny that the laying of wagers is evil in its nature, no one, after reading this history, can doubt whether it be evil in its tendency. After three days' fruitless inquiry, the pride of these thirty companions was greatly mortified, and their covetousness excited to a most fearful degree. Not being able to bear the thought of losing their wager, they were filled with indignation, and threatened to burn the bride, together with her father's house, if she did not get the secret from her husband, and reveal it unto them. She, partly through fear, and partly from a partiality for them, labored incessantly to gain from her husband the solution of the riddle. With this view, she wept before him during the remaining days of the feast, pretending that his secrecy was a proof of his lack of affection for her; and at last, having quite wearied him with her importunity, she obtained from him the secret, and then revealed it to them, and enabled them to gain the wager.

Samson might justly have disputed the point with them, because they did not find out the riddle themselves, but obtained the knowledge of it by treachery. But, though he told them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you had not found out my riddle," yet he determined to pay the wager. But what a terrible resolution did he adopt! He determined to kill thirty men of the Philistines, and with their garments to pay the wager that he had lost. It is said indeed that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and slew them;" nor can we presume to question for a moment the justice of God in inflicting such judgments on the enemies of his people. He may take them off when he will, and by whom he will.

But viewing the action by itself, we see in it altogether a most dreadful exhibition of the effects of gambling:  
in his friends, pride, covetousness, wrath, cruelty, and a confederacy to gain by fraud what they could not obtain in any other way;  
in his wife, hypocrisy, deceit, and treachery;  
in Samson, revenge, robbery, and murder!

Perhaps in the annals of the whole world we shall not find a more striking display of the manner in which *gamblings*are contracted, acknowledged, and discharged. They are contracted at friendly and convivial meetings; they are acknowledged as of greater obligation than all the common duties of justice and charity; and the peace of whole families, that were wholly unconnected with the transactions, is invaded. Yes, many are reduced to poverty, to prison, and to death, in order to discharge the debts contracted by the cast of a dice, or by the turning up of a card. I may go further still, and say, that of all the sources of suicide, gambling is by far the most fruitful.

As to the endearments of friendship, or the sweets of conjugal affection, gambling almost invariably produces the same result as in Samson's case, who left the place in disgust, deserted his treacherous wife, and had the mortification to find her afterwards in the embraces of one who had just before professed himself his greatest friend. Would to God that every gambler in the universe would duly consider this history!

We will now proceed to consider the riddle,

**II. As applicable to other subjects.**

We do not mean to assert that it was intended to be applied to other subjects; though, considering the nature of that dispensation, and the peculiar circumstances of his history—it seems highly probable that everything related of him had either a typical aspect or a mysterious import. We wish, however, always to lean to the safer side, and to suggest only in an accommodated sense any observations which would admit of doubt, if applied to the Scripture as expressive of its real import.

With this caution we think the riddle may be applied:

***~~1. To the Lord Jesus Christ himself.~~***

We know that he came down from the bosom of his Father, assumed our nature, sojourned many years upon the earth, and was at last put to death, even the accursed death of the cross. Now what good could we expect to result from this? Must we not rather suppose that the greatest possible evil must accrue from it, even the more aggravated condemnation of the whole world? Yet behold, "out of the eater came forth meat;" out of that, which we would have imagined would prove the destruction of the whole human race, has proceeded the salvation of ruined man!

In this light was this mystery announced to Adam in Paradise, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel! [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)." *Here the very wounds which Satan would inflict on the Lord Jesus, are spoken of as the means of effecting his own destruction!*Isaiah speaks to the same effect, that the Messiah, by making his own soul an offering for sin, would secure to himself a seed who should live forever! [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10); [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12). In the New Testament, the same mysterious representations are given us of Christ, "He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he might condemn sin in the flesh, [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3);" and "that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage, [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15). See also 2 Corinthians 5:21; [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9) and [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24)."

His death would be our life.

His sufferings would be our happiness.

His humiliation would be our glory! Amazing!

Yet so it is; for when he appeared to have been utterly vanquished, he rescued us from the hand of his great adversary, and spoiled all the principalities and powers of Hell, and triumphed over them openly on his cross."

**2. To every member of his mystical body.**

Great and multiplied are the *trials*of the Lord's people. Yet the very billows that threaten to overwhelm them, bear them forward to their desired haven. View the trials which they have in common with the rest of mankind. These are sent to them by God for their good, [Hebrews 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10-11); to improve their graces [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5), and eventually to augment the eternal weight of glory that shall be given them at their departure hence! [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17).

View the trials which they meet with on account of their Christian profession; these are rather a ground of joy than of sorrow, [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12), and are occasions of holy glorying, inasmuch as they are the means of bringing to us much richer communications of divine aid, [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10), and of advancing that very cause which they are intended to repress, [Philippians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12).

Whether therefore the riddle was intended to comprehend these things or not, we are sure that it was not more applicable to the occasion on which it was used, than it is to the trials and deliverances of the Lord's people.

But, in order to unravel this mystery, we must plough with the Lord's heifer, and seek the teachings of his Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.11); [Matthew 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.11).

***~~Two words of advice I would suggest as arising out of this subject.~~***

***~~1. Be frequent in reviewing the mercies of your God.~~***

There is no one who has not met with mercies and deliverances, on account of which he has reason to bless his God. And if we took frequent occasions of reviewing these mercies, what sweetness might we not extract from them; and that not for our own refreshment only, but for the comfort and refreshment of all connected with us!

Though, as must frequently be the case, there may be things in our private experience which we cannot communicate even to our dearest friends—yet it would be impossible but that they must derive benefit from converse with us, after we ourselves have extracted the *honey*which God's dispensations towards us are calculated to afford.

Let us then frequently turn aside even from our dearest friends, or in the midst of the most important business, to contemplate the mercies we have received; and we shall often be surprised at the rich stores of wisdom and consolation which we shall derive from them.

***~~2. Do not be hasty to complain of God's judgments.~~***

The troubles which we may be called to endure, may appear insupportable; and we may be ready to say, like Jacob, "All these things are against me." But, if we wait, we shall find that they are all working for our good; and that though "clouds and darkness may be round about the Lord, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne!"

How many thousands after a time have been constrained to say with David, "It is *good*for me that I have been afflicted!" Know Beloved, that *there is no trial so heavy, but, if you acknowledge God in it, it shall yield you a rich supply of heavenly consolations*. The most striking illustration of this truth will be found in Jehoshaphat's victory over three confederate armies; he was no less than three days in gathering the spoil, [2 Chronicles 20:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.2); [2 Chronicles 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.25); Even that last of enemies, death itself, however formidable it may appear, shall yield sweets to the believing soul. The conflict with death may be severe; but the triumph over it shall be complete, and the fruits of victory eternal!

***~~#275~~***

***~~SAMSON'S CHARACTER AND END~~***

**[Judges 16:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 16.28)**

"Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes."

Scarcely any part of Scripture has afforded more occasion for the doubts of sceptics or the scoffs of infidels, than the history of Samson. True it is, that many strange things are contained in it; but there is nothing in it which may not easily be accounted for by those who consider the nature of that dispensation, and the power of the God of Israel. The doctrine of the Resurrection appeared to many incredible; but our Lord said to them, "You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." The same reply we would make to any people who would question the facts contained in this history.

Samson was raised up by God on purpose to chastise the oppressors of Israel; and he was strengthened by God to effect that by his own arm, which seemed to require the united exertions of the whole nation. The circumstance of his being recorded as a man of faith and piety, gives a great additional interest to his history; because it is difficult to conceive how such inconsistencies should be combined in one person. We must not however attempt to cloak his impieties, because he was a *saint*; nor must we contradict an inspired Apostle, because he was a *sinner*; we should rather examine the different parts of his conduct, so that we may form a just estimate of his character; and we shall find our labor well repaid by many instructive lessons which his history will afford us.

Let us then consider:

***~~I. Samson's character.~~***

It must be confessed that there was in him much amiss. He appears to have been too much actuated by,

**1. A vindictive spirit.**

He knew indeed the peculiar commission given him; but yet in executing that commission he seems to have been influenced more by personal considerations than by true patriotism.

His first slaughter of thirty Philistines was an act of *revenge*for the treachery which he had experienced at his bridal-feast, both from the bride herself, and all his pretended friends.

When he returned afterwards to be reconciled to his wife, and found her given by her own father to another man, he executed the strange device of tying three hundred foxes together, two by two, by their tails, with a fire-brand or torch between each couple, and sending them in among the ripe corn, and the sheaves already cut, as also among the vines and olives; by which he devastated a great extent of the country. This was not so impractical a thing as we are ready to imagine; for the foxes in that country were very numerous, [Song of Solomon 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.15); [Ezekiel 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.4). And Samson, being the chief governor of the Jewish nation, would have many at hand to execute his commands.

And, notwithstanding the Philistines themselves, on hearing of the reason of this conduct, took revenge on his wife and father-in-law by burning them to death. Yet was he bent on further vengeance, and "slew the Philistines, hip and thigh, with a great slaughter."

After this we do not wonder that the Philistines sought to capture him; we only wonder that his own countrymen did not embrace this opportunity of uniting with him to shake off the yoke of their oppressors. The tribe of Judah, among whom Samson had taken refuge, were only alarmed for their own safety; and, to screen themselves, engaged to apprehend him, and deliver him up to the Philistines. On their swearing not to destroy him themselves, Samson surrendered up himself to them; and allowed them to bind him with two new cords. The Philistines seeing him brought to them as a prisoner, exulted greatly, and shouted aloud for joy. But their joy was soon turned into sorrow; for Samson burst the cords asunder, as easily as flax is consumed by fire; and, with the jaw-bone of a donkey, which he found near him, he slew no less than a thousand men.

Now we do not mean to ascribe the whole of this to mere revenge; for we doubt not but that he was moved to it by the Spirit of God; but as Jehu afterwards was actuated by pride even while in other respects he was under a divine impulse, so *Samson was too much under the influence of a vindictive spirit, while in other respects he was executing the designs of Heaven*.

***~~2. A proud spirit.~~***

On this last occasion, when God had given to him so great a deliverance, we would have expected that he would have been forward to give God the glory; but behold, he took all the honor to himself, "With the jaw-bone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw-bone of a donkey have I slain a thousand men! [Judges 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 15.16)." How lamentable, that at such a time he should forget by whom this miracle had been wrought, and should so provoke to jealousy his heavenly Benefactor! This, it is true, is but too common; but how evil it is in the sight of God, we may see in the judgment inflicted for it on a heathen prince; who, when applauded for his eloquence, omitted to give the glory unto God; he was smitten with a mortal disease, and "eaten up by worms! [Acts 12:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.22-23)."

***~~3. A spirit of lust and immorality.~~***

Here was his great failing. His first connection in marriage was imprudent, but not sinful; but when that tie was dissolved by the death of his wife, he seems to have entertained no more thoughts of an honorable connection, but addicted himself to immorality with *harlots*.

On one occasion, for the gratification of his sinful appetites, he put himself in the power of his Philistine enemies, and would have fallen a sacrifice to their rage, if he had not, beyond all reasonable expectation, risen at midnight from the harlot's bed, and, by supernatural strength, borne away the gates of the city which had been barred against him verse 1-3.

At another time he became enamored of a woman, called *Delilah*; and the violence of his attachment to her was before long the occasion of his death. Bribed by the Philistines, she sought to obtain from him information respecting the source of his great strength. He to amuse her, and to avoid a disclosure of so important a secret, told her various things, and submitted to various experiments; all of which issued in wonderful displays of his strength. But at last, "wearied to death" by her incessant importunity, he madly confided to her the secret, 'That his strength would vanish if only his locks were cut, since they were the badge of his Nazariteship, and the token or seal of his consecration to God. That seal once broken, the blessings which God had conferred upon him as a Nazarite would be forfeited and lost.'

She now saw that she had gained her point, and prepared everything for his destruction. But would not one have thought that after such a disclosure he would have taken care not to put himself in her power? Yet behold, he soon afterwards fell asleep with his head in her lap; and afforded her an opportunity of employing a man to cut off his hair. This being done, she woke him, as on former occasions; and he, unconscious that the Lord had departed from him, went forth to shake himself as at other times. But now his strength was gone; and the Philistines seized him and put out his eyes, and bound him with fetters of brass, and made him grind in a prison.

*What a solemn example is here of the miseries consequent upon unbridled lust!*The sinful infatuation it produces, is beyond all conception. Truly the fetters of brass do not form a stronger bond for his feet, than ungoverned passions make for the souls of men. Even reason and common sense often appear to fail the people who are under their influence; insomuch that, with temporal and eternal ruin before their eyes, they rush on until they bring upon themselves the miseries which they would not shun.

***~~How in the midst of all this wickedness can Samson be deemed a saint?~~***

We must make great allowance for the dispensation under which he lived, and the peculiar darkness of his times. But God forbid that we should vindicate such conduct as his! We apprehend that we must look for his piety rather in his latter days than at any time previous to his confinement at Gaza. Certainly his early days were marked with a pious submission to his parents; and it is probable, that, in his wonderful exertions, there was more of affiance in God, and a regard for Israel's welfare, than appears upon the face of the history.

Moreover, when God rebuked his pride by allowing him to be in danger of perishing through thirst, he betook himself to prayer, and obtained a miraculous supply of water from God, by a well opened in Lehi, called "The well of him who cried."

But in our text we see the greatest proof of his piety; as will more fully appear, while we consider,

***~~II. Samson's end.~~***

Like Manasseh, this ill-fated Judge humbled himself in his affliction, and sought the Lord. Of this there is abundant evidence in his prayer. We grant that even here there seems to be a remnant of that vindictive spirit which we have before noticed; but we are willing to hope, that it was the cause of God and of Israel that he desired to avenge, rather than his own. The compliance of God with his request seems to warrant this conjecture. Indeed God's honor, if we may so speak, required such a signal act of vengeance to be inflicted on his enemies.

The Philistines had assembled in a spacious edifice, to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their idol-God. To him they ascribed praise and honor, as having triumphed over the God of Israel. Thousands of their chief men and women were assembled in the place, and three thousand others on the roof; and Samson was brought forth, to be made an object of profane mirth and triumph. Then it was that Samson offered this prayer, and willingly devoted himself to death, that he might be an instrument of God's vengeance on them. The place was supported by two contiguous pillars; and God enabled him, by a wonderful exertion of strength, to pull down the pillars in an instant, and thus to overwhelm at once the whole assembly. He himself fell indeed in the common ruin; but in his death he reminds us of that adorable Savior, who "triumphed over principalities and powers upon the cross," and "by death overcame him who had the power of death, and delivered those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Here we cannot but contemplate the benefits of affliction. At Lehi, it was rendered serviceable to humble his pride; and at Gaza it brought him fully to repentance. We are ready to pity the degraded Judge of Israel when we see him reduced to such a state of misery by his enemies; but, if we pity the man, we congratulate the sinner, to whose final salvation these heavy trials were made subservient! Just so, we congratulate all, whatever their afflictions are, who find them overruled for so great a good.

***~~This subject may well be improved,~~***

***~~I. For warning.~~***

How painful is it to see a person, who had been consecrated to God from his first conception in the womb, and who had given early hopes of fulfilling the desires of his parents and the designs of God, abandoning himself to the lawless indulgence of his appetites and passions! Yet thus it is with many, whose parents have watched over them with the tenderest care, and prayed for them with the most pious solicitude! [Proverbs 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.22). O that those who think lightly of such sins would ponder the cautions given them by Solomon, [Proverbs 5:1-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.1-13); [Proverbs 6:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.25-28); [Proverbs 7:6-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 7.6-27); and learn early to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul!"

**2. For encouragement.**

As great as were the sins of Samson, and as justly as he merited the judgments which he brought upon himself—he found mercy from the Lord at last. *We are sure that every penitent, whatever his crimes may have been, shall obtain mercy, if only he flees for refuge to that Savior whose "blood cleanses from all sin!"*

We by no means encourage any in the indulgence of sin, from a hope that they shall at last repent of it and be saved; for how do they know that they shall live to repent, or that, if their lives are prolonged, true repentance will be granted to them?

But, if any are desirous of humbling themselves for sin before God, let them not despair of mercy. Let them rather expect, that God, who delights in mercy, will be gracious unto them; that he will refresh their weary souls in their deepest extremity, [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18); and that, before God takes them hence, he will give them victory over all their spiritual enemies; so that with their dying breath they shall sing, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

***~~#276~~***

***~~MICAH'S FALSE CONFIDENCE~~***

**[Judges 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 17.13)**

"And Micah said: Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest."

In the history before us we see the commencement of that defection to *idolatry*, which shortly prevailed throughout all the tribes of Israel. The account in point of time precedes the reign of the Judges; for it occurred while Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was the high-priest, and consequently soon after the death of Joshua, [Judges 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.28). And, as being the first step of Israel's departure from God, it is related more circumstantially than its intrinsic importance seems otherwise to have deserved.

Micah was of the tribe of Ephraim. He had stolen a large sum of money from his mother, which she had amassed; but from a dread of the curses which she had imprecated on the head of the guilty person, he had confessed his crime, and restored the money. She, pleased with the repentance of her son, would have given him the money; but he persisting in the refusal of it, she gave two hundred shekels of silver out of the eleven hundred which she had recovered, to form a carved image and a molten idol; which she gave to her son, that he might have them to consult on all occasions. He on his part appropriated to them an room of his house for a temple, and consecrated his son to be a priest, to officiate before them with an ephod, which was made for his use, verses 2-5. But a Levite, who wanted employment, coming that way, Micah engaged him to minister before the idols; and concluded that now he could not fail of being happy, since he had a duly authorized person for his priest.

Just at that time the Danites, who had not yet gained possession of all the land that had been as signed them, determined to go up to Laish, and seize it for their inheritance. But previous to their attack upon the inhabitants, they sent forth spies to search out the state of the people, in order that they might the better judge what force to send against them, and what prospect there was of ultimate success. These spies coming to Mount Ephraim, where Micah lived, desired him to consult God through the medium of his idols; and received from him an encouraging reply. The report of the spies being favorable, six hundred Danites went forth upon the expedition; and coming to the house of Micah on their way, robbed him of his idols, and bribed his priest to accompany them, and to minister to them, as he had done to Micah. After they had succeeded in destroying the inhabitants of Laish, and in taking possession of their land, they set up these idols for their gods, and thus established idolatry, which in process of time spread over the whole land!

But it is not of idolatry in general that we propose to speak, but only of that particular modification of it which Micah established, and of the confidence which he expressed, when *his newly-invented religion*was made to bear some faint resemblance to the Mosaic ritual. This so exactly represents the false confidences to which ungodly men of every age resort, that we shall find it a very profitable subject for our present consideration.

We take occasion then from our text to notice,

***~~I. The false confidences of ungodly men.~~***

The worship established by Micah was a mixture of heathenism and of the Jewish ritual.

It was heathenism, as far as it had respect to idols.

It was Judaism, as far as the use of an ephod and the ministration of a Levite were concerned.

But, as faint as its resemblance was to anything authorized by God, it was sufficient in Micah's judgment to justify a most assured confidence in the divine favor.

**Somewhat of a similar mixture is the religion of the generality of people in the present day.**

It is a combination of Heathenism, and Judaism, and Christianity.

It is in part Heathenism. What are the views which men in general have of God, but such as were entertained by the heathen philosophers? We have, it is true, clearer views of the unity of God; but of his perfections we have scarcely juster apprehensions than the heathen had. Christians in general account of God as a Being who is but little interested about the affairs of this world, either in a way of present control, or of future retribution. All, in their apprehension, is left either to chance, or to the will of man! And provided only some of the more heinous sins be not committed by us, the state of our minds and the habits of our lives will pass altogether unnoticed by him.

To see the hand of God in everything;  
to expect from him the blessings which we ask at his hands;  
to be sensible of his favor or displeasure;  
to regard him as pledged to order all things for his people's good;  
to rest assured, that he will fulfill to us his promises  
—all of this is, in the estimation of the world at large, no better than presumptuous pride and enthusiastic folly! So entirely do they exclude Jehovah from the government of His world, and reduce him to the state of the god of Epicurus.

In like manner the morality of men in general is simply that of the wiser heathens; the more refined and exalted requirements of Christianity being deemed unnecessarily precise, and absurdly strict. *A radical deadness to the world, and devotedness to God, are never contemplated by them, but as the dictates of ascetic gloom or fanatical conceit.*

While in their *principles*they sink into heathenism—in their adherence to *religious forms*they depend on Judaism. *Every sect has its favorite forms*, which, though of human origin only, are of more weight in the estimation of the generality, than either Christian principles or morals! A man may be skeptical in his principles, and licentious in his morals, and yet offend no one; but let him violate the *religious forms*which have been established by his own particular sect or party, and he will raise an outcry against him immediately. This is common both with Papists and Protestants; yes, and with Protestants of every description. The *rules of their own particular denomination*are more to them than the sacred oracles of truth! A neglect or violation of a human institution is more heinous in their eyes than any departure from the commands of God!

Thus it was with the Pharisees of old, who made void the law of God, and regarded only their own self-appointed forms; and thus it is at this day among multitudes who name the name of Christ.

A small portion of Christianity is for the most part added to this, to complete the system. Christ is acknowledged to have purchased for us such a relaxation of the divine law as we are pleased to claim, and a power to save ourselves by any measure of obedience which we choose to pay to the code we have devised.

***~~While such is the religion of the generality of people, it is supposed to constitute a just ground of confidence before God.~~***

Micah had now no doubts or fears but that all would go well with him both in this world and the next. And similar to this is the confidence which almost universally prevails among ungodly men. They have no fears but that God will do them good, because they are free from those crimes which outrage the common feelings of mankind, and serve God according to such rules as they have laid down for themselves! Whoever dies in such a state, they send to Heaven, as a matter of course; thinking, that to entertain a doubt of their safety would be the height of uncharitableness! It is surprising to what an extent their confidence is carried. The bare possibility of such people having perished in their sins is never once contemplated by them; and, if a doubt were expressed respecting the outcome of their own expectations, they would be quite indignant.

Were a truly pious man to express the same confidence as arising from the promises of God, they would inveigh against his presumption; but in their own delusive speculations their confidence is such as to preclude all doubt.

We may see this exemplified in the Jews of old. To have Abraham for their father, and the temple of the Lord for their religious services, was in their estimation sufficient ground of security that they would go the Heaven, though they lived in a constant violation of every known duty! [Matthew 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.9); [Jeremiah 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.4); [Isaiah 48:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 48.1-2).

And precisely thus it is with the generality of professing Christians. As infants they have been baptized into the Christian faith, and they have lived according to a system which the world approves; and therefore they can say without fear, "I know that the Lord will do me good."

But while ungodly men are buoying themselves up with such delusive hopes, let us contemplate,

***~~II. Their bitter disappointments.~~***

What was the outcome of Micah's confidence? Was it justified by facts? Could his idols help him in the day of adversity? or did Jehovah interpose for his support? No; his idols could not even protect themselves; and when he complained of the thieves who had robbed him, his pathetic expostulations were of no avail; and he was constrained to submit in silence to the loss of all wherein he had put his trust. Hear to what straits he was reduced, "So he said: You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? [Judges 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 18.24)." And thus will it be with the ungodly in the last day.

***~~Their "refuges of lies" will be swept away.~~***

The self-made religion in which they now so confidently trust, will be proved a baseless fabric. No foundation will then stand, but that which God himself has laid; nor will any superstructure endure, but that which is able to abide the fiery test which shall be applied to it! [1 Corinthians 3:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11-13).

The *law*, which sinners reduce to their own standard, will be found immutable; the obedience which they pay to it will be found so imperfect, as to be incapable of affording the smallest ground of justification before God.

The Lord Jesus Christ will then be seen to have been the only Savior of sinful men; and his obedience unto death the only hope of a ruined world. The religion of the Bible will then appear to be, what it really is—the only means of a sinner's access to God, and acceptance with Him!

***~~Their destitution and misery will be then complete.~~***

"You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have?" may then be considered as the bitter lamentation of every self-deceived soul. How gladly would they who were once so confident in their expectations of bliss, take refuge, if it were possible, under rocks and mountains! How thankfully would they accept of utter annihilation, instead of a protracted existence under the wrath of God!

In vain are now their pleas, "I thought that I was right."

Why did they rest in vain conjectures?

Why did they presume to substitute a system of their own in the place of that which God had revealed?

Why would they not submit to be saved in God's own way?

Why would they venture the salvation of their souls on plans and systems of their own devising?

Alas! it is now too late to rectify their error; they are gone beyond redemption; and are consigned to those regions of darkness and despair, where not a single ray of hope can ever enter to dispel their gloom! "They have walked in the light of the sparks which they themselves have kindled; and now they lie down in sorrow! [Isaiah 50:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.11)."

Thus it will be, whatever men may now say to the contrary, [Job 15:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.31); and, if they will not believe, they shall soon "see whose word shall stand—God's or theirs! [Jeremiah 44:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.28)."

***~~See then from hence,~~***

***~~1. The importance of having right opinions in religion.~~***

If we consider religion only as influencing the mind in this present life, then it is no unimportant matter whether we have such a vain system as men form for themselves, or such a grand and glorious system as God has revealed in his Word. Compare Micah's self-made religion with that of Daniel and the Hebrew Youths, and say, which of the two was the more effectual in the hour of trial?

Now extend your views to the eternal world; and compare the states of the Pharisee and the Publican, or of the martyred Stephen and his self-applauding murderers; and then say, what principles are most beneficial, and, what practice is most conducive to our true happiness. Away with all the systems then of man's device; and embrace with your whole hearts "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God!"

***~~2. The comfort of having the Lord for our God.~~***

Who can ever rob us of that? Who can take our God from us? or what can we lack, if we have him for our friend? We may be spoiled of all else; but still we shall be rich! With his favor secured to us, and his love shed abroad in our hearts—we shall be truly happy; like Paul, "having nothing, and yet possessing all things!"

Seek then to have the Lord Jesus Christ abiding with you. Seek to have him for your sacrifice; him for your altar, "him for your priest;" and you may then be as confident of the divine favor as your hearts can wish. You may then safely adopt the language of Micah, and say, "I know that the Lord will do me good." God's favor is then made over to you by an everlasting covenant; it is confirmed to you by *promise*and by *oath*, "by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie." So that from henceforth you "may have strong consolation, if only you flee for refuge, and lay hold on the hope that is set before you, [Hebrews 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-19)." Then you may look forward also to the day of judgment with assured confidence, that he who has witnessed the desires of your heart, will acknowledge you as his, and "claim you as his own when he shall make up his jewels! [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17)." Then shall it be seen, beyond all contradiction, who was right: the self-confident framer of a human system, or the humble follower of the Lamb; for "then shall all discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him who served God, and him who served him not! [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18)."

***~~#277~~***

***~~THE BENJAMITES' WICKEDNESS~~***

***~~[Judges 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 21.25)~~***

"In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes!"

Such is the depravity of human nature, that man is always prone to depart from God; and departures once begun, extend rapidly through individuals, communities, and kingdoms; the departure of a few righteous people, like the removal of a dam, soon opens a way for iniquity to inundate a whole country.

During the life of Joshua and his assistants in the government, the Israelites retained a good measure of piety; but no sooner were they called to their eternal rest, than impiety began to deluge the land.

The transactions recorded respecting the Danites in the 17th and 18th chapters, and of the Benjamites in the three last chapters, though placed after the history of the Judges, all took place while Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was high-priest; and consequently, very soon after the death of Joshua, and before any Judge in Israel had been raised up, [Judges 20:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.27-28); and it is repeatedly noticed in all those chapters, that these overflowings of ungodliness were occasioned by the lack of those beneficial restraints which a wise and righteous governor would have imposed upon the people. This is particularly specified in our text; from whence we are very forcibly led to show,

***~~I. The obligations we owe to Civil Government.~~***

***~~Where there is no government, all manner of iniquities will prevail!~~***

This is most remarkably illustrated in the history before us. The idolatry of the Danites is ascribed to that, [Judges 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 17.6); [Judges 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 18.1). The ease with which the inhabitants of Laish fell a prey to a small handful of invaders, was owing to the dissoluteness of its inhabitants, and a total lack of magistrates to enforce some beneficial laws, [Judges 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 18.7). The whole account also of the Levite and his concubine, as connected with the horrid wickedness of the Benjamites, and the extensive miseries consequent upon it, are all referred to the same cause—a lack of a civil governor, who would exercise a watchful care over the people, and impose such restraints as should keep them within the bounds of decency and order, [Judges 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 19.1) with the text.

To appreciate these evils aright, the three last chapters should be attentively perused:  
the unheard-of wickedness of the Benjamites;  
the determination of the whole tribe of Benjamin to protect the offenders;  
the civil war arising from it;  
the repeated defeats of the tribe of Judah;  
the ultimate destruction of the whole tribe of Benjamin—men, women, and children, with the exception of six hundred men who had fled from the field of battle;  
the demolition of all their cities;  
the destruction also of the whole population of Jabesh Gilead, except four hundred virgins, who were preserved in order to prevent the utter extinction of the tribe of Benjamin;  
these and other miseries all arose out of this single circumstance—a lack of a regular government sufficiently strong to prevent or punish the violations of the laws.

There is one circumstance in this history which seems unaccountable; namely, That when the eleven tribes were united against Benjamin solely for the purpose of demanding justice against the perpetrators of that enormous wickedness, and when Judah led the battle by divine appointment, no less than forty thousand of that tribe would be slain by Benjamin in two battles, while the impious Benjamites suffered no loss at all. God intended by this to punish the supineness of all the tribes, who had neglected to espouse his cause against the idolatrous Danites. They had united as one man, when the interests of society demanded their interposition; but they had taken no steps to vindicate God's honor against the introduction of idolatry, though God had expressly required in his law their most determined efforts in his behalf, [Deuteronomy 13:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.12-16). On this account, God first made use of the Benjamites to punish them—and then delivered the Benjamites into their hands, that justice should be executed on them also.

But whatever was God's design in these desolating judgments, they must still be all referred to that cause which we have already noticed.

If any further illustration of the point be wanted, we need only behold the evils which are perpetrated even in the best regulated governments, in defiance of the laws; and then we shall see what evils would prevail, if all the restraints of law and justice were withdrawn.

***~~But a vigilant and energetic magistracy stems the torrent of iniquity.~~***

Where a good government is, there are known and established laws, to which the highest, as well as the lowest in the state, are submissive. Our persons, our property, yes even our reputations, are secured from injury. Or, if any injure them, the law affords us suitable redress. If any sons of Belial will break through the restraints which the law has imposed upon them, no sooner are they convicted of the crime, than they pay the penalty with the loss of their liberties or lives. Hence every man feels himself secure; the weak fears not the invasion of his rights any more than the strong; but all sit under their own vine and fig-tree, with none making them afraid.

This security we are apt to overlook; but we can never in reality be too thankful for it. If we were to estimate our state according to truth, we would all consider ourselves like Daniel in the lions' den; the lions have not lost their nature; but they feel a restraint, which, though invisible, operates for our preservation; if that were once withdrawn, we would then, like Daniel's persecutors, soon become a prey to the violent and oppressive.

But the subject may justly lead us also to consider,

***~~II. The obligations we owe to the Gospel of Christ.~~***

The restraints of Civil Government are external only, and have respect chiefly to the welfare of society; they cannot reach to the thoughts or dispositions of the heart. Hence:

***~~Ungodly men do precisely what they please.~~***

They keep within the regulations of human laws, so far at least as to avoid a criminal prosecution; but they will indulge their lusts in ways which do not come within the cognizance of the civil magistrate, and will live altogether "without God in the world." All indeed do not run to the same excess of riot; but all will equally "do what is right in their own eyes." All mark out a line for themselves; some give themselves a greater latitude; and some are circumscribed within narrower bounds; but all lay down to themselves certain rules, to which they annex the idea of propriety. And if a minister of the Most High God stands forth to testify against their ways as evil, they will find a host to vindicate their cause, and to inflict the deadliest wounds also on those who dare to assault them in the name of God.

The language of their hearts is, "Who is Lord over us?" In vain do we endeavor to convince them of their errors. They are determined to think themselves right. *To be "right in their own eyes" is with them a perfect vindication of their conduct!* They will not come "to the word and the testimony" of Scripture—that is a test to which they will not submit; and, if only they are free from gross and open sin—they despise the sword of the Spirit, and defy the sharpest arrows that are taken from his quiver.

What we here speak is as applicable to the most righteous among them, as to the most unrighteous. Solomon tells us that "there is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, who are not washed from their filthiness! [Proverbs 30:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.12)." Their standard of duty, be it what it may, is of their own making; and they follow the laws of God no further than will consist with the regulations which they have formed for themselves.

***~~But the Gospel produces in them a most blessed change.~~***

The Gospel establishes a King—the Lord Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and the Lord of all, and *he erects his throne in the hearts of men*.

The Gospel rectifies the viewsalso, of all that receive it. *His Word, and not our own vain conceits, becomes now the rule of judgment; the smallest deviation from that, whether by excess or defect, is regarded as evil, and nothing is approved any further than it agrees with that perfect standard.*

We may also add, the Gospel regulates the conduct. Those who receive the Gospel aright, instantly give themselves up to the Lord Jesus Christ, accounting his service to be perfect freedom, and desiring to live no longer to themselves, but "unto Him who died for them and rose again."

Of course, we must not be understood to say that these effects are produced equally in all, or in any to their full extent. Men are still corrupt creatures, even the best of men; and consequently they will, like brands out of a fire, still bear the mark of the fire, though the flame is extinguished. But still they differ as widely from the unconverted world, as those who live under a well-regulated government do from the most licentious savages. They are thankful for the restraints under which they live; and are ready to die in defense of that King whom they venerate, and that law which they account it their highest privilege to obey.

In civilized society, men are happy in being secured from external violence; but, *under the Gospel, they are happy in being secured from the assaults of Satan, and from the corruptions of their own hearts.*

***~~From this subject we would take occasion to recommend:~~***

***~~1. A self-distrustful spirit.~~***

*By nothing are the delusions of men more strengthened, than by a confidence in their own wisdom and judgment!* No reasons will weigh in opposition to the conceits of self-opinionated men; nor will an appeal to the Scriptures themselves be allowed to be of any force. Hence men perish in their errors, until it becomes too late to rectify them.

How happy would it be if men would distrust their own judgment; and if, when they see how thousands of their neighbors err, they would admit the possibility of error in themselves! God has given us an unerring standard of truth; to that let us refer all our pre-conceived opinions; and remember, that, "if we walk not according to that rule, there is no light in us!"

***~~2. A cautious judgment.~~***

Persons are apt to form their judgment on very inadequate grounds. Anyone who would have seen the two defeats of Judah, would be ready to conclude, that the cause for which victory had decided, was the right. But we are not to judge from events; righteousness is not always triumphant in this world; it may be oppressed; and the supporters of it may be trodden under foot; but there is a time when God will vindicate his own cause, and evince the equity of all his dispensations.

*The unalterable Word of God must be our only rule of judgment in everything!* If we suffer in following that, let us not doubt the goodness of our cause, but betake ourselves to fasting and prayer, and, above all, to that great Sacrifice which was once offered for sin. Then, though suffering, we shall reap good to our souls; and, *though vanquished now, we shall surely triumph at last.*

***~~3. An unreserved submission to the King of saints.~~***

This is true happiness; this once attained, no enemy can hurt us, no occurrence can disturb our peace. "I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on me, because he trusts in me." O that we were all brought to surrender up ourselves sincerely to him! Whether we will submit to him or not, "God has set him as his King upon his holy hill of Zion;" and "He will reign, until all his enemies be put under his feet!" "Kiss the Son then, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way!" "Let every imagination that is contrary to his will be cast down, and every thought be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!"

**RUTH**

***~~#278~~***

***~~THE CHARACTER OF RUTH~~***

***~~[Ruth 1:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.15-17)~~***

"Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

The study of Scripture characters is very instructive; for, in them, we see human nature in all its diversified conditions, not as artificially delineated by a brilliant or a warm imagination, but as really existing, and exhibited to our view.

For subjects of public discussion, too, they are peculiarly favorable; because, in presenting real scenes, they bring before us circumstances which are of daily occurrence, or which, at least, are well adapted to show us how to act, when such circumstances occur. The partings of friends and relatives are common; and, inasmuch as they give birth to a great variety of emotions in the mind, they elicit the inward character with great fidelity.

Such is the incident which we are now about to consider, and which will reflect peculiar light on the dispositions of one, who, though a Moabitess by birth, was one of the progenitors of our blessed Lord.

From this farewell scene, and the distinguished excellence of Ruth's behavior, I shall be led to mark:

***~~I. Ruth's character as simply depicted here.~~***

In the circumstances before us:

***~~1. Ruth approves herself as a pattern of filial piety.~~***

Her mother-in-law, Naomi, had long endeared herself to her; and now was about to part with her, and to return to the land of Israel. But Ruth would not allow her to depart alone, but determined to adhere to her to the last hour of her life. Nor in this determination was she biased by any selfish hopes of future aggrandizement. Her love was altogether pure and unselfish. She well knew, that, though Naomi was once possessed of opulence, she was now reduced to poverty; nor had Naomi any surviving son, who might be united to her, and raise up seed to his departed brother. All this was faithfully represented by Naomi, both to her and to her sister Orpah, in the most affecting terms, "But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me--even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons--would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!" At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her. [Ruth 1:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.11-14)."

But nothing could shake the resolution of Ruth; she determined to renounce all her old relatives, and the prospects she might have in her native land, and to cleave steadfastly to Naomi, even unto death. And the manner in which she refused to acquiesce in Naomi's proposal was tender and affectionate in the extreme, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following after you." This, in other words, was as if she had said, "You know that any request of yours, however difficult or self-denying it were, would be obeyed with the utmost alacrity; but to ask me to forsake you, this is too much; it would break my heart; I could not do it; I beg you to forbear putting me to so severe a trial. Entreat me not to leave you; for the alternative, of parting with you or disobeying your command, is as a sword in my bones, a wound which I cannot possibly endure. Be the sacrifice ever so great, I am ready to make it; I shall delight in making it."

Thus did this duteous female, from love to Naomi, make, in effect, the very reply which Paul, many hundred years afterwards, gave, from love to the Savior, and on an occasion not very dissimilar, "What mean you to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus! [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13)."

***~~2. Ruth approves herself as a pattern of vital godliness.~~***

This was at the root, and was the true spring of her determined resolution, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." She had been instructed by Naomi in the knowledge of the true God; and she determined to consecrate herself to his service, and to take her portion with his people. This was very particularly noticed by Boaz, as no less conspicuous than her filial piety, "Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband--how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. [Ruth 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 2.11-12)."

Her desire after God was paramount to every other consideration under Heaven. She believed that his people were happy above all other people; and, whatever she might endure in this life, she determined to unite with them, and, as far as possible, to participate in their lot. *Her views of religion might not be clear; but it is evident that a principle of vital godliness was rooted in her heart, and powerfully operative in her life*. In fact, she acted in perfect conformity with that injunction that was afterwards given by our Lord, "Whoever does not forsake all that he has, he cannot be my disciple! [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33)."

But her character will appear in yet brighter colors, if we consider:

***~~II. Ruth's character as compared with that of Orpah and Naomi.~~***

***~~Ruth's character as compared with that of Orpah.~~***

Orpah loved her mother-in-law; and, at first, determined not to part from her. In answer to the suggestions of Naomi, she joined with Ruth in saying, "Surely we will return with you unto your people, verse 10." But, when a faithful representation was given her respecting the sacrifices she would be called to make, she repented of her good intentions, and, taking an affectionate leave of her mother-in-law, "returned to her own people, and to her idol-gods, verse 15." Like the rich youth in the Gospel, she departed, reluctantly indeed—yet finally and forever, [Matthew 19:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.21-22). "Orpah," it is said, "kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clung unto her, verse 14." Happy Ruth! "you chose the better part; and never was it taken from you! [Luke 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.42)," nor ever had you reason to regret your choice. It was as wise as that of Moses, when he "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season [Hebrews 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.25)." We congratulate you on the strength of your principles, or rather, on the grace given you by the Lord.

Unhappy Orpah! we know not what was your condition in after life; but, whatever it was, do you not now bemoan your instability? Do you not now wish that you had been faithful to your convictions, and had cast in your lot with God's chosen people?

As for you, Ruth, O favored saint, even if you had been as miserable in after life as you were happy, we should have pronounced you blessed; but doubly blessed were you in the distinctions conferred upon you in this world, as pledges of the glory which you inherit in the realms of bliss, even in the bosom of your descendant, your Savior, and your God.

***~~Ruth's character as compared with that of Naomi.~~***

That Naomi was a pious character, we have no doubt; and amiable too; for by her conduct she conciliated the regard of both her daughters-in-law, who, though Moabites by birth, were through her convinced of the superior excellence of the Jewish religion, and the superior happiness of those who were imbued with it.

We cannot but earnestly call the attention of Christian parents to this trait of Naomi's character. For there are too many, who, while they profess godliness, make it odious to all who come in contact with them, and especially to those who are dependent on them. Their tempers are so hasty, so imperious, so ungoverned, that their very daughters are glad of an occasion to get from under their roof!

I must tell all such professors, that they are a disgrace to their profession; and that if religion does not make us lovely and amiable in all our family relations, it does nothing for us, but deceives us to our eternal ruin!

Yet I cannot think very highly of Naomi's character, when I see the advice which she gave to her daughters-in-law. She loved them, it is true; but her love was of too carnal a nature; for she had more respect to their temporal welfare than to the welfare of their souls. Some would offer an apology for her; that she only intended to try the sincerity of their love. But, supposing she had done this in the first instance, which yet she had no right to do, especially when they had both said, "Surely we will return with you unto your people." I say again, she had no right to "cast a stumbling-block in their way," and by repeated entreaties to urge their return to their idolatrous friends and their idol-gods! But when she saw, unhappily, that she had prevailed with Orpah, had she any right to urge Ruth to follow her sad example? Should she not rather have rent her garments, yes, and torn the very hair from her head with anguish, at the thought of having so fatally prevailed to ruin her daughter-in-law's soul? Should she not rather have striven to undo what she had done to Orpah, than continue to exert the same fatal influence with Ruth? Should not the advice of Moses to Hobab have been hers to both of them, "Come with me, and God will do you good! [Numbers 10:29-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.29-32)."

Naomi, you have given us a picture too often realized in the present day; in you we see a mother more anxious about the providing of husbands for her daughters, than the saving of their souls. You did love your daughters-in-law, it is true; but your concern for their temporal welfare overpowered all other considerations, and not only kept you from leading their minds to God, but actually induced you to exert your influence in opposition to their good desires. You were a tempter to them, when you should have done all in your power to keep them from temptation, and have had your whole soul bent on securing their everlasting salvation.

Beloved Ruth, we bless God that you were enabled to withstand the solicitations given you, though from so high a quarter; for we are told by our Lord and Savior, "He who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me! [Matthew 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.37)." You did well, in that your refusal was so tender, so affectionate, so respectful; but still you did well, also, that you were firm. Your firmness has reflected a luster on your character; for while it detracted nothing from your filial piety, seeing that "we must obey God rather than man," it has shown how much more pure your love was than that of your mother-in-law, and how much more rigid and firm your piety.  
 **ADDRESS.**

***~~1. To parents.~~***

Learn, I beg you, from Naomi; learn to instruct your children and dependents in the knowledge of the true God, and to conciliate their regards by the most unwearied efforts of tenderness and love. But beware how you discourage in them any good desire.

I will grant that there are in Scripture other instances of people laboring to counteract the movements of personal affection. Ittai, the Gittite, when following David in his flight from Absalom, was urged to leave him, [2 Samuel 15:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.19-21); as Elisha also was repeatedly by Elijah previous to his assumption to Heaven, [2 Kings 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.2); [2 Kings 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.4); [2 Kings 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.6). But there was no positive duty lying upon them, or, at all events, none which David and Elijah were not at liberty to dispense with.

But Naomi had no right whatever to discourage the pious purposes of her daughters; if she had chosen to dispense with their attendance on her, *she had no authority to dissuade them from devoting themselves to God*. Remember, then, the true limits of your authority; it may be, and should be, energetically used for God; but it must not, even in advice, be used against him. Your influence is great; and on it may depend the salvation of your offspring.

Oh, what a grief must it have been to Naomi, in after life, that she had given such fatal counsel to her apostate daughter! And who can tell what cause you may have to bewail the discouraging of pious emotions in your children, even in one single instance? And think not that even piety renders this caution unnecessary.

Rebekah was pious; yet when she feared that her beloved Jacob would lose the birthright, what a device did she suggest, and with what horrid impiety did she urge him to adopt it, [Genesis 27:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.12-13). Beware, I say, of following Naomi in this respect; and rather use your influence, like Lois and Eunice, for the training of *your Timothy*to the highest attainments of piety and virtue, [2 Timothy 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.5).

***~~2. To young people.~~***

Cultivate, to the utmost, an affectionate and obediential spirit towards your parents. This is a frame of mind peculiarly pleasing to God. When he enjoined it in the Decalogue, he wrote it with his own finger on a tablet of stone; and it is distinguished above all the other commandments by this, that it was "the first commandment with a promise, [Ephesians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.2)." The exercise of this spirit pre-eminently characterized our blessed Lord in his early days, "He went down with his parents to Nazareth, and was subject unto them, [Luke 2:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.51)." This is the best return that you can make to your parents for all the care which they take of you, and all their labors for your good. Especially, if, like Naomi, they are brought into affliction and poverty—forsake them not then; but rather redouble your attentions to them; and account no sacrifice too great to make, if by any means you may be a comfort to them in their declining years.

At the same time be attentive to the concerns of your souls. Embrace the God of Scripture as your God; and worship him, and serve him, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, [Acts 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.23)." And let no hopes of improving your temporal condition, either in marriage or in any other way, draw you aside from him. Renounce all for God; and "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord."

If others turn from the Lord, and go back unto the world, do not follow them. Even though they be your near relatives, with whom you have been bound in ties of the closest amity, let them not prevail; yes, though their prudence be proposed to you as the fittest pattern to follow, and the proposal comes from the highest authority, still be faithful to your convictions; and be faithful to your God. This will issue most to your satisfaction; this will bring you peace at the last; for so it is written, "Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord! [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)."

***~~#279~~***

***~~THE CHANGES MADE BY TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCES~~***

**[Ruth 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.19)**

"So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed,*"Can this be Naomi?"*

To *seek*the applause of man is wrong; but to *merit*it, is most desirable. A man of worthless character creates no respect in the minds of others; so that, if adversity befalls him, he finds but little sympathy in the bosoms of those around him. Whereas a godly man under misfortune, excites a general commiseration; and every one takes a lively interest in his affairs.

This is beautifully exemplified in the history before us. Naomi was certainly a woman of piety, and much esteemed. In a season of dearth she had left her country with her husband and sons; and, after ten years' absence, she returned in a bereaved and destitute condition, having lost her husband and her two sons, and having no attendant but a daughter-in-law, as poor and destitute as herself. Yet, behold, she no sooner reaches the place of her former abode, than the whole city is moved with her misfortunes, every one feeling for her as for a sister, and with tender concern exclaiming, "Can this be Naomi?"

The circumstance here recorded will lead me to show you:

***~~I. What changes take place in life.~~***

This is altogether a changing scene; every day bringing with it something new to elevate or depress our minds. Some changes are of a favorable nature, such as the growth of our children in wisdom and stature; the advancement of our friends in piety and honor; and above all, the conversion of the mirthful and dissipated to the knowledge of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. These things sometimes occur so suddenly and beyond our expectation, that we scarcely know how to believe them; and we are ready to ask, with pleasing surprise: Can this be Naomi, whom I remember not long ago under such different circumstances?

But it is rather of afflictive changes that our text leads us to speak; and we shall notice them,

***~~1. In relation to temporal matters.~~***

What effects are wrought by disease or accident in the space of only a few days, we all are well aware. The person who but as yesterday was flourishing in health, vigor, beauty—has become enfeebled, emaciated, yes, a mass of deformity, so that you exclaim, with almost incredulous surprise, Can this be Naomi?

Nor are changes less quickly made in the outward circumstances of men, one day living in affluence and all the splendor of wealth; the next, reduced to poverty and shame. The age in which we live has been fruitful in such examples, princes and nobles having taken refuge, and found subsistence from the hands of charity, in our happy isle During the French Revolution; and since that period, multitudes of our most opulent merchants having fallen from the highest pinnacle of grandeur to insignificance and poverty. Nor is it uncommon to behold a man, who by his talents has commanded universal admiration, brought, through illness or through old age, to a state of more than infantile mentation; so that he can be no longer recognized but as a wreck and ruin of the former man.

The circumstances of Naomi lead me to mention yet another change, namely, that of family bereavements. We have seen people in the full enjoyment of domestic happiness, with children, numerous, healthy, playful, the joy and delight of their parents—by successive strokes brought to a state of widowhood and desolation. Behold the disconsolate widow, "weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not;" and because the husband, who was her stay and her support, is either languishing on a bed of sickness, or wrested from her by resistless death! In a word, see Job encircled with his family, and in the fullest possession of all that the world could give him. Ah! how fallen! how destitute! *What a complete picture of human misery, and of the vanity of all sublunary good!*

***~~2. In relation to spiritual concerns.~~***

The most distressing sight is that of one who once was hopeful as to the concerns of his soul, but has "left off to behave himself wisely," and launched forth into all manner of dissipation. Or, if a more pitiable object can present itself to our view, it is that of one, who, after attaining an eminence in the Christian life, has fallen into a state of willful and habitual sin, and brought public disgrace upon his holy profession.

*David*will here naturally occur to our minds. Look at him, "Can this be David?" the man so abhorrent of evil, that he would not allow a person who should utter a falsehood to dwell in his sight? Ah! how fallen! how unlike this murderer is to "the sweet singer of Israel," "the man after God's own heart!"

And *Solomon*, too. Can this be Solomon? that perfection of wisdom, whom all proclaimed as the wisest of the human race, now so infatuated, as to seek his happiness in a number of wives and concubines; and so impious, as both to gratify them, and to unite with them, in the most abominable idolatries! [1 Kings 11:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.1-10)? Can this be Solomon? Who can believe it?

But must we go back to those distant ages for instances of human frailty and depravity? Would to God that they were of such rare occurrence, that none had ever arisen in our own remembrance. But wherever the Gospel is preached, instances will be found of people who "ran well for a season only," and who, though they "began in the Spirit, have ended in the flesh!" Look at any such people now, and see how unlike they are to their former selves! "How has the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed?"

But, that we may duly improve these occurrences, let us consider:

***~~II. What feelings the contemplation of them should inspire.~~***

We should not be uninterested spectators of such events:

***~~1. They should excite sympathy in us.~~***

In no case should we exult over fallen greatness. We read indeed, of the triumphant utterance of joy at the fall of the Babylonish monarch, agreeably to the predictions respecting him, [Isaiah 14:4-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.4-11). And similar exultation was felt at the destruction of Jerusalem; as it is said, "All that pass by clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth? [Lamentations 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 2.15)." But though these gloryings were permitted by God for the punishment of his enemies, they are not recorded for our imitation. We, like our blessed Lord, should weep over the desolations even of our bitterest enemies, [Luke 19:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41-42). We should "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)." *The sight of misery, wherever it is found, should call forth our tenderest sympathy*, and cause us to "weep with those who weep, [Romans 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.15)."

This is particularly suggested by the conduct of the people at Bethlehem, "The whole city was moved" at the sight of this poor widow, whom they had not seen for the space of ten years; and one sentiment of compassion filled all ranks of people, saying, "Can this be Naomi?" So let it be with us, whether we be able to relieve the sufferer, or not. The very feeling of compassion will be pleasing to our God; and will assimilate us to that blessed Savior, who pitied us in our low estate, and "who, though he was rich—yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)."

***~~2. They should excite contentment in us.~~***

In such a changeable world as this, what is there for us to covet?

Shall we desire riches? How soon do "they make themselves wings, and fly away! [Proverbs 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.5)."

Shall we desire honor? How soon may our Hosannahs be turned into, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

As for pleasure, of whatever land, so vain is it all, that "even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is grief, [Proverbs 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.13)."

Indeed, the whole world, even if we could possess it all, is but "vanity and vexation of spirit."

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have *wives*should live as if they had none; those who *mourn*, as if they did not; those who are *happy*, as if they were not; those who *buy*something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away!" [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)."

If changes of the most calamitous nature occur, we should remember, that "nothing has happened to us, but what is common to man." There is nothing but what may issue either in our temporal or eternal good. There are not lacking instances of the deepest reverses being themselves reversed; for *Job's*prosperity, after his distresses, far exceeded anything that he had enjoyed in his earlier life! [Job 42:10-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.10-16). *Naomi*, too, found, in the outcome, that she had no reason to "adopt the name of Mara, verse 20;" for her subsequent connection with Boaz soon dissipated all her sorrows, so that she could "put off her sackcloth and gird herself with gladness."

But, if this should not be the case, we may well be satisfied that "tribulation works patience, and experience and hope," and that our light and momentary afflictions work out "for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18)." In the view, then, of all these things, we should "learn 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 want, [Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12)."

**3. They should excite** **piety in us**.

This will never fail us. If we have much, piety will sanctify our prosperity, and keep it from injuring our souls. If we have little, piety will supply the lack of everything. View the rich man in all his abundance, and Lazarus in all his destitution. The eye of *sense*will look with envy on the one that is reveling in plenty; the eye of *faith*will form a far different estimate, and congratulate the sufferer in the midst of all his distresses.

The wealth of this world brings with it many cares and troubles; but "the blessing of God makes rich, and adds no sorrow with it, [Proverbs 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.22)." Even while the two were here in this world, no doubt the poorer was the happier man. But *at the moment of their departure hence, what different feelings would have been expressed, if they had still been subjected to the sight of man!*

Can this be the rich man? now destitute of a drop of water to cool his tongue?

Can this be Lazarus? now in the bosom of Abraham, at the banquet of the Lord?

So, then, shall it before long be said of you, sons and daughters of affliction, if only you improve your trials for the furtherance of your spiritual welfare. How soon shall all "your tears be wiped away from your eyes!" How soon shall "joy and gladness come forth to meet you; and sorrow and sighing flee away forever!" "Be patient, then, unto the coming of your Lord;" and you shall soon find that "the sufferings of this present life were not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)."

***~~#280~~***

***~~BOAZ AND HIS REAPERS~~***

**[Ruth 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 2.4)**

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!"

"The LORD bless you!" they called back.

Every season suggests to us some appropriate considerations; and *even the most common incidents of life are capable of affording us very important instruction*. Certainly, at first sight, a man's fellowship with his harvesters would not promise much for spiritual edification; but the address of Boaz to his people, and their reply to him, were altogether so different from what is usual in our day, that we shall find our time profitably employed in the investigation of them.

***~~I. Their mutual address is the first thing to be considered.~~***

It may be understood in a two-fold view:

***~~1. As a friendly greeting.~~***

It seems probable that, if not at that time—yet in after ages, this kind of address was common in the time of harvest, [Psalm 129:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.7-8). But, as used on this occasion, it deserves peculiar notice; both as expressing great kindness on Boaz's part, and as evincing much respect and gratitude on theirs. Boaz, it must be remembered, was "a mighty man of wealth, verse 1;" and therefore any notice from him might be deemed an act of respect, and more especially this, which conveyed to their minds such a sense of paternal love.

Their reply argued a befitting feeling of filial respect. Into how many fields might we go, before we heard such greetings as these! How much more frequently might we hear complaints respecting the work, on the one part; and murmuring concerning the wages, on the other part! Notwithstanding the superior advantages we enjoy, and the higher attainments which, in consequence, we might be expected to make in everything that was amiable and praiseworthy, how uncommon an occurrence should we deem it, if we happened to witness such greetings in the present day! The true picture of modern life may be drawn in those words of Solomon, "The poor uses entreaties; but the rich answers roughly, [Proverbs 18:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.23)."

***~~2. As a devout blessing.~~***

From the piety evinced by Boaz, we may well suppose that these benevolent expressions, on both sides, were not a mere customary form; but a real desire in the bosoms of them all, for their mutual welfare in reference to the eternal world. How lovely was the address, how suitable was the answer, in this view! *It is remarkable that the Apostle Paul begins and ends almost every epistle with prayers and blessings, expressive of his love for the souls of men.*And such ought our correspondence to be, even when the main subject of our letters refers to temporal concerns. Such, too, should be our daily fellowship with friends and workers, in the house, or in the field. Who does not admire this interaction between people so distant in rank—yet so allied in spirit? Let us, then, cultivate the spirit here manifested; for, truly, if it universally prevailed, we should enjoy almost a Heaven upon earth!

***~~II. The next point for us to consider, is the instruction we should gather from it.~~***

We may learn from it:

***~~1. That the blessing of God is our chief good.~~***

This, under any view of their expressions, is evidently implied. The wealth of Boaz, if he had possessed ten thousand different estates, would have been of no real value without the blessing of God; and with that, the men who labored in harvesting his fields were truly rich. It is the light of God's countenance which is the only solid good, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6). "In his presence is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself, [Psalm 30:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.5); [Psalm 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.3)."

***~~2. That religion appears in its true colors when it regulates our conduct in domestic and social life.~~***

It is in vain for a man to pretend to religion, if in his daily converse with the world he does not manifest its power to transform the soul. What is the knowledge even of an angel, without love? What is the faith that could remove mountains? What the zeal that could give all our goods to feed the poor, or even our bodies to be burnt for Jesus' sake? We speak advisedly when we say that in the full possession of all these excellencies, we would be no better than "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals," if we were not under the habitual influence of genuine love, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3).

Know brethren, that your religion must be seen, not in the church or in the prayer closet only, but in the shop, the family, the field. It must mortify pride, and every other evil passion; and must bring forth into exercise, "all the mind that was in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4-5)." Test yourselves by this standard; see what you are, as husbands or wives, parents or children, masters or servants. See whether you possess the courtesy of Boaz, or the respectful love of his harvesters. It is in this way that you are to shine as lights in a dark world. It is in this way that you are to put to shame the specious pretenses of politeness, and the feigned humility of those who strive for earthly honor. Your courtesy must be the genuine offspring of Christian benevolence; and your whole deportment, a visible exhibition of your Savior's image!

And now, not as a master to his servants, but as a father to his children, I say, "The Lord be with you!" And may there be in all of you a responsive voice, imploring the blessing of Almighty God on him, who truly, though unworthily, seeks your welfare.

"May he Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

***~~#281~~***

***~~RUTH'S PIETY AND REWARD~~***

***~~[Ruth 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 2.11-12)~~***

Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband--how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

The book of Ruth contains only the domestic occurrences of one poor family; and it may well excite our wonder that such trifling incidents should occupy the pen of Scripture inspiration, when the affairs of kingdoms and nations are overlooked. But there is nothing trifling that relates to morals; and still less, that relates to the Messiah. Were there nothing contained here but an exhibition of filial piety, it would not be recorded in vain; because a very principal intent of the inspired volume is, to rectify, in every relation of life, the dispositions and habits of mankind. But an attentive reader of this history will discover in it a fund of rich instruction. To assist you in this search, we shall set before you:

***~~I. The general circumstances of the history.~~***

Not having time to notice everything, we shall confine ourselves to those parts which deserve our more especial attention.

The famine that was in the land of Canaan "in the days of one of the Judges,"  
the consequent departure of Elimelech with his wife and children into the land of Moab,  
the marriage of his two sons with Moabitish women,  
the death of Elimelech and of both his sons,  
the return of his wife Naomi to her native land, when she heard that God had restored plenty to it  
—these and other circumstances we pass over in silence, in order that we may enter more fully into the things which relate to Ruth.

Ruth was the wife of Mahlon, Naomi's son; and to her this history principally relates. Two things in particular are stated concerning her, and they are distinctly specified in the words of our text; namely,

***~~1. Her piety.~~***

This was so conspicuous, that it was a matter of notoriety, and a theme of high commendation, at Bethlehem, almost as soon as she arrived there. On Naomi's adopting the resolution to return to her own country, Ruth, though a Moabitess, determined to accompany her. And though Naomi stated faithfully to her the many inconveniences that would attend it, she would Allow nothing to divert her from her purpose. She had been instructed by Naomi in the knowledge of the only true God, and had seen in her the beauty and excellence of practical religion; and she determined to participate Naomi's lot, whatever it might be, and to give herself up a living sacrifice to Naomi's God.

True it was, that in order to this she must relinquish all her own relations, and abandon all hopes of ever receiving benefits from them; but she had *counted the cost*, and deliberately preferred an adherence to Naomi and Naomi's God, before her country, her kindred, and all that the world could give her. The terms in which she expressed her resolution strongly marked the firmness of her purpose, "But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me!" [Ruth 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.16-17)."

Here is a pattern of true piety, and particularly as contrasted with Orpah, the widow of Naomi's other son. Orpah, as well as Ruth, was much attached to her mother-in-law Naomi; but she had not a supreme regard for the God of Israel; and therefore, when she saw what she must forego in order to accompany Naomi, she drew back, and returned to her own people and their gods. When the final decision was to be made, we are told, "They all lift up their voice and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clung unto her, [Ruth 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.14)."

Could Orpah have adhered to Naomi without making any sacrifices, she would have done it; but if she must give up all her prospects in life in such a cause, she will not pay the price. She parts indeed with much regret; but still she parts; like the Rich Youth that turned his back on Christ, because he could not bring his mind to the terms which were required of him, [Matthew 19:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.21-22).

O that we may learn justly to appreciate the characters of Ruth and Orpah; and instead of drawing back, like Orpah, through the love of this world, may we follow rather the steps of pious Ruth, and "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." This is what our God requires of all; nor will our Savior on any other terms acknowledge us as his disciples, [Luke 14:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26-27); [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33).

***~~2. Her reward.~~***

Though she knew not at all in what way God would requite her—yet she went forward, committing all her concerns to him, and "putting her trust under the shadow of his wings." Nor was she long before she experienced the tender mercies of her God. On her arrival at Bethlehem, she went into a field to glean some barley for the subsistence of herself, and of Naomi, whose infirmities rendered her unfit for so laborious an employment. Immediately, beyond all expectation, she was treated with great kindness by the reapers; and speedily afterwards by Boaz also, the owner of the field; who gave his servants a strict charge concerning her, and not only recommended her to glean in company with his maidens until the end of harvest, but authorized her to take a portion of their food, and bade the reapers to drop handfuls of corn for her, that she might reap the richer fruits of her industry.

On her expressing her astonishment at all this unexpected kindness, she was informed by Boaz that it was a reward for the piety she had exercised towards her afflicted mother-in-law, and towards the Lord God of Israel. Laden with an extraordinary quantity of corn, she went home at the evening to Naomi; who, finding on inquiry that this benefactor was Boaz, a near relation of her own—encouraged Ruth to follow the advice he had given her, and to glean in no other fields but his. Moreover, when Naomi found that this kindness of Boaz continued to the end of harvest, she began to think that God might incline the heart of Boaz to execute the office which belonged to the person who was nearest of kin to one who had died childless, namely, to marry the widow, and "raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance."

In the hope of this, she advised Ruth to adopt a measure, which certainly to us appears exceeding strange, and which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for, except we suppose Naomi to have been actuated by a divine impulse, or at least by a firm reliance on God, whose glory, in this matter, she principally consulted. The expedient, dangerous as it was, succeeded; and Boaz agreed, that if another person who was nearer of kin to Ruth than himself should decline the office, he would instantly take it upon himself. The very next morning Boaz made the proposal publicly to the man who had a prior right; and then, on his declining to fulfill his duty, openly avowed his determination to fulfill it himself; and called the elders of the city to attest his redemption of her inheritance, and his espousal of her for his lawful wife. Thus wonderfully did God reward her for all her piety.

Still further, now it pleased God to confer on her that which was the great desire of her soul, and to make her a mother in Israel. Yes, so greatly did God honor her, that David, the greatest of all the kings of Israel, sprang from her, as the grandson of her child; and the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Savior of the world, was lineally descended from her.

How richly was now that prayer of Boaz answered to her, "May the Lord recompense your work, and a full reward be given to you of the Lord God of Israel!"

Such being the principal circumstances of the history, we proceed to notice:

***~~II. The light which it reflects on subjects of the greatest consequence.~~***

And here a flood of light breaks in upon us. Truly the history is replete with instruction; independent of the moral duties which it inculcates, such as those of parental care and filial love, or the religious duties, such as affiance in God and devotion to his service, it reflects a light on:

***~~1. The ways of Providence.~~***

Little do people think, when brought into great affliction, what good may be derived from it, or what are the ultimate designs of God in it. When Naomi first came back to Bethlehem, and was recognized by her old acquaintance, she said to them, "Call me not Naomi, but Mara," that is, not Pleasant, but Bitter, [Ruth 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 1.20); but within a few weeks she was congratulated as the happiest of women, [Ruth 4:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 4.14-15); so completely was that Scripture verified in her, "He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He makes the barren woman to keep house, to be a joyful mother of children, [Psalm 113:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 113.7-9)." The ways by which her exaltation was effected, appeared merely fortuitous; but they were all ordered by the Lord, who foresaw the end from the beginning. It is said in the history, that "So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. She *happened*to find herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech, [Ruth 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 2.3)." Thus,*as far as it was her act, it was casual and undesigned; but as a link in God's chain, it was entirely ordered of the Lord!*

The same must be observed in reference to every other part of the history; the minutest event in it, as in that of Joseph, was under the immediate control of God, who made use of the most contingent means to accomplish his own eternal purpose!

Let not any then, however reduced, conclude that their case is desperate, or that God has brought them into such a state for evil; for, as the bondage and imprisonment of Joseph were steps to his highest exaltation, so may our heaviest afflictions be the appointed means of bringing us to the most exalted good. "God's ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known;" and he frequently "makes the depths of the sea a way for his ransomed to pass over, [Isaiah 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.10)."

***~~2. The wonders of Redemption.~~***

Two things were enjoined by the law of Moses for the express purpose of shadowing forth the redemption of the world:

The one was, that the nearest of kin should have a right to redeem an inheritance which his relation had mortgaged, [Leviticus 25:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.25).

And the other was, that the brother of a person who died childless should marry his widow, in order to raise up seed to the departed person, and to prevent his name from perishing in Israel, [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 25.5-10).

These prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ as our kinsman, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," redeeming us by his own precious blood; and uniting himself to us, that we may bring forth fruit unto God! [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4).

Now both of these things were done in the history before us; Boaz, as the kinsman of Ruth, purchased her to be his wife; and also redeemed her inheritance, that she, together with himself, might have the enjoyment of it. When he called the elders to be witnesses of the transaction, these were his own words, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day." [Ruth 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth 4.9-10)." Both the one and the other he obtained by purchase, being entitled so to do by the special ties of blood kinship.

Just so, we are expressly told that the Lord Jesus Christ assumed our nature for that very purpose, that, "being made of a woman, and under the law, he might redeem those who were under the law, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4-5)." The words of the Apostle are, "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage, [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15)."

How interesting then does this portion of the inspired records become, when we behold what a mystery is contained in it!

***~~3. The call of the Gentiles into the Church of Christ.~~***

In common cases it was unlawful for an Israelite to marry one of the daughters of Moab; but Ruth had become a proselyte to the Jewish religion, and was therefore entitled to fill the privileges of a child of Abraham. Still as a Moabitess, taken into that line from whence the Messiah was to spring, and actually made an instrument of continuing the succession whereby he was brought into the world, she was a witness for God to the Gentile world that he had not utterly forsaken them; but that they in due time would be incorporated with his chosen people, and become partakers of his salvation.

Previous to this period, she was barren; but now she bore a son, through whom thousands and myriads were born to God; and in being the lineal ancestor of Christ, she was instrumental to the happiness of all that shall be saved by him, even of us Gentiles, as well as of those that were of Jewish descent. To her therefore we may eminently apply those words of the prophet, "Sing, O barren, you who did not bear! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who did not travail with child! for more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife, says the Lord, [Isaiah 54:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.1)."

Let none then apprehend that they are so far off, but that they may yet be brought near by the blood of Jesus, and "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God!"

***~~4. The procedure of God in the day of judgment.~~***

Rewards do not always accompany virtue in this world, because God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and reward every one according to his works. But there are some instances wherein God appears for his people in this present world, in order that he may give a specimen, as it were, of what he will do hereafter; and such an instance is exhibited in the history before us. Ruth's love to Naomi, and her confidence in the God of Israel, were richly recompensed. And who shall ever fail of recompense, who devotes himself sincerely to the God of Israel, and surrenders for him all his worldly prospects and comforts?

We must indeed bear in mind the difference between the conduct of Orpah and of Ruth. It is not by a *profession*of love, but by the actual manifestation of it, that we must approve ourselves to God. We must not be contended with merely greeting his people, but must adhere to them, deliberately braving all difficulties and trials, and determinately adhering to his sacred cause. Let us only act in this manner; and the whole universe, like the Bethlehemites on that occasion, shall soon witness our reward, [Matthew 19:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.29) with [Psalm 45:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10).

***~~1 SAMUEL~~***

***~~#282~~***

***~~HANNAH'S SONG OF THANKSGIVING~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 2:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.1-10)~~***

Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. "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. "For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. "It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

*The return which mankind in general make to God for his mercies, is to idolize the gift, and forget the Giver.* Directly opposite to this is the conduct of those who are truly pious; they value the gift only in proportion to its real worth, and rise in heavenly contemplations to the Donor himself; thus making the creature an occasion of exalting and magnifying the Creator.

We observe this particularly in the history of Hannah, whose devout acknowledgments we have just recited. She had been greatly afflicted on account of her not bearing any child to her husband Elkanah, while Peninnah, who was his other wife, had borne several. Her grief was daily augmented by the unkind behavior of Peninnah; nor could all the kindness and love that she experienced from her husband, remove it. She carried her requests therefore to the Lord, who alone was able to relieve them. Unto him she vowed, that if he would grant her a son, she would dedicate him to the service of the sanctuary, and that he should be a Nazarite from the womb.

Having obtained her request from God, she now came to perform her vow; as soon as the child could with any propriety be separated from her. It is thought at three or four years old, she took him with her to the tabernacle at Shiloh, and there, for the whole remainder of his days, "lent him to the Lord." At the time of surrendering him up, she burst forth in this song of praise and thanksgiving, in which she takes occasion from the mercy given to her, to adore the goodness of God as manifested towards the whole creation. She mentions,

***~~I. The perfections of God's nature.~~***

Unless we are fully aware of the desire which the Jewish women felt to have the Messiah spring from them, we shall not be able to account for the extreme grief occasioned by barrenness, or for the exultation arising from the birth of a child. But to all the common grounds of joy which Hannah had in the birth of Samuel, that of her deliverance from the taunts and insults of her rival was a great addition; and to that she had especial respect in the opening of this song. But, after this slight mention of her own particular case, she proceeds to celebrate,

***~~1. The power and holiness of God.~~***

God does not always interpose in *this world*to display his hatred of sin, or to vindicate the oppressed; because *there is a day coming, when he will rectify all the present inequalities of his moral government*. But he does not leave himself altogether without witness, that he is a righteous Governor, and a powerful Avenger. His effectual interposition on this occasion was, in Hannah's eyes, a decisive proof, yes and a glorious exhibition too, of his holiness and power; and gave her an assurance, that as these perfections were essential to his nature, and unbounded in their extent, so they should ever be called forth into activity in behalf of all who would trust in him.

***~~2. His wisdom and equity.~~***

Great was her consolation, that while she was judged uncharitably by her fellow-creatures, she had One to whom she could commit her cause; One who was privy to every thought of her heart, and would put a just construction upon the whole of her conduct. In the contemplation of this truth, she exulted over those who had so proudly and so arrogantly condemned her.

Truly this is one of the richest sources of consolation that any person can have, when suffering under misrepresentations or calumnies of whatever kind; yes, it is quite sufficient to tranquillize the mind, and to raise it above all those feelings which oppression is calculated to produce, [1 Corinthians 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3-5).

***~~II. The dispensations of God's providence.~~***

Here the pious Hannah extends her views from herself to the world at large; and declares, that the change thus produced in her state, is illustrative of what is done by God throughout the whole creation.

In the outcome of wars;  
in the enjoyment of plenty;  
in the increase of families;  
in the continuance of life;  
in the possession of wealth;  
and in advancement to honor  
—who does not see that the greatest changes take place, even when least expected! verses 4-8. Who therefore must not be convinced of the folly of indulging either presumptuous confidence, on the one hand, or desponding fears on the other hand? None can say, "I am so strong, I shall never be moved." Nor ought anyone to say, "There is no hope." The afflicted should "weep, as though they wept not." The prosperous "rejoice, as though they rejoiced not"—each being aware that their condition may soon be altered, and shall be altered, if God sees it on the whole conducive to their good.

***~~III. The purposes of God's grace.~~***

From a view of temporal concerns, she rises to those which are spiritual and eternal; indeed here her words are evidently prophetic, and relate,

**1. To the godly.**

She had found to her joy, what care God takes of his people; and she confidently declared that that care would be extended to all his saints, even to the end of time. Their adversaries might lay snares for their feet; but he would "keep their feet;" he would "keep them from falling, and present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy! Jude verse 24."

On the other hand, his adversaries would assuredly be confounded by him; however they might vindicate themselves now, they should soon "be silent in darkness;" and though now they might defy him, as it were, to his face, he would thunder upon them out of Heaven, and utterly, yes eternally, destroy them!

***~~2. To the Church's King, the Messiah himself.~~***

As yet there had been no king in Israel; nor was there for fifty years afterwards; and therefore it is reasonable to think that she spoke of Him, whose throne was in due time to be erected in the hearts of men, even the Lord Jesus Christ. This further appears from her characterizing him by the very name *Messiah*, a name never before assigned to the king of Israel, but henceforth intended to designate him before all others. The Messiah, the Anointed, and the Christ, are all terms of precisely the same import. That she spoke of Him—yet further appears by the marked resemblance between this song, and that which the blessed Virgin poured forth at the prospect of the Savior's birth, [Luke 1:46-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.46-55). His triumph then she firmly predicts; and declares that his kingdom shall be extended even to "the ends of the earth." Many efforts will be made to prevent its establishment in the world; but none shall prevail, "his horn shall be exalted," and all his enemies shall perish!

It may be asked, What had this to do with the particular occasion of Hannah's thanksgiving? I answer, It is this very thing which constitutes in a very great degree, the beauty of this song, and that marks the effects of ardent piety upon the soul. A single mercy, like a stream, leads the soul up to the Fountain-head; and it is then only improved aright, when we take occasion from it to contemplate the fullness that is treasured up there, and that is diffusing all possible blessings, temporal and spiritual, throughout the world; and, inasmuch as the universal reign of Christ is that which will bring most glory to God and most good to men, it ought ever to be uppermost in our minds; and every mercy we enjoy should lead us ultimately to the contemplation of it.

***~~We may learn then from hence:~~***

***~~1. The benefit of prayer.~~***

See how successful she was, though she uttered no words, but only importuned God in her heart, [1 Samuel 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.10); [1 Samuel 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.12-13). And what will God refuse to those who seek him in sincerity and truth? The Savior's promise to us all is this, "Whatever you shall ask in my name, I will do it!" "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you!"

Let all the sons and daughters of affliction bear this in mind. Here is a sure remedy for all their griefs, and an infallible supply for all their needs, "I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD! [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3)."

***~~2. The blessedness of true piety.~~***

Exceeding heavy were Hannah's trials, [1 Samuel 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.6-7); and they were not a little aggravated by the uncharitable surmises of Eli himself, [1 Samuel 1:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.13-16). But into what holy joy were they turned at last! Thus, *when true piety occupies the soul, the most afflictive dispensations will even be overruled for good*. Our night of sorrow may appear long; but the morning of joy shall soon arise. Our seed-time of tears, shall be followed with a blessed harvest. Only let us delight in heavenly contemplations, and every perfection of God's nature, every dispensation of his providence, and every purpose of his grace, shall swell, as it were, our tide of joy, until it becomes "unspeakable and full of glory!"

***~~#283~~***

***~~THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING THE GREAT SACRIFICE~~***

**[1 Samuel 2:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.22-25)**

[A Court Trial Sermon at Cambridge]

"Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD's people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death."

The consideration of an earthly tribunal is of great use to restrain the wickedness of ungodly men. But as there are innumerable offences which can neither be proved by human testimony, nor defined by human laws, it is necessary that men should be reminded of another tribunal, to which they shall be shortly summoned, and before which they shall be called to a strict account. Long before the deluge this was a topic much enforced by the preachers of religion, Jude verse 14, 15; and *Eli*adverted to it, as well calculated to enforce his exhortations, and to dissuade his sons from their impieties. His sons were transgressors of no common stamp; they are justly reprobated as sons of Belial. Their father being advanced in years, the administration of the priestly office had devolved to them. This office they abused to the purposes of oppression and debauchery. The interposition of their father became highly necessary; as God's viceregent, he should have vindicated the honor of God, and the rights of his subjects. Eli should have interposed, not only with parental but judicial authority. He should not only have manifested his detestation of their lewdness and rapacity, but should have punished them with degradation.

He however, either from a timidity and supineness incident to age, or from a shameful partiality for his own children, forbore to inflict the punishment they deserved; and contented himself with expostulations and reproofs. He said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD's people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?"

With less hardened criminals these words might have produced a good effect; for if it is awful to be summoned before an earthly judge, how much more so to be *called into the presence of God, laden with iniquities, and destitute of any advocate or intercessor!*

May our minds be impressed with reverence and godly fear, while we consider the import of this admonition, and deduce from it some suitable and important observations!

The words of the text do not at first sight appear to need much explanation; but we cannot well understand the antithesis, or see the force of the interrogation, without adverting particularly to the circumstances, which occasioned the reproof. The sense is not, That, if a man violates a human law, he shall be condemned by an earthly judge; and, that if he violates the divine law, he shall be condemned by God himself. This is far short of its real import.

The sin which the sons of Eli had committed was of a peculiar nature. They, as priests, had a right to certain parts of all the sacrifices that were offered; but, instead of being contented with the parts which God had allotted them, and of burning the fat according to the divine appointment, they sent their servants to strike their three-pronged flesh-hooks into the pot or caldron where the meat was seething, and to take whatever the flesh-hook might bring up. If they came before the flesh was put into the caldron, they demanded it raw, together with all the fat that was upon it. If the people objected to such lawless proceedings, or reminded them that they must not forget to burn the fat, the servants were ordered to take away the meat immediately, and by force, verse 16.

To these enormities, the young men added others of a most malignant nature; they, who, from their office, should have been ministers of justice, and patterns of all sanctity—availed themselves of their situation to seduce the women when they came to worship at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, verse 22. Thus they discouraged the people from even coming to the house of God, and caused them to "abhor the offering of the Lord."

Now it should be recollected that sacrifices were the instituted means of reconciliation with God; there was no other way in which any offence, whether ceremonial or moral, could be purged, but by the offering of the appointed sacrifice before the door of the tabernacle; without shedding of blood there was to be no remission of sin, [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22).

It should be remembered further, that *these sacrifices were typical of the great sacrifice which Christ was in due time to offer upon the cross*. The whole Epistle to the Hebrews was written to establish and illustrate this point. "The blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin;" they had no efficacy at all, but as they typified him who was to "appear in this last dispensation to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, [Hebrews 9:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.25-26); [Hebrews 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1); [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4); [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14)."

In causing therefore the offerings of the Lord to be thus abhorred, the young men sinned in a peculiar manner against God himself; they poured contempt upon the very means which God had provided for their obtaining of pardon and reconciliation with him. Thus they rendered their situation desperate.

Had they only committed some heinous offence against man—a judge, entrusted with the execution of the laws, might have arbitrated between the parties; he might have punished the delinquents, and obtained satisfaction for the injured person; and, the offenders, if truly penitent, might have brought their offering to God, and thus, through the blood of their sacrifice and the intercession of the priest, have obtained the remission of their sin. But they had sinned directly against God himself; so that there was no third person to redress the grievance or settle the dispute.

Moreover they had despised the only atonement that could be offered for them; yes, in despising the typical, they had, in fact, disclaimed all trust in the real atonement. What hope then remained for them? Having provoked God, they had no person of authority sufficient to arbitrate between them; and having rejected the only Sacrifice, the only Advocate, the great High-priest, they had none to make atonement for them, they had none to intercede; they must therefore be left to their fate, and reap the bitter fruits of their iniquities. In confirmation of this, God declared that "their sin should not be purged by sacrifice or offering forever! [1 Samuel 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.14)."

With this explanation we see at once the force and emphasis of the words before us. They were intended to express the exceeding heinousness of the sins that had been committed, and to deter the offenders from persisting in such fatal conduct. While they intimate the danger to which a violation of human laws will expose us, they suggest *the infinitely greater danger we incur by despising the only means of forgiveness with God*.

With the additional light which the New Testament reflects on this passage, we may see that we are as much interested in this admonition, as the very people were, to whom it was first given; for, though we have not run to their excess of riot, or caused the offering of the Lord to be so abhorred—yet we have too much disregarded the sacrifice of the Son of God.

If we have not openly opposed the atonement of Christ, we have been, perhaps still are, too indifferent about it. The censure therefore in the text, however severe it may appear, lies in full force against *us.*To neglect the Savior is in a most fatal manner to sin against God; it is, at the same time, to provoke the Majesty of Heaven, and to reject the only Advocate, the only Atoning sacrifice for sin. Hence the Apostle asks with such tremendous energy, "How shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation! [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)." Which question, both in import and expression, accords with that in our text, "If a man sins against the Lord, who shall intercede for him?"

In this application of the passage we are reminded of a parallel passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God! [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27)." Here the writer states the reason why an apostate from the truth has nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation. The reason is the same as in our text: he has turned his back on the sacrifice of Christ, and there will be no other sacrifice for sin to all eternity; there is therefore no hope of salvation for him.

The Apostle then adds, "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? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people! [Hebrews 10:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-30)."

Thus may we ask, in reference to the text: If the infraction of human laws, when substantiated by sufficient evidence, is ever punished with the loss of life—then how much more shall a neglect and contempt of Christ meet with due recompense from a holy and omniscient God?

**The text being thus explained, we may proceed to deduce from it some important observations.**

The solemnity of the present occasion requires us to take some notice of human judicatures; we shall not however restrict our observations to them. There is a *future judgment*unto which we must all appear; nor should we satisfy your expectations any more than our own conscience, if we did not principally advert to that. The text affords us a proper opportunity for discharging our duty in both respects.

We observe then:

***~~I. That the dispensing of justice by people duly qualified and authorized, is an unspeakable blessing to a nation.~~***

The institution of *judges*is a necessary part of every well-ordered government. When God called his people Israel, and formed them into a distinct nation by his servant Moses, he gave this command, "Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you, [Deuteronomy 16:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.18-20)."

When Jehoshaphat set himself to restore the political and religious welfare of his kingdom, he paid immediate attention to this point, "He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the LORD, who is with you whenever you give a verdict, [2 Chronicles 19:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 19.5-6)."

After the Babylonish captivity also, when the Persian monarch gave commandment respecting the re-establishment of the Jews in their own land, he particularly enjoined Ezra to be mindful of this matter, "And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates--all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment, [Ezra 7:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 7.25-26)."

Indeed, without such an institution, the laws themselves would be altogether vain and useless; the weak would sink under oppression; and the strong would tyrannize with impunity. The bonds of society would be broken asunder; and universal anarchy would prevail.

We have witnessed the destruction of all constituted authorities, and the utter annihilation of all established laws. We have beheld licentiousness stalking with the cap of liberty, and ferocious despotism, under the name of equality, spreading desolation with an undiscriminating hand at the time of the French Revolution.

But, blessed be God, it is not thus with Britain; I pray God it never may be. The laws, with us, are respected; and those who superintend the execution of them, are reverenced.

If one man sins against another—we have judges, who are competent and not afraid to judge him.

If existing laws are not sufficient to check the progress of conspiracy and treason—we have a legislature that will deliberate with coolness, and enact with wisdom.

If the necessary restraints are violated by presumptuous demagogues—we have *magistrates*who will call the offenders to trial; juries, that will bring in their verdict with conscientious truth; and *judges*, that, while they declare the sentence of the law with firmness, know how to temper judgment with mercy.

Yes, to their united efforts, under the care of Providence, we owe it, that faction and sedition have been disarmed of their power, would to God I might also add, the inclination, to disturb the realm.

However the opinions of many were shaken for a time by specious arguments and groundless cavils, there are but few, it is hoped, at this time, whose eyes have not been opened to discern the excellence of our constitution. Who, that has seen insulted majesty proclaiming pardon to mutiny and sedition; who that, when the despisers of that pardon were brought to trial, has seen the very judges becoming counsel for the accused; who, that has seen to what an amazing extent lenity has been carried (not from partiality or supineness, as under Eli's administration, but from a love of mercy, and a desire to win the offenders to a sense of duty,) who, that reflects how forbearance has been exercised, insomuch that not a single execution even of the most daring traitors took place, until lenient measures absolutely defeated their own ends; who, I say, that has seen these things, must not acknowledge the equity and mildness of our government? And who, that knows the value of such a government, would not uphold it to the utmost of his power?

While we are speaking upon this subject, it is impossible to omit the mention of one, who with unexampled fortitude has stemmed the torrent of iniquity in this country, and has made the most opulent to know, that if they will tempt the chastity of individuals, and destroy the peace of families—they shall do it at their peril. I do not hesitate to say, that every father of a family, and every lover of virtue in this kingdom, stands indebted to him, and has reason to bless God, that such integrity and power are combined in one person. The name of Lord Kenyon will necessarily occur to the mind of every reader.

There is one other point worthy to be noticed in the judicatories of this country; I mean, a freedom from political or religious prejudice. If a man is known to disapprove the measures of government, he is not the less likely on that account to obtain justice in any cause in which he may be engaged; if he dissents from the established mode of worship, he is not the less protected in the right of serving God according to his conscience; nor, if on account of superior zeal and piety, he is branded with an ignominious name, will prejudice be allowed to bias the decisions of our courts against him. Every member of the community, of whatever denomination or description, is sure to have his cause attentively heard, and impartially determined!

These things cannot but create a love to our constitution in the mind of every man, who rightly appreciates the blessings of civil and religious liberty. And I pray God that the laws of our country may ever continue to be thus respected, and to be thus dispensed.

The observation now made, has been suggested by the first part of Eli's admonition. Another observation we may offer, arising from the obvious connection which exists between that and the latter member of the text; namely,

***~~II. That there are many things, not knowable by human judges, which will be brought to trial before the Judge of the living and the dead.~~***

Man's tribunal is erected principally for judging things which particularly affect the welfare of society; and, in criminal causes, respect is had to *actions*rather than to *thoughts*, or at least to actions as the evidences of our thoughts.

But at the tribunal of God, everything which affected the divine government will be brought forward:  
the sins against *God*—as well as sins against our fellow-creatures;  
the sins of *omission*—as well as of commission;  
the sins of *thought*and *desire*—as well as those of purpose and of act.

There is not any one action of our lives that will not then be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary!

There is not a word of our lips which will not then bear its proper stamp of piety, or transgression!

There is not so much as a thought of our hearts, that will not receive its just mark of approbation or displeasure.

We are expressly told, that "God in that day will judge the secrets of men; that he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart!"

"God will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil . . . but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good, [Romans 2:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.6-10)."

At that day, we are informed, "the Judge will come in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory;" and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, even "with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God." "Then shall the sea give up the dead which were in it, and death and Hell deliver up the dead that were in them, and all, small and great, shall stand before God."

"The Ancient of days, whose garment is white as snow, and the hair of whose head is like pure wool, will sit upon his fiery throne; and while a fiery stream issues from before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto him, he will open the books! [Daniel 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.9-10)."

The book of life, [Revelation 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.12), wherein the names of his people are written.

The book of his remembrance, [Malachi 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16), wherein the most secret imaginations of men's hearts were registered.

The book of conscience too, [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12), which, however illegible now through our ignorance and partiality, will be found to correspond with his records in every particular.

And lastly, the book of his law, [Romans 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.12), according to which he will pass his judgment.

Ah! Who can reflect on the solemnities of that day, and not be filled with awe?

Who among us can endure so strict a scrutiny?

"Who can abide the day of his coming?"

We may easily conceive the feelings of a prisoner, who, about to be tried for a capital offence, hears the trumpet announce the coming of his judge. Let us endeavor to realize the thought, and to apply it to our own case. We are sure that such a criminal would lose no time in preparing for his defense. He would engage his counsel, summon his witnesses, and employ every are in order to obtain a favorable sentence.

Let us go and do likewise! Our "time is short; the Judge is at the door," and if we are unprepared to meet him, woe be unto us; our sentence will be awful indeed; the very terms, in which it will be expressed, are already told us, "Depart, you who are cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41)."

In one respect indeed we differ widely from such a criminal. If he escapes, it must be through lack of evidence to convict him. Whereas the only way for *us*to escape, is to confess our guilt, and plead the atonement offered for us by the Son of God!

This leads me to my last observation, namely,

***~~III. That a neglect of Christ will be found in that day, to have been the most fatal of all offences!~~***

Sins of any other kind, however heinous they may have been, yes, though they may have brought us to an ignominious end, may yet be pardoned by our God, provided we turn to him with sincere sorrow and contrition, and rely on the atonement which Christ has offered. The Scriptures are extremely full and strong upon this subject. They declare:

That "all who believe, shall be justified from all things!"

That "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin!"

That "though our sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as white as snow."

So undoubted is this truth, and so suited to the condition of fallen man, that it has been often and well proclaimed in our very courts of justice—proclaimed to criminals condemned, at the very time of condemnation, and that too, by those very people who pronounced the sentence of death against them. Yes, thanks be to God, *there are judges, even in this degenerate age, who are not ashamed to unite the balm of Christian counsel with the severity of a penal sentence*.

But let us suppose that we have neither violated the laws of man; nor, in any *flagrant*instances, the laws of God; shall we therefore be acquitted at God's tribunal? Shall we need none to entreat for us, none to plead our cause in that day? May we safely neglect the sacrifice of Christ, because we have abstained from gross iniquities?

Let us not deceive ourselves with any such dangerous imaginations. "We all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God!" "Every mouth therefore must be stopped, and all the world must become guilty before God!" None can stand upon the footing of his own righteousness. Having transgressed the law, we are cursed by the law; as it is written, "Cursed is every one who does not continues in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them."

We must therefore all, without exception, seek deliverance in Him, "who has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." God has declared that "there is salvation in no other; that there is no other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ!" If we will not "enter by that door," we exclude ourselves from even a possibility of obtaining mercy to all eternity!

I know it will be urged in opposition to this, that we have been free from all gross offences, and have been punctual in the observance of many civil and religious duties. Be it so; but how would such a plea sound in a court of justice? Let a criminal, accused of rebellion against an earthly monarch, plead his allegiance to the King of kings; let him say, "I regarded his sacrifice, I trusted in the atonement, I sought a saving interest in Christ." Would his plea be valid? Would he not be told immediately, that these things he *ought*indeed to have done, and not have left the other undone?

Thus then we answer those who go about to establish their own righteousness instead of submitting to the righteousness of God, "It was well that you abstained from gross sin, and fulfilled many duties; but you ought also to have sought redemption through the blood of Christ; you ought to have 'fled for refuge to the hope set before you;' and because you have neglected him, you have no part or lot in his salvation."

What can be plainer than our Lord's own assertions, "No man can come to the Father but by me;" and, "If I wash you not, you have no part in me?" What can be more awful than that interrogation of Peter, "What shall the end be of those who obey not the Gospel of God?"

We may venture to put the question to the conscience of every considerate man:

If you sin against God in neglecting and despising his dear Son—then what atonement will you offer to him?

If you make light of the sacrifice offered upon Calvary—then where will you find another sacrifice for sin?

If you disregard the mediation and intercession of Christ—then where will you find another advocate?

If you sin thus against God—then who shall entreat for you?

Here then the subject wears a very serious and solemn aspect. We all are hastening to "the judgment-seat of Christ, where we must give account of ourselves to God!" There, high and low, rich and poor, judges and criminals—must all appear to receive their sentence of condemnation or acquittal. There will be no respect of persons with God. Even the criminal who died by the hand of the executioner, provided that his disgraceful circumstances led him to reflection, and made him implore mercy through the blood of Jesus—shall stand a monument of redeeming grace; while his superiors in morality, yes, even the judge who condemned him, if they died in impenitence and unbelief, shall hear the sentence of condemnation pronounced against them, and be doomed to that "second death in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!"

Let us then inquire diligently into the state of our souls.

Let us "judge ourselves that we be not judged of the Lord."

Let us examine what regard we have paid, and are yet daily paying, to the sacrifice of Christ.

Let us inquire whether "He is all our salvation and all our desire?"

Let us remember, that if we would have him to entreat for us in that day, we must now entreat him for ourselves, "desiring earnestly to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God which is by faith in him."

***~~#284~~***

***~~ELI'S UNFAITHFULNESS REPROVED~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 2:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.28-31)~~***

"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. The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your family line."

*However the promises of God may be expressed, they are never so to be understood, as if they should be fulfilled to us while we are in a state of willful sin; there is always in them an implied condition, that we depart from iniquity, and endeavor faithfully to serve the Lord.* To Aaron a promise was made, that the priesthood should be continued in his family, and in that of Eleazar his son. Yet for some wickedness of his descendants it was transferred from the family of Eleazar, his eldest son, to that of his younger son, Ithamar, from whom Eli was descended. Again the promise was made, that it should be continued in the line of Eli. But, for a similar reason, it was afterwards taken from Abiathar, his descendant, and given to Zadok, who was of the elder branch.

That the promises were to be understood with such limitations, God himself declares in this address to Eli; wherein he tells Eli, that he had rescinded the promise made to him, and determined to act towards him on the broad basis of equity, precisely as he would towards all mankind, "I said indeed that your house, and the house of your father, should walk before me forever; but now the Lord says: Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Here we may see:

***~~I. What conduct God requires of us.~~***

This will be best learned from a review of the context. Eli being far advanced in age, his sons performed the priestly office in his stead. But they abused their power to such a degree as to "make the offerings of the Lord to be abhorred." Eli heard of their proceedings, and reproved them for their wickedness; but he neglected to exert that authority with which God had invested him; and manifested more regard for the feelings of his sons, than he did for the honor of his God. This was Eli's fault, and the occasion of God's heavy displeasure against him. From hence then we see what God requires of us:

***~~1. God expects us to have a supreme regard for his glory.~~***

The honor of God ought to be dear to every one of us; for though we cannot augment or diminish his *essential*glory, we may greatly affect the regards of men towards him, and be an occasion of his being either honored or blasphemed by multitudes around us. In truth, there is not anything we do, but has considerable influence of this kind. How careful then should we be, and how watchful, not to do anything which may lower him in the esteem of men! The thought that should be ever uppermost in our minds is this, "What aspect will such or such conduct have upon true religion; and what effect will it produce in advancing or retarding its influence in the world?"

***~~2. God expects us to promote his glory to the utmost of our power.~~***

To *exemplify*piety in our own conduct must be our first labor, and to show all possible respect to everything that relates to God. His word, his Sabbath, his name, his Gospel, his cause and interest in the world—must be exceeding high in our estimation. But we must not content ourselves with honoring God in our own persons; we must exert all our influence that he may be honored by all around us.

Some are invested with *magisterial*power; and they must use it for God, and not bear the sword in vain.

To others is committed the *ministry*of the Gospel; and they must boldly reprove sin of every kind, and commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

To others is *parental*authority entrusted; and they must not content themselves with gently rebuking the wickedness of their children, but must exert themselves to the uttermost to restrain it. Here was Eli's defect. He did well to begin with mild reproof; but he should have proceeded to severer measures, when he saw that they were not to be reclaimed by gentler means. In a word, we should be so intent on advancing the honor of God in the world, as to esteem nothing too much to do, nor anything too great to suffer, for the attainment of our object. Relations, interests, or life itself, should be of no account with us in comparison with this, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26), with that expression in the verse before the text, "You honor your sons above me."

Such being the conduct which God requires, let us consider,

***~~II. In what light God will view our conduct.~~***

***~~He will account himself "honored" by our observance of it.~~***

Often does he speak to us to this effect; and in what sense we must understand the expression, has been before explained. Though "our goodness cannot extend to him," or profit him, if he esteem himself glorified by it—then it is quite sufficient for us; nor can we have any greater stimulus to exertion than such a consideration as this.

To form a just estimate of it, let us only reflect on the zeal which is manifested by all the hosts of Heaven to honor God; how do they all vie with each other in their songs of praise! And if an opportunity were afforded them to advance his honor by any offices on earth, how readily would they leave their blessed abodes, and fly here to execute his high commands! They are represented as "doing his commandments, and hearkening to the voice of his Word," to obey the first intimation of his will. Such is the zeal that should animate us; and God will assuredly consider himself as glorified by it; indeed he is glorified, inasmuch as our obedience proclaims to all around us, that he is, in our estimation at least, worthy of all the love that we can manifest, and of all the service that we can render to him.

***~~But where such conduct is lacking, God accounts himself treated with contempt.~~***

Is there no medium between an honoring of God and a despising of him? I answer, No! If he is not honored, something else is honored above him, and the creature is set above the Most High God. It is said of Eli, that he "honored his sons above God;" and this was considered by God as an instance of direct and absolute contempt.

The same is true respecting every act of disobedience, and every neglect of duty; which necessarily implies an attention to our own ease, interests, or pleasure, in preference to the will of God.

What a contempt of the *Divine Majesty*does it argue, when we resist his will!

What a contempt of his *love*and *mercy*, when we neglect his salvation!

What a contempt of his *justice*, his *holiness*, and his *truth*, when we entertain the idea that such conduct can pass with impunity! This is the very construction that God himself puts upon such conduct, "Why does the wicked despise God, while he says in his heart: You, God, will not require it?"

If then we, poor, ignorant, guilty creatures, feel so keenly when *we*are treated with contempt—then let us consider how indignantly the Most High *God*will resent such conduct at our hands.

He himself has told us,

***~~III. What notice God will take of our conduct.~~***

**He will honor his faithful and obedient servants.**

This he has promised [John 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.26); and he will perform it. Men may treat them as if they were "the filth of the earth and the off-scouring of all things;" (though they cannot help reverencing them in their hearts, [Mark 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.20);) but God will honor them with the most distinguished tokens of his love. He "will give them a name better than of sons and of daughters," and will enrich them with the inestimable blessings of grace and peace. Through their whole lives he will admit them to the nearest fellowship with himself; and what will he not do for them in the hour of death? Yet all this falls infinitely short of the glory he will confer upon them in the eternal world. Read what testimonies of his approbation he will give them before the assembled universe, and with what honors he will invest them at his own right hand, [Matthew 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34); [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17); truly they shall never have reason to complain that their fidelity to God has not been adequately rewarded.

**But those who have despised him shall be despised by him.**

Though they may be exalted among men, God will hold them in the utmost disdain. He will not grant to them so much as one kind look; but, on the contrary, in the hour of their greatest extremity, "he will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes!" No consolations will he administer to them in a dying hour; but will rather hide his face from them, and shut his ear at the voice of their cry. And when they stand at his judgment-seat, he will bid them "depart you who are accursed, into everlasting fire!" regarding them no more than the chaff that is cast into the oven; They will then indeed "awake to shame and everlasting contempt."

***~~Here then we may see,~~***

***~~1. What estimate we should form of lukewarm religion.~~***

That religion is most pleasing to men, which is regulated by the opinions of the world; but that alone is acceptable with God, which is agreeable to the standard of his revealed will. He requires our whole hearts; and looks with utter abhorrence upon the lukewarmness of a Laodicean state! [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16). Let us then not be contented with serving God in our closets; but let us confess him in the world; and let us not only serve him ourselves, but use all our influence to bring others also to a submission to his will. Yes, if all others should determinately reject his yoke, let us say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"

***~~2. What alone we are to regard as the great object of our desire.~~***

"The honor that comes from man" should be no further of any account with us, than it may augment our influence in serving God. It is the honor which comes of God that alone deserves our concern. To have the witness of his Spirit and the testimony of our own conscience that we are pleasing God, is worthy of our most diligent pursuit. That will comfort us, when all other sources of consolation are cut off. Moreover, the approbation of God will continue, millions of ages after that the breath of man's applause has vanished away! Let us then act to God, and live for God, and endeavor so to walk with him, that we may enjoy the light of his countenance; for "in his favor is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life itself!"

***~~#285~~***

***~~ELI'S SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE REBUKES~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)~~***

"So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."

*It is of the nature of sin to harden the heart, and to prevent the declarations of God from having their due influence on the mind*, [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13). It operates in this manner, wherever it is found; the righteous, no less than the wicked, experience the same effects, in proportion as it gains an ascendant over them.

Eli had neglected to exert that authority, which, as God's high-priest, and as a parent, he ought to have exercised over his abandoned sons; and God sent a prophet to him, "a man of God," to reprove him, and to warn him of the judgments which his sin would bring both on himself and his posterity, [1 Samuel 2:27-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.27-35). But this message seems to have produced no good effect. God therefore used another method of awakening his conscience; he revealed himself to Samuel by an audible voice, and renewed to him the declarations, that had been before made in vain. The voice was new to Samuel; and, taking it for Eli's voice, he repeatedly attended on the aged priest; but when, according to the direction of Eli, he had requested the further manifestation of Gods will, he received from God the communication he desired. It does not appear that he would of himself have imparted to Eli the information he had received; but when adjured to it by Eli himself, he could not refrain.

The points for our present consideration are,

***~~I. The fidelity of Samuel.~~***

The tidings were of a most dreadful nature; and to deliver them must have been a distressing office to Samuel. But Samuel was not elated by the revelation that had been made to him; nor was he hasty to denounce the judgments which he was commissioned to declare, [Jeremiah 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.16); yet on the other hand, when he was solemnly called upon to disclose the whole, he would not dissemble, nor conceal anything; but related to Eli every minute particular.

In this we have an excellent model for God's servants in every age. *They should deliver only what they themselves have received from God*; nor, in delivering that, should they delight to denounce the judgments of God, or exult over those whom they are constrained to condemn; yet they should, with befitting fidelity, "declare the whole counsel of God;" they should "keep back nothing that can be profitable" to those to whom they are sent; but should "commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

The consciousness of their own youth or weakness should not keep them from discharging their duty aright; they should declare the whole truth to all, whether old or young, professors or profane, "Having received God's Word, they must speak his Word faithfully! [Jeremiah 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.28)."

While we approve of the fidelity of Samuel, we must also of necessity admire,

***~~II. The resignation of Eli.~~***

If the tidings were painful to Samuel to deliver, much more must they be so to Eli to hear. Even to people far less interested than he, they were sufficient to make "their ears to tingle." Yet Eli did not set himself against them, though delivered by a child; on the contrary, *he submitted to the divine decree with humble resignation*. He knew that God was too wise to err, and too good to inflict punishment without a cause. He knew also that he himself had sinned against the Lord, and well deserved the judgments that had been denounced against him. Hence the language of his heart was, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, [Micah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.9)."

This shows how we should receive all the denunciations of God's wrath against sin. We should not huff at them, or harden ourselves against them, or think unkindly of those who set them before us; we should not with Pharisaic pride exclaim, "In so saying you reproach us." But whatever God says in his Word, by whoever it may be delivered, we should "receive it, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God," precisely as much as if it had been spoken to us by an audible voice from Heaven! Eternal judgments indeed we may deprecate, yes and ought to deprecate, with all our might; and even temporal calamities we may deprecate in submission to God; we may entreat him to remove the bitter cup, as fervently as we will, provided we add, "Nevertheless, not my will, but may your will be done!" We must acknowledge the justice of God even in his severest judgments, and be contented that our temporal happiness should be destroyed, if only "our spirits may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, 1 Corinthians 5:5."

***~~From this subject we may further learn,~~***

***~~1. The importance of exerting our influence for God.~~***

Eli had neglected to punish his sons for their great impieties; he had reproved them indeed; but when he found the inefficiency of lenient reproofs, he had neglected to adopt more severe measures. This was the sin which excited God's displeasure against him, and occasioned the utter ruin of his whole family.

How strongly does this apply to every individual among us! How urgently does it call upon us to exert our influence, whatever it may be, for God! Let us not say, "Am I my brother's keeper?"*If others are bold in the service of the devil, we should be bold in the service of our God*, "we must reprove our brother, and not allow sin upon him." Our influence is as much a talent as our time, or money, or anything else; and we ought to use it for God. We should not be contented to go to Heaven alone, but should endeavor to carry all whom we can along with us.

***~~2. The comfort of being savingly interested in the Gospel of Christ.~~***

There were many sins for which the Mosaic dispensation provided no sacrifice; and God himself warned Eli, that "the iniquity of his house should never be purged by sacrifice or offering, to the end of time."

But no such declaration is made to us under the Gospel; there is not a word in all the Bible that even hints at the insufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to atone for the greatest guilt, or the doubtfulness of any person's acceptance, provided he pleads that sacrifice as the ground of his hopes. We are told indeed, that, "if a man sins willfully (in rejecting that sacrifice) after he has received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no other sacrifice, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation! [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27)." But to those who penitently trust in that sacrifice there is no ground of despondency. Whatever then our sins may have been, let us remember, that the death of Christ was "an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world;" that "his blood is able to cleanse us from all sin, "and that "though our sins be red as crimson, they shall through him be made as white as snow."

Let this comfort us under every desponding apprehension; and while, with Eli, we commit the entire disposal of all events into the hands of a righteous God, let us cast ourselves with confidence on his promised mercy, and "hold fast the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end."

***~~#286~~***

***~~ELI'S ANXIETY FOR THE ARK OF GOD~~***

**[1 Samuel 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 4.12-13)**

"That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry."

The Word of God, to whatever it relate, shall certainly in due time be accomplished; it may indeed, like the seed under the clods, appear to have been lost; but as soon as the appointed season arrives, we shall be made to see, that not a jot or tittle of God's Word can ever fail.

It had some years before been announced to Eli, that God would bring such judgments upon his house as should make "the ears of everyone that heard of them to tingle." Now the time for the execution of the threatening drew near; and the manner in which it was executed is set before us.

The Philistines had gained a victory over Israel, and had slain about four thousand men. The elders of Israel, astonished at such at event, devised an expedient for securing, as they hoped, a successful issue to the contest. They sent to Shiloh for the ark of God; which accordingly was brought by Hophni and Phinehas into the camp. Eli, at the advanced age of ninety-eight, being informed of the measure that had been adopted, anticipated in his mind the evils that were at hand; and full of anxiety, "Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God."

We propose to consider,

**I. The grounds of Eli's anxiety.**

Eli did not doubt whether God was *able*to protect his ark; but he had just grounds to doubt whether he *would*protect it.

He knew the wicked state of the people at large, and of his sons in particular.

He knew that the measure which had been adopted, had not been commanded or authorized by God.

He knew that if the ark should be taken, the loss would be incalculable.

He knew that in the event of such a misfortune, the Philistines would profanely exult over the God of Israel.

And if on these grounds he trembled for the ark, is there not reason to tremble for the cause of God in many parts of the Christian world? Of the wickedness of merely *nominal*Christians it is almost superfluous to speak.

Let us turn our attention rather to those whose office it is to bear the ark and to minister before it; how many of them, alas! walk unworthy of their high calling!

Or let us look to those who profess to regard the ark of God, and to expect salvation from a Covenant God in Christ; do we not behold among them many by whom God is habitually and grievously dishonored? Are there not many too, who, under a sense of their guilt and danger, devise expedients which were never sanctioned by the Lord, and resort to them for salvation, in an utter neglect of those means which have been revealed by God? What have all such people reason to expect, but that God, who has long since departed from the Churches of Asia, and from innumerable other Churches which once enjoyed the light of his Gospel, should "remove his lampstand" from them?

And what if such a judgment should be inflicted upon *us?* How would those who hate the light exult, and the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph! Truly, if we viewed the state of the Christian world aright, there is scarcely a people for whom we have not cause to tremble, lest they should lose the privileges which they are so backward to improve, and be delivered up into the hands of their spiritual enemies. And "woe unto them when God departs from them! [Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 9.12) with [Joshua 7:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.6-9) and [Nehemiah 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 1.3-4)."

Commendable as the anxiety of Eli was, we cannot be surprised at,

***~~II. The outcome Eli's anxiety.~~***

The Israelites were defeated; no less than thirty thousand of them perished; the sons of Eli, the priests who bore the ark, were slain; and the ark itself was taken. The awful tidings soon reached the ears of Eli. He heard of Israel's defeat, and bowed with meek submission; as he did also when he was informed of the death of both his sons; but when he was told that the ark of God was taken, he fainted, he fell, he died!

Now in this death he may appear to have resembled the wicked Israelites; but there was in truth a great difference between them. His death indeed was in part judicial, and so far may be compared with theirs; but theirs was accompanied with manifest tokens of the divine displeasure; and we have reason to fear that not they only, but Hophni and Phinehas also, were cut off in their sins. But Eli showed his supreme regard for God; and in some sense died a martyr to his love to God.

The *wife of Phinehas*also evinced the same piety. She was so affected with the tidings, that her pangs of travail were prematurely hastened; and, when her attendants strove to comfort her with the information that she had borne a son, she no further noticed it than to give him the name of *Ichabod*, which means inglorious; assigning as the reason for it, that "the glory was departed from Israel, and the ark of God was taken! verse 19-22." Thus did she, and Eli, manifest, that a concern for the honor of God was deeply rooted in their minds, more deeply than any other consideration, whether of public interest or of the ties of marriage.

We congratulate then this aged priest on the outcome of his anxiety; and we rejoice, that, when his errors in life had subjected him to the divine displeasure, he showed in his death that he had obtained mercy of the Lord. Had we not been informed of this closing scene, we might have doubted how far the judgments of God might come upon him in the eternal world; but with this knowledge of his latter end, we feel no doubt of his acceptance with God, and his exaltation to the realms of bliss.

***~~This whole history is very instructive; it teaches us,~~***

***~~1. The inefficacy of ordinances.~~***

As the Israelites idolized the ark, and looked to it as a Savior in the place of God, so do many look to the ordinances of religion, as though there were in them a power to save—instead of looking through them to the God of the ordinances. But, though Paul should plant or Apollos water, it is God alone who can give the increase; and if we put the word, or ministers, or sacraments, or anything else in the place of God, we shall find them to be a lamp without oil, and "a fountain sealed."

***~~2. The danger of presumption.~~***

The Israelites hoped for the divine protection, though they humbled not themselves for their iniquities, nor even in earnest implored his help; yes, they shouted for joy as though a victory were already gained.

But it is in vain to indulge such a hope as this. If we turn not from our sins, it is not possible but that we must be overtaken by the divine judgments. For the truth of this, God himself refers us to the history before us, "Go," says he, "and learn what I did to Shiloh, for the wickedness thereof. Compare [Psalm 78:58-64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.58-64) with [Jeremiah 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.12)."

***~~3. The necessity of walking in the fear of God.~~***

We know not how soon, or how suddenly, death may come upon us. Even if our lives be prolonged to an advanced age, we may yet be taken off without a moment's warning. How desirable then is it that all, and especially those who are drawing near to the time of childbirth, should stand ready for death and judgment! It is not necessary, nor indeed desirable, that we should be living under a servile dread of death; but we should be "working out our salvation with fear and trembling." We should be "trembling for the ark of God;" longing to hear of the victories of Christ in the world, and dreading to hear of the triumphs of his enemies.

We should particularly "watch," to see the progress of his grace in our own souls, and fear lest by any means he would be dishonored through us. If that is our frame of mind, we shall be accepted of God both in life and death; for the declaration of God himself is this, "Blessed is the man that fears always."

***~~#287~~***

***~~THE ARK RETURNED TO BETH-SHEMESH~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.19-20)~~***

"But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them, and the men of Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?"

Until we come to behold some extraordinary interposition of the Deity, we have in general a very slight sense of his majesty and greatness. But when we see any remarkable display of his power, we are apt to forget all his other perfections, and to think of him with insupportable terror.

We have a striking instance of this in the Israelites, when they saw God's decision of their controversy with Aaron on the subject of the priesthood, "The Israelites said to Moses, "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? [Numbers 17:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 17.12-13)."

Thus, in the passage before us, the men of Beth-shemesh, who had just before manifested so little respect for the Lord as to treat his ark with impious irreverence, no sooner felt the tokens of his displeasure than they exclaimed, *"Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"*

We propose to consider,

**I. The grounds and occasions of this question.**

To understand it aright, we must consult the whole of this and of the preceding chapter.

***~~God had prevailed over the idolatrous Philistines.~~***

God had, for the punishment of his offending people, delivered the ark into the hands of their enemies; and the Philistines having triumphed, as they imagined, over the God of Israel, placed the ark, as a trophy, in the temple of Dagon their God. They had before "offered a great sacrifice to Dagon, when, as they supposed, he had delivered Samson into their hand, [Judges 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 16.23-24);" and now they endeavored to do him still greater honor, by placing, as they imagined, the God of Israel at his feet. But behold, their god, without any visible cause, fell prostrate before the ark; and, when set up again in his place, again, the very next night, fell down before the ark, having both his head and his hands broken from the trunk. Should they not have learned from this that their idol had neither wisdom nor power to effect anything? [1 Samuel 5:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 5.1-5).

But when they would not understand from this sign the superiority of the God of Israel, Jehovah smote multitudes of them with a pestilence, of which they died; and multitudes also with tumors which are supposed to be a very grievous kind. See [Psalm 78:65-66](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.65-66), insomuch that they were constrained to acknowledge that "his hand was sore upon them, and upon Dagon their god, [1 Samuel 5:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 5.6-7); 1 Samuel 5:11-12." Wearied with their sufferings, they sent the ark to Gath; but there the same judgments were inflicted on the people, both small and great; so that they got it removed to Ekron; where the people were terrified at the prospect of experiencing the like calamities, and soon united in the general wish for its dismissal from their country.

Another judgment also which God inflicted on them contributed to make them anxious to restore the ark without delay, and to appease the wrath of him whose symbol it was; their country was suddenly overrun with *mice*, which destroyed all the fruits of the earth. A consultation therefore was held by all the priests and diviners, to ascertain the best method of testifying their sorrow for the indignities offered to Jehovah; the result of which was, to send back the ark, with representations in gold both of the mice and of the tumors, five in number, one for each of the lords who ruled the country, and who were therefore fit representatives of the whole people.

But in their mode of executing this they showed how reluctant they were to part with the ark, or to acknowledge Jehovah's power. They put the ark on a cart, and yoked two cows to it, and left them to go where they would; taking care however to shut up their calves at home, that, if they should, contrary to all their natural inclinations, go directly to the way of Beth-shemesh, it might be evident, beyond all possibility of doubt, that they were constrained to do so by the invisible power of Jehovah, [1 Samuel 6:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.1-11).

In all this, however, God glorified himself, and showed that the whole creation was subject unto him, and that He alone was "God over all the earth, [1 Samuel 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.12)."

***~~God had punished also his own presumptuous people.~~***

The men of Beth-shemesh received the ark, as it befit them, with joy and gratitude; and immediately offered the cows as a burnt-offering to the Lord. But soon they lost that reverence which they had been ever taught to feel towards that symbol of Jehovah, and with impious curiosity *looked into the ark*, which was not so much as to be seen by any except the high-priest, and by him only once in the year. For this profane conduct God smote seventy of the men of Beth-shemesh." Terrified at this judgment, especially as connected with all the judgments that had been inflicted on the Philistines, the men of Beth-shemesh were as desirous to get rid of the ark, as ever the Philistines themselves had been. Instead of humbling themselves before him for their sin, they thought only of their punishment; and were willing rather to part with Jehovah himself, than to conciliate his favor by suitable humiliation.

Such were the grounds of this desponding question. We now proceed to state,

***~~II. The answer to be given to it.~~***

***~~Whatever reason for despondency there was in their apprehension, there was none in reality.~~***

Doubtless the wicked can never stand before God.

God is a holy Being, who "cannot look upon iniquity" without the utmost abhorrence of it. The profane sinner, however he may "despise God," and huff at his judgments, will have far other thoughts of God when once he begins to feel, either in his body or in his mind, the effects of his displeasure. Behold, how changed was the voice of *Nebuchadnezzar*, when he recovered from the malady which God had inflicted on him, [Daniel 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.30); [Daniel 4:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.34-35). And what a contemptible "god" did *Herod*appear, when worms were devouring his vitals, [Acts 12:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.21-23). Or look at *Belshazzar*, with his knees smiting together at the sight of the hand-writing on the wall, [Daniel 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.6). Or at *Felix*, when Paul "reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25)." How little were these people able to stand before the Majesty of Heaven!

And shall it be thought, that when they shall be summoned before his tribunal in the last day, they will be able to make good their cause? No! they will wish for rocks and mountains to fall upon them and to "cover them from the wrath of the Lamb." *Now*they may justify themselves, and condemn the righteous; but *in that day*, we are assured, "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, [Psalm 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.5)." Nor will the presumptuous and disobedient professor stand before God; for "not everyone who *says*unto Christ, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he who *does*the will of our Father who is in Heaven." Men may plead that they have eaten and drunk in his presence, and done many wonderful works in his name; but the Lord Jesus will say to them, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you workers of iniquity! [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23); [Luke 13:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.25-27)."

O that every sinner would consider this; and that every professor of religion would search and try his ways!

But the true believer has no cause to dread his presence.

Even the removal of the judgments from the penitent Philistines is sufficient to show that God delights in mercy, and that "judgment is his strange act," to which he is greatly averse. But there are numberless promises made to the believer, promises which may "embolden him to enter into the holiest with the blood of Jesus" in his hand, just as the high-priest, on the day of annual expiation, entered with the blood of his sacrifices within the veil.

*Though he is in himself a guilty and corrupt creature, in Christ he stands before God without spot or blemish!*[Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27); yes, "though his sins have been as red as crimson, they are washed away, and he is made as white as snow." Let him only be steadfast in the faith, and he has nothing to fear, [Hebrews 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.6); 1 [John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.28). While he shows forth his faith by his works, he may expect to enjoy that "peace of God which surpasses all understanding, [Hebrews 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.11); [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17);" and especially, while he is filled with love, and therein bears the image of his God, he may look forward to the day of judgment with confidence and joy! [1 John 3:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-21); [1 John 4:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.16-17).

Know then, Believer, that "in Christ you may have boldness and access with confidence unto the Father by faith in Christ [Ephesians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.12);" and that in due time you shall "be presented faultless before him with exceeding joy! Jude verse 24."

***~~Observe then, from this subject,~~***

***~~1. How great an enemy to our welfare is slavish fear!~~***

What might not the Philistines and the Beth-shemites have obtained, if, instead of sending the ark from them through slavish terror, they had humbled themselves before it, and sought mercy of the Lord? But so it is with people who are filled with slavish fear; they wish to banish that which inspires them with terror, rather than to part with their sin, which alone makes God an object of dread. Hence they will resort to anything for peace, rather than to God himself, who alone can give them peace.

But let this be a fixed principle in our minds; that, whatever judgments we either feel or fear, we will not entertain hard thoughts of God. Let us bear in mind, that he is infinitely more willing to give than we are to ask; and that he will never cast out those who "come to him in the name of Jesus."

***~~2. What a comfort to the soul is the knowledge of Christ!~~***

The dissolution of the world, and the coming of Christ to judgment, have nothing dreadful in them to the true believer. He has a refuge, and a hiding-place; yes "Christ himself is to him a sanctuary," where he is hidden from the fear of evil, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17). O that we did but cultivate this knowledge more! *Christ is the true ark, which contains that law that was fulfilled by him, and is covered by the mercy-seat, from whence mercy is dispensed to all his believing people.*Into that ark we may look; not indeed with unhallowed curiosity, but with a humble desire to understand all the mysteries of redemption.

The cherubim that overshadowed the mercy-seat intimate to us, not only what the angels in Heaven are doing, (for they are constantly endeavoring to look into this mystery, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12),) but what we also should do. Paul, after preaching Christ for twenty years, still pressed forward for a further knowledge of him; and with the same view we also should be "searching the Scriptures which testify of him." This is a knowledge in comparison with which all things else are as dung and dross, [Philippians 3:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-10); and the more we attain of it, the more shall we be transformed into his image, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18), and be rendered fit for the glory which he has prepared for us! [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12).

***~~#288~~***

***~~SAMUEL'S SUCCESSFUL INTERCESSION~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 7:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 7.7-9)~~***

"When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines." Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him."

There is scarcely a more striking instance of reformation to be found in all the Holy Scriptures, than in the chapter before us. The people of Israel had long been in a state of awful departure from God. They had presumptuously confided in the ark at a former period, as though its very presence was sufficient to secure them the victory over the most powerful enemies, [1 Samuel 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 4.3-5); but now, though it had been restored to their country twenty years, no one had shown any just regard to it.

We may well suppose, however, that Samuel had not been idle; indeed we apprehend that the general reformation which took place at this time, was the fruit of his labors. Availing himself of the deep impression which had been made on the minds of the whole nation, he proposed to meet all the elders of Israel at Mizpah, with a view to keep a fast unto the Lord. This measure was adopted; but the Philistines, imagining that the collecting of so many people at one place was with a view to combine for military purposes, took the alarm, and determined to make an assault on them, before they would be able to arrange their plans, and prepare themselves for the battle. The approach of the Philistines produced great consternation at Mizpah, and necessitated the Israelites to stand on their defense. But, conscious of their incapacity to resist their foes, they besought Samuel to intercede with God for them. His intercession is the subject which we propose for our present consideration:

***~~I. Samuel's intercession as solicited by them.~~***

***~~They had now learned by experience that God alone could help them.~~***

They did not, as formerly, resort to the ark for aid; nor did they confide in an arm of flesh; Jehovah himself was now their hope; and they sought him in a manner that was truly befitting, "they lamented after him," being grieved at their hearts that they had provoked him to depart from them; they "drew water, and poured it out before him," expressing thereby the depth of their sorrow, [Psalm 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.14); and "they fasted," in order to beget in themselves a more penitent sense of all their transgressions. In this frame of mind they betook themselves to him, whose power had so often proved effectual for their support.

***~~But, conscious of their own unworthiness, they sought with all earnestness the intercession of Samuel.~~***

Very striking is their address to him, "Cease not to pray unto God for us." They were persuaded that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man would avail much." Hence they entreated Samuel to intercede for them. But they remembered that the intercession of Moses against Amalek was no longer successful than while his hands were held up in prayer; and therefore they importuned Samuel not to suspend for a moment his cries to God in their behalf. Happy were they in having such an intercessor; and happy in having a heart to acknowledge his worth, and to seek his aid.

***~~II. Samuel's intercession as offered by him.~~***

***~~He offered to the Lord a burnt-offering.~~***

Though Samuel was not a priest, he officiated as a priest on this occasion, and was doubtless accepted of God in that service. The presenting of a suckling lamb upon the altar intimated that neither the people nor himself could approach unto God, or hope for any mercy at his hands, but through that great Sacrifice which should one day be offered, even that Lamb of God which should take away the sins of the whole world. At the same time, as a burnt-offering, it was intended to honor God, who had so often supported them in the hour of need. This affords an important hint to us in all our addresses at the throne of grace; we must implore mercy solely through the sacrifice of Christ, and acknowledge God's perfections as glorified, in all his dispensations, whether of mercy or of judgment, of providence or of grace.

***~~This sacrifice, he accompanied with fervent prayer.~~***

Samuel well knew, that as prayer without a sacrifice would be of no avail, so neither would a sacrifice without prayer. He therefore "cried unto the Lord." O what is intimated in that expression! what humility, what fervor, what importunity! Such is the prayer that God requires; and such prayer, offered in dependence on our great Sacrifice, shall never go forth in vain, [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.15).

***~~III. Samuel's intercession as accepted of the Lord.~~***

***~~Instantly did God grant to answer it.~~***

Before the offering of the lamb was finished, God's acceptance of the prayer was manifest. The Philistines approached to the battle; but were so intimidated and confounded by thunder and lightning, that they fell an easy prey to those whom they had expected utterly to destroy. Thus the intervention of God was seen in the clearest light. Had the victory been gained solely by the sword of Israel, they might have ascribed it to their own skill and prowess; but when it arose from causes that were entirely out of the reach of men, they could not but acknowledge that God himself had interposed in answer to the prayer of Samuel.

As signal as this favor was, we are warranted to expect a similar acceptance of our prayers, if only we ask in humility and faith. Jehoshaphat obtained a similar answer under circumstances precisely similar, [2 Chronicles 20:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.21-22); and with equal speed was Daniel answered, when praying for himself, [Daniel 9:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.19-23); and we also shall be heard in like manner, if we draw near to God, as it is both our privilege and our duty to do, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24).

***~~He answered too to the utmost extent of the petitions offered.~~***

Deliverance out of the hands of the Philistines was the mercy asked; and so entirely was this deliverance effected, that the Philistines never came again into the land of Israel as long as Samuel lived.

We too may expect that God will exceed our utmost requests. If we are straitened at all, it is not in him, but in ourselves. If we were more earnest, and more enlarged in prayer—then our blessings would be proportionably multiplied, [2 Kings 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.19); [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20).

***~~We may learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. On what our safety as a nation rests.~~***

We should imitate their repentance, reformation, faith, and zeal; and should unite, both ministers and people, in committing our cause to God.

***~~2. How our safety as individuals is to be secured.~~***

There is no other way for individuals than for nations; only in nations the mercies of God may be enjoyed by those who have been at no pains to seek them; whereas every individual must stand or fall according to his own exertions in the ways of penitence and faith.

***~~#289~~***

***~~MEMORIALS OF GOD'S GOODNESS~~***

**[1 Samuel 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 7.12)**

"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us."

There is in the generality of men a very culpable inattention to the ways of *Providence*. A variety of dispensations succeed each other without ever attracting their notice. Hence they are unconscious of any kindness exercised towards them; and are ready to ascribe their success to *themselves*, or even to *chance*, rather than to God. But, if they would observe the many strange and unforeseen events which arise, and notice how they concur to promote their welfare, they would "understand the loving-kindness of the Lord," and be constrained to acknowledge his wise and gracious agency.

The *veil*with which modern occurrences are covered, is, in the Scriptures, removed; and we see "the holy arm of the Lord made bare." We at this day should regard a storm as a mere accidental thing, common perhaps at the time of year; and think little of God, "who makes the clouds his chariots, and his ministers a flame of fire."

But, in the passage before us, the victory gained by means of a *storm*is ascribed to the merciful interposition of Jehovah. By means of thunder which terrified the Philistine army, the unprepared Israelites were enabled to destroy them, and to break the power of those who for twenty years had grievously oppressed them; nor was it a little remarkable, that this victory was gained upon the very spot where, twenty years before, God had delivered both them and the ark in which they vainly trusted, into the hands of the Philistines. To commemorate the goodness of the Lord, "Samuel set up a stone, which he called Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto has the Lord helped us!"

From these words we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. What reason we have to erect similar memorials.~~***

Whether the agency of God is more or less visible, it is certain that not so much as a sparrow falls to the ground without his special direction. Let us then take a view of the mercies he has given to us. These have been,

***~~1. Public mercies.~~***

These have been exceeding great. Those specified at the close of the year 1804, were, our long-continued preservation from foreign invasion, or domestic tumults, or even the sound of war; as also our freedom from pestilences, earthquakes, and hurricanes, which had recently committed dreadful ravages in Spain, America, and the West Indies.

***~~2. Private mercies.~~***

We shall find abundant cause of thankfulness, if we survey our temporal mercies. How are we indebted to God for life, when multitudes have been taken into the eternal world; and for health, when many have been pining away with sickness; or racked with acute disorders! What an unspeakable mercy is it that our reason is continued to us, when many are bereft of this noble faculty, and thereby reduced, like Nebuchadnezzar, to a level with the beasts! What do we owe to God, if we have found comfort in our relatives and connections, (for "it is God who makes men to be of one mind in a house,") and if death has not been permitted to rob us of those in whose welfare we are deeply interested! Perhaps during the preceding year we have entered into new connections, or had our families enlarged. Perhaps our business has prospered; or the difficulties with which we have contended, have been overcome. In all these things we ought to acknowledge the hand of God, and to think how highly favored we have been above myriads of our fellow-creatures.

***~~2. Spiritual mercies.~~***

But if we turn our thoughts to the contemplation of our spiritual mercies, what ground shall we find for the liveliest gratitude, and the profoundest adoration! That the ordinances of the Gospel are continued to us, when, for our misimprovement of them "our lampstand might so justly have been removed;" what a blessing is this! If we only consider that the preached Gospel is, though not the only—yet the principal means which God makes use of for the salvation of men, we never can be sufficiently thankful that its sound has reached our ears, and its light been exhibited before our eyes, "for many prophets and kings have in vain desired to see and hear these things," which we so richly enjoy.

We have all, more or less, been made the subjects of restraining grace; and O, what a tribute of praise does that demand! How many of our fellow-creatures have brought themselves to an untimely end, either by their excesses, or by the hands of the public executioner! How many forlorn females protract a miserable existence by the wages of prostitution! How many, either to conceal their shame, or to avenge a quarrel, have committed murder! *How many, to rid themselves of their present troubles, have madly rushed on suicide!*Whence is it, I would ask, that we have not fallen into one or other of these evils? Are we made of better materials than they? "Have we not all one father?" Did they, previous to the commission of their evil deeds, imagine themselves more likely to fall than we?

Let us acknowledge "the good hand of God upon us;" *it is God alone who has made us to differ; and if he had not preserved us by his restraining grace, we would at this moment have been numbered with the most miserable and abandoned of the human race!*

Some among us, we trust, have been made to experience converting grace. And what cause for thankfulness have they! Look around, and see how few even of those who statedly hear the Gospel are savingly converted by it! What then do they owe to God, who have been quickened from the dead; who have had their sins blotted out by the blood of Jesus; who have been made partakers of a divine nature, and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven! Should not they raise an Ebenezer to the Lord?

Nor have they less cause for thankfulness who have received preserving grace. Consider how many have "begun to run well, and afterwards been hindered;" some waxing cold in their regard to true religion; others "turning aside to vain jangling;" some drawn into infidelity; and others making true religion itself hateful and abominable, by their hypocrisy or open impiety. Never does a year pass, but some instances of grievous backsliding occur, to the great dishonor of God, and the grief of all his people.

And why are not we the people that have been left to fall?

Have we felt no secret inclination to sin?

Have we on no occasion yielded to the suggestions of our great adversary, so that nothing but Omnipotence, snatching us like brands out of the burning, could have preserved us?

Have we never inwardly backslidden, so that if God had not for his own mercy's sake restored us, we must have been lost forever?

Let us only examine the records of our own hearts, and call our own ways to remembrance; and *there is not one of us who will not be ready to look upon himself as the greatest monument of saving mercy that can be found on earth!*

Whether then we consider our temporal or our spiritual mercies, we cannot but find unbounded occasion to raise grateful memorials to the Lord our God.

But it will be proper to show,

***~~II. In what manner we should erect our memorials.~~***

External and visible monuments are very proper expressions of national gratitude; but, as individuals, we must erect very different memorials.

***~~1. We must get a sense of God's goodness engraved on our hearts.~~***

We need not to form inscriptions on stone or brass; we are concerned rather to have the mercies of our God written upon our hearts. But here is our great fault; we do not "keep his great goodness in remembrance;" we "forget him at the sea, even at the Red Sea."

*One single calamity will call forth abundant complaints against God; but ten thousand mercies are scarcely sufficient to raise the soul to God, or to excite one desire to requite his love!* Sensible of this, David stirred up his soul to the performance of its duty, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name; bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits!" It is in this way that we must raise memorials to God; and such memorials he will not despise. One grateful and devout acknowledgment of God's mercies, is a more pleasing sacrifice to him than the cattle upon a thousand hills, "Whoever offers him praise, glorifies him."

***~~2. We must endeavor to impress others also with a sense of it.~~***

This is a method of perpetuating the remembrance of his goodness, which the Lord himself has prescribed. [Psalm 78:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.5-7). And the more sensible we ourselves are of his kindness to us, the more shall we exert ourselves to preserve the knowledge of it in this way.

How admirable is the example of *David*in this particular! He seems to have labored with all his might, not merely to praise God with his own lips, but to interest all, whether of his own or future generations, in the same blessed employment, [Psalm 145:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-7).

On the contrary, how severely was *Hezekiah*rebuked for ostentatiously displaying his own riches, when he should have been magnifying to the Babylonish ambassadors the Lord's goodness, and commending to them the knowledge of the God of Israel, [2 Kings 20:12-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.12-18) with [2 Chronicles 32:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.24-25); [2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.31). It is possible enough that he might pretend to give God the glory; but God, who knew his heart, saw that he was lifted up with pride.

Just so, we are in danger of *erecting memorials rather for our own honor*, than for God's; but we must be exceeding jealous upon this head, lest, instead of pleasing, we offend the Majesty of Heaven; and lest, instead of bringing a blessing upon ourselves, we entail a curse! We may boast; but our boast must be of God, and not of ourselves; we may raise monuments; but they must be truly "Ebenezers," ascribing everything to "the Lord's help," and not to an arm of flesh.

***~~3. We must testify our sense of it by an increased devotion to his service.~~***

If we are sincere in our acknowledgments, we shall be inquiring, "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the benefits that he has done unto me?" The end for which our God grants his mercies to us, is, that we may bring forth fruit to his glory; and, if he finds that all his pains and sustenance are without effect, he will cut us down as "cumberers of the ground! [Isaiah 5:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.3-6); [Hebrews 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.7-8)." Whatever

be our character then, we must make this improvement of the Lord's goodness to us. If we are impenitent, it must lead us to repentance. If we are already his servants, it must constrain us to increased diligence in his service, and cause us to abound more and more in every good word and work. We must not satisfy ourselves with empty commendations, crying, "Lord, Lord;" but must do with cheerfulness and delight whatever he commands us.

***~~4. We must trust him in all future difficulties and dangers.~~***

This is a very principal end of raising memorials of any kind; it is, not merely to remind us of what God *has*done, but of what he is ever ready to do, if we call upon him.

Here again we are called to admire the conduct of *David*, who regarded the deliverances which he had experienced from the paws of the lion and of the bear, as arguments for trusting in God, and for expecting a similar deliverance from the sword of Goliath, [1 Samuel 17:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.37).

*Paul*also made a similar improvement of the mercies given to him; saying, "God has delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us, [2 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.10)."

Trials will succeed each other, as "clouds coming after rain;" we are not to expect a termination of them, until we are called to our eternal rest above. Yet while on this account we can only say, "Hitherto has the Lord helped us," we may safely commit ourselves into his hands, knowing, that "whoever trusts in the Lord, shall be even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but stands fast forever! [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1)."

***~~#290~~***

***~~THE DUTY OF COMMEMORATING GOD'S MERCIES~~***

**[1 Samuel 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 7.12)**

"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us."

The Jews lived under a Theocracy, and received from God a greater number of visible interpositions in their favor than any other nation under Heaven. In remembrance of these, many different memorials were erected, and many rites instituted; so that the people might be kept in a steadfast adherence to him as their rightful Sovereign, and in a constant dependence on him as their almighty Protector.

But they were ever prone to depart from him, and to transfer their allegiance to the gods of the heathen that were no gods, but idols of wood and stone. For these iniquities, they were frequently given up into the hands of their enemies, and left to feel the bitter consequences of their impiety. But, when they were made sensible of their guilt, and brought to humble themselves before God, he returned in mercy to them, and effected for them the deliverance they implored. Such an interposition was obtained for them by the prayers of Samuel; and in remembrance of it was the stone erected, to which my text refers.

But, as God is the Governor of all the earth, and interposes still for his people as really, though not so visibly, as in the days of old, we will not confine our views of this transaction to the particular deliverance to which it primarily refers, but will extend them generally to the Church at large; and consider it as,

***~~I. A commemorative act.~~***

The Jews at this time were grievously oppressed by the Philistines. Samuel called them to repentance, and promised, that, if they would put away their false gods, and return with penitential sorrow to the Lord their God, they should be delivered out of the hands of their enemies. That their return to Jehovah might be the more solemn and universal, Samuel appointed all the heads of the nation to meet him at Mizpah. But the Philistines, jealous of so large an assemblage of Israelites on the borders of their country, came forth to attack them; and God, in answer to the prayers of Samuel, rescued his people from their hands, and utterly discomfited the Philistine armies. To commemorate this deliverance, Samuel "put up the stone, which he called Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto has the Lord helped us."

But, to understand the precise scope of this memorial, we must advert to the means by which the deliverance was obtained. Then we shall see that the stone thus raised, proclaimed, to the whole nation:

***~~1. That God is a hearer of prayer.~~***

This the people could not but acknowledge, since they all had applied to Samuel to entreat the Lord in their behalf, verse 8. And this was a truth which it was of the utmost importance to commemorate, since it demonstrated Jehovah to be the only true God. To this truth the whole Scriptures bear witness. It was in answer to the cries of Israel that God had formerly delivered them from Egypt, and brought them in safety through the Red Sea. When Amalek came forth against them to destroy them in the wilderness, it was not by the sword of Joshua, but by the prayers of Moses, that Israel obtained the victory; for, when the hands of Moses hung down, Amalek prevailed; but, in consequence of their being held up until the evening, Israel prevailed, and gained at last a complete triumph. In every part of their history the same truth was manifested. See [Psalm 106:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.43-44) and Psalm 107 throughout. And to this hour are *the memorials of it the greatest possible encouragements to seek for mercy at his hands.*

***~~2. That God will deliver his penitent and believing people.~~***

Here we must have an especial eye to the occasion before us. The people, in compliance with the exhortations of Samuel, prayed, and fasted, and confessed their sins, and put away their strange gods, and gave themselves up to Jehovah, "to serve him only, verse 6." This showed the sincerity of their repentance, without which they could not hope for mercy at God's hands.

But, as humiliation alone could be of no avail, Samuel offered a suckling lamb as a burnt-offering to God, thereby acknowledging the people's desert to be utterly consumed, and their hope of acceptance only through a vicarious sacrifice. It is remarkable, that, as Samuel was in the very act of offering this sacrifice, "God thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines," and, by the terror which those thunders inspired, caused them to fall an easy prey to the sword of Israel, verse 9-11. A still more glorious testimony he gave to Peter's exhibition of this Lamb of God as crucified for the sins of men. See [Acts 10:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43-44).

Thus the people were reminded, that in all their approaches to the throne of grace there must be a union of penitence and faith; and that, whenever they so approached God, they would assuredly be delivered, however great might be the difficulties in which they were involved, or imminent the dangers to which they were exposed.

But to all future ages also was this memorial intended to convey,

**II. An instructive lesson.**

***~~1. It plainly teaches us that we should often review our past mercies.~~***

All believers have received mercies in abundance, which they ought from time to time to review, in order to impress a sense of them the more deeply on their minds. For lack of this, how many mercies are forgotten! And what a loss do we sustain by means of our forgetfulness! *Blessings that are unnoticed are no more to us than they are to the brute creation*; but if we bring them frequently to our remembrance, we have frequently in the retrospect a sweeter taste of them than we had in the actual possession. From this act of Samuel's then let us learn to pass over no mercy without laboring to imprint it on our minds, and to retain the remembrance of it to our dying hour.

***~~2. It teaches us that we should especially view the hand of God in all of our past mercies.~~***

It is this which gives the chief zest to all our mercies. And to whom can we trace them but to God?

Look at your temporal mercies:  
the time, and place of your birth, when the light of the Gospel was shining all around you;  
your preservation during the helpless state of infancy, which so many myriads of human beings never survive;  
the many deliverances, seen, and unseen, which you have experienced since;  
the blessings of health and abundance, while so many have spent their days in sickness and poverty.

View but the last year, and see how many have been plunged into deep distress, from which you are exempt; or been called away into the eternal world, while you are left with protracted opportunities of working out your salvation!

Think of your spiritual mercies. Have you any measure:  
of spiritual light in your minds,  
of softness in your hearts,  
of holiness in your lives?

Have you any hopes in Christ as your Savior?

Have you any experience of the Spirit as your Comforter?

Have you any prospects of Heaven as your inheritance?

Think of multitudes around you, or look at those who are gone beyond redemption, and say whether it is within the power of language to express your obligations to your God! For who is it that has made you to differ? Will you, or can you, trace these blessings to your own superior wisdom, or goodness, or strength? Must you not of necessity acknowledge the hand of God in them, and say, "Hitherto has the Lord helped us!"

Surely in reference to every blessing, whether temporal or spiritual, you must say with David, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise!"

***~~3. It teaches us that we should make our experience of past mercies. the ground of expecting all that we can need from God in the future.~~***

Doubtless the memorial raised by Samuel was particularly intended to answer this end. And so should the memorials that are raised in our hearts, "You have been my help; therefore under the shadow of your wings will I rejoice! [Psalm 63:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.7)." "Because the Lord has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live [Psalm 116:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.2)." This was Paul's mode of improving past mercies, "God," says he, "delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us! [2 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.10)."

From what we have received "hitherto," we know what to expect henceforth. O blessed effect of preserving memorials of past mercies in our minds! What holy confidence will it introduce into the soul, and what a happy anticipation even of eternal blessedness! Only let the "Ebenezer" which Samuel erected teach us this, and we shall ourselves raise in due time a similar memorial in the realms of bliss.

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

***~~1. Take now a review of all that God has done for you in times past.~~***

Let those who are yet living without God in the world contemplate God's forbearance towards them.

***~~Let those who have been brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel survey the riches of divine grace displayed towards them.~~***

Let believers bring to their remembrance their manifold temptations, their grievous back-slidings, their repeated falls; or, if they have been kept from falling, the almost miraculous supports by which they have been upheld. Then will the example before us have its due effect; and God will receive the glory due unto his name.

***~~2. Look forward now to all that you can need from God in times to come.~~***

Nothing but a sense of our necessities will keep us properly dependent on God. Let your minds then be continually intent on this subject. Think of all you need for *body*, or for *soul*, for *time*, or for *eternity*—and then see what need you have for help from God in the future.

Yet do not be disheartened by the sight of all your necessities; but remember, that however great they are, "God is able to supply all your needs out of his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Call to mind the promises of help which God has given you in his Word, [Isaiah 41:10-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10-16). See how ample they are; how repeated; how strong! Though you are but "a worm," yet through him "you shall thresh the mountains."

In a full persuasion of this, commit your every concern to him, and expect that he will be "a very present help to you in every time of need." Only trust in him with your whole hearts, and "you shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

***~~#291~~***

***~~SAMUEL'S JUDICIAL CHARACTER~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 7:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 7.15-17)~~***

"Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD."

As there are times and seasons commended to our special attention on a religious account, so there are particular occasions which it is proper for us to notice, on account of the interest they create in the public mind, and the facility they afford for imparting instruction suited to them. The pomp with which the judges of the land are surrounded, when they go their circuits for the purpose of dispensing justice through the land, is calculated to make a good impression upon the community at large; and to fill all ranks of men with gratitude to God, for the protection which they enjoy under the dominion of laws wisely enacted and well administered.

We avail ourselves of the opportunity now offered, to set before you the judicial character of Samuel, (than whom there never existed a more diligent or impartial judge,) with a view to trace a parallel between the privileges enjoyed by Israel under his government, and those with which we are favored in this happy land.

In the prosecution of this subject I will state:

***~~I. The advantages of Israel under the government of Samuel.~~***

Perhaps, among all the governors of Israel, there was not one that maintained a more blameless character than Samuel. Indeed, he is distinguished in Scripture as inferior to none, not excepting even Moses himself, [Psalm 99:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 99.6); [Jeremiah 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.1).

***~~1. We see how eminent Samuel was in the administration of justice.~~***

Though he had all the cares of government upon his hands—yet did he, from year to year, make a circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpah, in order to take cognizance of the violations of the law, and to decide with equity all the cases that would be brought before him. Now, this was a very great benefit, not to those particular places only, but to all the country round about them; for it tended to uphold the authority of the laws; it gave to all an assurance that their grievances would be redressed, and that those who dared to violate the law should not go unpunished. Thus it conduced to the peace and welfare of society in general, inasmuch as it checked the commission of outrage among the lawless, and gave security to those who were quiet in the land.

His knowledge of the laws inspired all with confidence;  
his known integrity disposed all to a ready acquiescence in his decisions;  
his authority silenced opposition, where unreasonable selfishness would otherwise have maintained and perpetuated discord;  
and his taking a circuit, annually, for the express purpose of dispensing justice, facilitated the access of all to his tribunal; when, if he had remained at home, multitudes would have been constrained to go without redress, through an incapacity to bring before him all the witnesses that would be necessary to substantiate their claims.

***~~2. Samuel was eminent in the maintenance of true religion.~~***

While the ark was at Shiloh, he would probably have not felt himself authorized to build an altar at Ramah; but now that it had been many years removed from the Tabernacle, in which, until it was taken by the Philistines, it had been kept; and, consequently, the worship of Jehovah, as appointed in the Law, had been neglected. He, as a prophet of the Most High God, and doubtless by inspiration of God, raised an altar at Ramah, where the seat of government was; and thus proclaimed through the land, that Jehovah, and Jehovah alone, was to be worshiped.

To see this in a proper light, we must recollect that the whole people of Israel had been addicted to idolatry, everywhere worshiping strange gods, even Baal and Ashteroth! 1 Samuel 6:3-4. For this, God had given them up into the hands of the Philistines for several years; until, upon their repenting and turning to the Lord, he had delivered them by the hands of Samuel. It was under these circumstances that Samuel built an altar to the Lord, so that the people might be kept steadfast to the faith they had received. And this was doubtless a great benefit conferred upon the land; because his example, supported and enforced as it was by his authority, could not fail to deter many from relapsing to idolatry, and to encourage everywhere the worship and the service of the one true God.

Perceiving, as we now must, how happy the Jews were under such a governor, we yet are only the better prepared to see:

***~~II. The superior advantages which we enjoy under our government.~~***

We will mark this in both of the preceding particulars; for it is certain that we far, very far, excel them:

***~~1. In our legal proceedings.~~***

We have an order of people expressly for the purpose of maintaining, and enforcing, and executing the laws. For this office they are qualified by a long and most laborious education; and are chosen from among their competitors on account of their superior proficiency. So far from having their time occupied with political engagements, they are absolutely prohibited from entering upon the great political arena of the nation, in order that they may be kept free from any undue bias, and be enabled to devote all their time and all their talents to the prosecution of their one object of dispensing justice through the land.

And these people take a circuit, not through one district only, (like Samuel, who went not beyond the country belonging to the tribe of Benjamin,) but through the whole kingdom; and that, not once only, but twice in the year, and in some part even thrice.

In respect of impartiality and integrity, they were not exceeded even by Samuel himself. Under the whole heavens there never was a country where the laws were more equitably, more impartially dispensed. Even religion itself, which, as an object of aversion, is more likely to warp the judgment than anything else, is sure to find support according to the laws; and, if it is on any occasion oppressed, it is only in conformity with laws that have been unadvisedly enacted, and not in opposition to laws that have been made for its support.

And who among us has not reason to bless God for such a constitution as this! Who is there that can injure the very lowest among us, without being amenable to the laws, and paying the penalty due to his transgression? The peace and security which we of this happy land enjoy, under the dominion of the laws, are not exceeded by any people under Heaven, and are equaled by very few. And this benefit depends not on the life of any individual; (the Israelites found a far different state of things under the government of Saul,) it is the constitution of the land; it is transmitted and perpetuated under every reign; and I trust it will continue the happy portion of this country to the latest generations!

***~~2. In our religious privileges.~~***

We have not one altar raised, in one favored place; but many, throughout the whole land; so that, for the most part, they are accessible to all; and where the increase of population has required more, they have been erected with great liberality at the public expense.

Nor is our worship so unedifying or expensive as that at Ramah. No, truly we have a Liturgy provided for us; a Liturgy, in which all that was shadowed forth under the Jewish ceremonies is plainly declared. The imposition of hands on a dying victim, the sprinkling of his blood upon the mercy-seat and on the offerer, and the consuming of his flesh upon the altar, were but faint emblems of what we are taught in express terms.

We go as sinners unto God;  
we bring before him that great Sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ;  
we implore mercy in the name of that adorable Savior;  
we declare our affiance in his all-atoning blood, which we sprinkle on our consciences for the remission of our sins.

The king upon the throne, and the lowest subject in the land, here meet upon a footing of equality; all having equal access to God, and equal encouragement to expect mercy at his hands.

Say, you who are here assembled, whether you do not feel your elevation in these respects, and are thankful that the golden scepter of mercy is held forth equally to all; and that, instead of having occasion to envy the great and mighty of the earth, you have reason rather to rejoice that "there is no respect of persons with God," or that, if there is, it is in your favor; since God has "chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom, [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)." Truly the preaching of the Gospel, unrestrained as it is to time, or place, or party, calls for the devoutest gratitude from every person in the land.

***~~Learn then, brethren,~~***

***~~1. How to appreciate the blessings you enjoy.~~***

We have seen how happy Israel was under the government of Samuel; and what still richer privileges we of this nation enjoy. But we are surprisingly slow to acknowledge the blessings which are thus richly bestowed upon us. Indeed, *the commonness of these mercies is the very thing which hides them from our view!* Could we but see what has been done by the Court of Inquisition in Popish countries, and what is still done wherever that tribunal exists; could we see our own friends and relatives seized for some supposed crime, we know not what; and carried, we know not where; and tried, by we know not whom; and put to death by torments more cruel and lingering than we can conceive—then truly we should bless our God for our courts of law, for our trials by jury, for the publicity of all judicial acts, and for the high unimpeachable integrity of our Judges.

And if we could conceive the cruelties exercised on thousands on account of articles of faith, we would indeed adore our God for the liberty we enjoy of worshiping God in conformity with our own judgment, and of serving him according to the dictates of our own conscience. Religion, with us, is a part of the national law; and is upheld as sacred, against the efforts of all who would subvert it. Truly, I must say, if we do not praise God for these benefits, "the very stones may well cry out against us!"

***~~2. How to improve the blessings we possess.~~***

Samuel improved his influence for the honor of God, and for the benefit of man. And thus must we also act, according to our ability. True, we are not invested with such authority as his; yet have all of us, in our respective spheres, some opportunity of doing good. We may, both by our example and advice, promote the dominion of law and equity, by doing unto others as we, in a change of circumstances, would think it right that they should do unto us. Yes, and on many occasions we may strengthen the hands of those who administer the laws, by giving them the aid of our testimony, and upholding them in the execution of their high office. In so doing, we may be public benefactors to the state.

Yet we must not let our zeal be exercised only on things relating to the outward benefit of man; we must have a zeal for God also, and must endeavor to uphold his worship in the land; yes, and in this we must be particularly active in the place where we live. There are many who will take extensive circuits about some temporal matter, who yet are found very remiss at home in matters relating to their God. But in us should be combined a zeal, both public and personal, both civil and religious.

Look well then, I beg you, brethren, to this duty. Let there be in you a holy consistency; and let it be seen, that, if you are benevolent abroad, you are pious at home; and that the more closely your conduct is inspected, the brighter will it be found, and the more will your character be exalted in the estimation both of God and man.

***~~#292~~***

***~~CONVERSION A GROUND OF JOY~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 10.12)~~***

Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

*Proverbs are short and weighty sentences, comprising in few words some great and important truth.* Of this kind was that which David addressed to Saul, "As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes wickedness.’ [1 Samuel 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.13)." Of this kind were all the Proverbs of Solomon. But sometimes they are brief sayings referring to some particular event, which they serve at once both to commemorate and improve. The most remarkable of any in the Bible, is that which was used to commemorate God's interposition in behalf of Isaac, to preserve him from being offered up in sacrifice by his father's hand, and at the same time to show what interpositions all God's faithful and obedient people may expect in the very moment of their greatest necessity, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" or, as it should rather be translated, "In the mount (the mount of difficulty) the Lord shall be seen, [Genesis 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.14)."

The proverb in our text is of a less serious kind; yet it is very instructive, as showing, that God will impart his blessings to whoever he will, and frequently to those who we would, humanly speaking, say, were least likely to receive them.

Upon the people of Israel desiring to have a king over them, God appointed Saul to be their king. But, when Samuel announced to Saul the purpose of God respecting him, Saul could not believe it. Samuel, however, gave him signs, whereby he should infallibly know the truth of what had been declared. All these predictions came to pass accordingly; and all the people, when they saw Saul prophesying, as skillfully as any of the other prophets, were filled with wonder, that he, who had never been instructed, should be able to perform his part in so extraordinary a way. They could scarcely believe their own senses! And so remarkable was it in their eyes, that it served them as a proverb, whereby to express to all future generations any great and unlooked-for improvement in the mind of man, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Now this proverb we may consider as containing,

***~~I. A subject for grateful admiration.~~***

What surprise this change in Saul occasioned among all who beheld it, we are informed in the verse before our text, "And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" And a man of the place answered, "And who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

A similar surprise, too, is often created by the change wrought in people at this day by the grace of God; being wrought under circumstances which, to the eye of sense, appear most unfavorable.

Many are converted to God, when no such change could have been hoped for,

**1. From their age.**

Some are awakened after they have attained the middle period of life, when it might have been supposed, that their opinions and habits were so firmly fixed as not to admit of any material alteration. Respecting such, we may suppose their friends to say, 'I am surprised at him, a man of sense and judgment! a man of correct habits and sound principles! How can it be, that he should allow himself to be warped by the statements of any foolish enthusiast? I can scarcely believe it! Is HE become one of these deluded people?' Among the godly, too, the same surprise may prompt them to ask, 'And is he become one of us?'

Others are turned to God at a very early age, before they could well be expected to exercise any just discretion on matters of such consequence. Of them we may suppose the observation to be, What! at his early age has he begun to think? At a time of life when we might expect nothing but thoughtless levity to occupy his mind, has he begun to set God before him, and to devote himself to his Savior with his whole heart? Who could have conceived that he should so appreciate the value of his soul, and feel so deeply the importance of eternity? It seems as if another Samuel or Timothy were born into the world, if not a very John, who was sanctified from the womb.

***~~2. From their occupations.~~***

At the very first establishment of Christianity, soldiers flocked to ask counsel of John the Baptist, and Roman centurions believed in Christ, [Matthew 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.5); [Matthew 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.10); [Acts 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.1); [Acts 10:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.47-48). Among the very Apostles of our Lord, too, was *Matthew*, a unjust tax collector, called by Christ, when sitting at the tax booth.

Just so, now, from amidst camps, where, for the most part, a dissoluteness of living, rather than anything of serious piety, may be supposed to dwell, does the work of conversion go forward. And amidst the busiest scenes of worldly business is the still small voice of redeeming love attended to, and made effectual for the salvation of men.

And what may we suppose their close companions to say? 'I am amazed at him! He, so bold and intrepid as to brave death in its most terrific forms—is *he*brought down to such a state of feminine weakness, as to be weeping for his sins, and reading his Bible, and praying to God, and performing, I know not how many self-denying services, which he calls his duty? And this other person, too, who was advancing so rapidly towards opulence—is he all of a sudden sitting loose to wealth, and attending to the concerns of his soul?'

And while their former friends express their surprise thus, in a way of regret, we may well imagine that those to whom they have joined themselves are not a whit less ready to express the same, in a way of grateful admiration.

**3. From their habits.**

One has lived as a self-sufficient skeptic, in haughty unbelief, despising, as weak and foolish, all who yield to the authority of God's blessed word.

Another has, with the same proud spirit, valued himself on his attachment to that world, and his conformity to all its dictates; and, from a conceit of his own superior goodness, has despised others, and disdained to humble himself, even in the presence of Almighty God!

In another has been found nothing but thoughtless gaiety, and a round of habitual dissipation. He has done nothing that violates decorum; he has conformed to the standard which the society in which he lives has established; and he has seen no great end of life, but to live for his own pleasure.

Another has felt himself more at liberty, and has launched forth into a more licentious course, gratifying his every inclination, without any other restraint than that which worldly prudence has imposed.

Now, as diverse as these habits are, they all present peculiar obstacles to the conversion of the soul.

Pride of intellect,  
self-righteous conceit,  
love of the world,  
addictedness to sensual pleasure  
—all obstruct our way to Heaven!

It is a *miracle of divine mercy*whenever any of them are overcome.

Habit, of whatever kind it is, becomes a second nature—and nothing but Omnipotence can effectually counteract it. When, therefore, sinful habits are overcome, and opposite habits are established in its stead—it gives a just occasion for every observer to remark, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

***~~4. From their connections.~~***

It frequently happens, that one in a family, surrounded by friends who are altogether adverse to religion, is brought to the knowledge of Christ, while all the others are left in darkness. And that one is enabled to confess Christ, while all the others, in a way of solicitation or of threat, put forth their utmost efforts to prevent it! Amidst hatred, contempt, persecution, perhaps the weakest member of the family is enabled to maintain his ground, and to be faithful to his conscience and his God. In the circle in which he moved, it seemed almost impossible that divine grace should reach him; the darkness seemed almost impervious to light, or, at all events, the *chains*that bound him, seemed incapable of being loosed.

But as God, in the case of Peter, caused light to shine into the prison, and the fetters to be loosed, and the prisoner to come forth, so that the very people of God themselves, when they heard his voice, could not believe it; so have we seen, in divers places, the power of God put forth, and "from Caesar's household, yes, and from the very stones, as it were, children raised up to Abraham." These events, whenever they occur, cannot but excite, in all the family of Christ, a grateful admiration, and a devout thanksgiving to Almighty God!

But we may see in this proverb also,

***~~II. A matter for prudential inquiry.~~***

When we behold how delusive these appearances were in the instance of Saul; and that afterwards, when he was in the very act of seeking to destroy David, he prophesied again, and excited in the beholders the same wonder as before, [1 Samuel 19:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 19.15); [1 Samuel 19:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 19.20-24); we cannot but feel extremely suspicious of such conversions; and, together with our grateful admiration, blend also a measure of prudential inquiry, saying, "Is Saul among the prophets?"

***~~This is a matter which ought not to be too hastily assumed.~~***

It is a fact, that many "have a name to live, while they are really dead, [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1)." They "say they are Jews, while they are not, but are liars, [Revelation 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.9)." "Many will say unto Christ, *Lord, Lord!* when they will not do his will, [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21)." They "name the name of Christ, when they will not depart from iniquity, [2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19)." In the days of old, many would call themselves the *children of Abraham*, when they would not do the works of Abraham, [John 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.39); so now at this day, many will "*profess*that they know God, while they" palpably and habitually "in works deny him, [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16)." So far do many carry their self-deception, that they both live and die in the full confidence of their acceptance with God, when yet they have never truly known him; and they will even go to the bar of judgment, as it were, with their arrogant claims in their mouths, "Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, and in your name cast out devils, and in your name done many wonderful works?" But to their utter consternation will the Judge address them, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you workers of iniquity! [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23)."

***~~How, then, shall the point be determined?~~***

I answer, if you would know whether you are indeed among the prophets, inquire diligently whether you have the *mind*of the prophets; and whether you have the *spirit*of the prophets. If we do not accord with the Prophets and Apostles in their views of Christ, the matter is clear: we can have no part with them. Moses and all the prophets testified of Him, as the only Savior of the world; and if we do not regard him in this light, renouncing all our own righteousness, and looking for acceptance through Him alone, we stand at once self-convicted, and self-condemned!

But we must go further, and examine whether we are renewed, not merely in sentiment, but also "in the spirit of our mind." *We must not merely have a new creed, but really be made new creatures, having all our dispositions and desires conformed to those of Christ himself*—being "holy as he is holy," and "pure as he is pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)." If we would not deceive our own souls, we should take:  
the *faith*of Abraham,  
the *meekness*of Moses,  
the *devotion*of David,  
the *firmness*of Elijah,  
the *integrity*of Daniel,  
and all the characteristic virtues of the different prophets—as tests whereby to try ourself. And though we are far from combining in ourselves all their respective excellencies—yet there must be no grace which we allowedly neglect, or which we do not aspire after with our whole hearts. We must be Christians "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth!" Nor can we hope ever to be accepted by God, if we are not "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no deceit."

***~~By way of application,~~***

***~~1. Let me speak to some a word of encouragement.~~***

Many are ready to say, "I can never hope to be numbered with the children of God." But, if God chose Saul to an earthly kingdom, may he not choose us to one in a better world? If he fitted him for the discharge of earthly duties, may he not fit us for those which are heavenly? The exercise of sovereignty is the same in either case; and as there certainly was nothing in Saul to merit the distinction conferred on him—so *may we hope that God's sovereign choice may be fixed on us, though we are conscious that there is nothing in us to conciliate his regards*.

Perhaps, too, this may be done at a time that we least expect so great a blessing. Saul was occupied in seeking his father's donkeys, when Samuel made known to him God's purpose respecting him, and anointed him to the regal office.

Who can tell? You may have come here, at the present moment, with as little expectation of receiving any distinguished benefit as he; and yet this may be the hour when God will call you to his kingdom and glory, and give you "an anointing from the Holy One 1 [John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.20)" to prepare you for it. Look up to God; and pray that he would now, by his almighty power, make you, not only "another man," but "a new creature in Christ Jesus;" so may you hope that it shall be done unto you; and that, as the Church of old, on seeing the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, "And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" [Acts 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.20-21)" Just so, they may admire the grace of God in you, and, with joyful thanksgivings, may "glorify God for you! [Galatians 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.23-24)."

***~~2. Let me take up, over others, an affectionate lamentation.~~***

Respecting too many of you, alas! it must rather be asked, 'What! Is he *not yet*among the prophets?' Has he heard the word so long and so faithfully preached in vain? Has the Spirit of God so often striven with him in vain? Has he made so many good resolves in vain? Alas! how aggravated is his guilt! and how awful will be his condemnation!

Yes, brethren, you must, many of you at least, be sensible, that no great and visible and lasting change has taken place in you, nothing that has excited the admiration of others, nothing that has called forth thanksgiving in yourselves. If you compare yourselves with the Prophets and Apostles of old, you can find in yourselves no real resemblance to them, either in zeal for God or in devotedness to His service.

I would not have you continue in this forlorn state. You may perhaps, when you see the prophets with "their tabret and their pipe," be ready to account it all enthusiasm; and I readily acknowledge, that now the melody must be rather in the *heart*, than in any external and audible expressions. But there must be the praises of God both in your heart and in your mouth; and your whole life also must testify that "God is truly with you." Be in earnest, then, and seek without delay converting grace; and, "while you have the light, walk in the light, that you may become the children of the light! [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36)."

***~~#293~~***

***~~THE ISRAELITES' REJECTION OF SAMUEL REPROVED~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 12:16-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.16-23)~~***

"Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king." Then Samuel called upon the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel. The people all said to Samuel, "Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king." "Do not be afraid," Samuel replied. "You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right."

There is scarcely any more curious part of sacred history than that which relates to the appointment of Saul to the throne of Israel. He was a man of noble stature, but of a base family. His father's donkeys had strayed, and he went with a servant three days in search of them. His provisions were exhausted; and he thought of returning home, lest his father should begin to be anxious about him. His servant understanding that they were not far from the abode of Samuel, whom they supposed to be a kind of magician, and capable of informing them where the donkeys were, proposed that they should call upon him, and seek that information at his hands; but having no money left to pay this magician for his trouble, they were discouraged; having no idea that he would give his advice without a fee. The servant however said he had the fourth part of a shekel left, and that they would offer him that. Accordingly they went, and were informed that the donkeys were found. But Saul had further information, that quite astonished him.

The people of Israel had requested Samuel to appoint a king over them; and God, on being applied to by Samuel, directed him to comply with their request; and told him moreover, that this very Saul was the person whom he should appoint. Accordingly he told Saul what God had ordained; and gave him several signs whereby he should know infallibly that the matter was of God; and then convoked the people, and drew lots before the Lord; and Saul was the person on whom the lot fell. Saul, through modesty, hid himself; but God disclosed to Samuel the place where he was hid; and Samuel sent for him, and committed to him the charge of the kingdom, for which God then fitted him by some special gifts.

Were we to judge only from that part of the history to which we have already alluded, we would suppose that this change in the constitution of Israel was pleasing to God; but Samuel, by divine command, declared the contrary, and condemned the people with great severity. This is related in the words of our text; from whence we shall be led to notice:

***~~I. The sin committed.~~***

***~~The Israelites desired to change the form of their government, and to have a king appointed over them.~~***

For this desire, they had many spurious reasons:

Samuel was now old, and incapable of supporting the fatigues of government; he had therefore delegated a large portion of his authority to his sons, who, alas! were far from walking in his steps, or executing aright the trust reposed in them. This was assigned as one reason for their request, [1 Samuel 8:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.1-5). But though this would have justified a request for Samuel's interposition to reprove, or even to depose, his wicked sons, it was by no means a sufficient reason for them to seek an extinction of that form of government which God himself had appointed, and a substitution of another in its stead.

They were now also alarmed with the threats of Nahash, king of the Ammonites, who was preparing to invade them, [1 Samuel 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.12); and they wished to have the power of their government vested in the hands of one who should be able to protect them. But they needed not an arm of flesh, while they had Jehovah for their king; and if Jehovah had not delivered them according to their desire, it was owing to themselves, who by their sins had forfeited his protection. *They therefore should have made this an occasion of humiliation and of turning unto God, and not an occasion of desiring another king in the place of God*.

Besides, they wished to be in this respect *like the nations around them*, [1 Samuel 8:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.19); [1 Samuel 20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 20), forgetting that a Theocracy was their highest honor, and most distinguished privilege.

***~~This desire of theirs was exceeding sinful.~~***

It was, in the first place, an act of great folly; for they enjoyed all the benefits of kingly government, without any of its expenses or of the evils generally arising out of it, 1 Samuel 8:9-18.

In the next place, it was a mark of base ingratitude towards Samuel, who had spent his whole life in their service; and in this view Samuel could not but feel it, and complain of it. Yet so heavenly was his mind, that instead of resenting it, he committed it to God in prayer; and never complained of it until after the appointment of a king had been ratified and confirmed. Then indeed he appealed to them, whether he had not conducted himself towards them with the most unblemished integrity, [1 Samuel 12:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.2-5). But past services were of little account with people so infatuated and self-willed as that people were at this time.

But further, it was also a direct and open rejection of God himself. This was the construction which God himself put upon it, [1 Samuel 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.7). And how little God deserved this treatment at their hands, Samuel showed them, by recounting to them the mercies which he had given unto their nation, from its first existence even to that day, [1 Samuel 10:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 10.17-19); [1 Samuel 12:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.7-11).

But they were deaf to every statement that he could make, and insensible to every feeling that should have actuated their minds; for *who can convince those who are determined not to be convinced?*"Nay, but we will! [1 Samuel 8:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.19); [1 Samuel 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.12)," is but a poor answer from those who are taught what God wills. It is indeed the answer of sinners in general; but all who make such a reply, will hear of it again from God himself.

What we are to think of their conduct, will further appear from,

***~~II. The reproof administered.~~***

Such wickedness as this could not pass unreproved. Samuel therefore "solemnly protested against them," as God had commanded, [1 Samuel 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.9); and then proceeded to deal with them in that way which he conceived to be most conducive to their amendment:

***~~1. He desired a judgment from God, with a view to their humiliation.~~***

There was not at that time any appearance of a storm, nor was the wheat harvest a season when storms often occurred. But he requested of God to manifest his displeasure by a sudden tempest; and immediately the thunders rolled, the rain descended in torrents, and the indignation of the Lord was clearly shown; insomuch that "the people greatly feared both the Lord and Samuel." Thus was the desired effect produced; the people saw that they had sinned; and entreated the intercession of Samuel, that they might not be punished according to their deserts.

How different is the voice of God from that of man! that will convince the most obstinate, and soften the most obdurate; and, sooner or later, those who will not yield to the remonstrances of God's servants, shall be spoken to in a way which they can neither gainsay nor resist.

***~~2. He proclaimed mercy from God with a view to their encouragement.~~***

There was nothing vindictive in the conduct of Samuel; he lamented that the people should act so wickedly, and that God should be so dishonored; but he willingly sacrificed his own interests, and cheerfully resigned the power which had been committed to him. He saw how agitated the people were; and gladly embraced the opportunity of pouring balm into their wounds. He bade them "not fear;" for though they had sinned greatly, God would not utterly cast them off; and though there was nothing in them to induce him to show mercy, he would be merciful to them "for his great name's sake."

*It was not for any merit of theirs that God had ever made them his people, but purely of his own sovereign will and pleasure. And, to show them "the immutability of his counsel," he would still continue his favors to them, notwithstanding this great transgression*. They must however turn unto him, and cleave unto him, and no longer look unto the creature for deliverance; for on no other terms would he acknowledge them as his people, or grant unto them the blessings which he had reserved for them. As far as depended on himself, Samuel assured them that he would harbor no resentment for the indignity done to him, but would continue to pray for them to his dying hour. *Thus admirably did he temper severity with kindness, and soften fidelity with love.*

***~~By way of improvement, let us beware lest there be among us also any who reject God.~~***

If the rejection of Samuel was a rejection of God—then what must a rejection of Christ himself be? And yet, how many are there who say of him, "We will not have this man to reign over us! [Luke 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.14)." Yes, though expostulated with, and warned with all fidelity, how many persist in this awful determination! They say in effect to their minister, "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto you! [Jeremiah 44:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.16)." To disregard the voice of his faithful ministers may appear a small thing; but it is not really so; for Jesus identifies himself with his servants, "He who receives you, receives me; and he who receives me, receives him who sent me, [Matthew 10:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.40)."

*Beware then, how you presume to set aside the authority of Christ, or to place a rival upon his throne.*God may give you your own way; but it will be a curse to you, and not a blessing. Woe be unto you indeed, if you provoke God to "choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight, [Isaiah 66:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.4)." He says of Israel, "I gave them a king in my anger, and took him away in my wrath, [Hosea 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.11);" as you know he did, in a miserable and disgraceful manner, [1 Samuel 31:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 31.3-10).

Beware lest such be the termination of your ways also, and lest you "be given up to believe a lie, as a prelude to your final condemnation! [2 Thessalonians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.11), [12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thessalonians 2.12)." The direction of God to you is clear, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in ME is your help; I will be your King! [Hosea 13:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.9-10)." Let this counsel be welcomed by you; and your submission to his government shall before long be followed by a participation in his glory!

***~~#294~~***

***~~DEVOTION TO GOD URGED FROM A SENSE OF GRATITUDE~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 12:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.23-24)~~***

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you."

*A zeal for the honor of God, and a concern for the welfare of men's souls, are the most striking features of a spiritual mind*; and, when truly felt, will swallow up all selfish considerations, and take occasion, even from injuries received, to display their energy towards those who have injured us.

This disposition was manifested in no small degree by the Prophet Samuel, who, having long been the teacher, the governor, and the deliverer of Israel, was deposed, though not by force—yet by the unanimous wishes of his nation, who desired to have a king after the manner of the surrounding nations. Instead of expressing any resentment against them for this indignity, he only inquired of them whether they could charge him with any selfish administration, and then assured them of a continued interest in his prayers, and exhorted them to serve the Lord with their whole hearts.

His words will naturally lead us to consider,

**I. The duty here inculcated,**"Be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart!"

All, who believe the existence of God, acknowledge that he is worthy to be feared and served; but when our duty to him is practically enforced, too many cry out against it as the offspring of superstition and the parent of fanaticism.

***~~Let us mark then with precision, the nature of this duty.~~***

*To fear God, is to regulate our conduct by the unerring standard of his Word, avoiding carefully everything which may displease him, and doing with diligence whatever is pleasing in his sight.* But this must be done "in truth;" it is not a feigned obedience that will suffice. Hypocritical services, however specious, must be odious to God, "He requires truth in our inward parts;" and though "he will not be extreme to mark" our unavoidable infirmities, he will genuinely resent every instance of deception, "He cannot be deceived, and he will not be mocked!" To be accepted by him, we must be "Israelites indeed, and without deceit."

Moreover, our services must be, not like the constrained obedience of a slave—but the willing expressions of filial regard; they must be done "with all our heart."

If, like "Amaziah, we did that which was materially right in the sight of the Lord—yet not with a perfect heart," it would be of no avail, [2 Chronicles 25:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.2); we must, like Hezekiah, "do it with all our heart" if we would "prosper, [2 Chronicles 31:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 31.20-21)."

*Nothing must be deemed too hard to do, or too great to suffer, that God may be glorified.*David's direction to Solomon to "serve the God of his father with a perfect heart and a willing mind," completely expresses the nature of our duty as it is inculcated in the text of [1 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9).

***~~Let us next observe the importance of this duty.~~***

In the text it is said to be a right, and good, and necessary way; and not only in comparison with other ways, but to the exclusion of all others. They indeed, who most faithfully enforce the practice of this duty, are often reproached as deceivers, that would impose upon weak minds, and lead astray the ignorant and unwary. *The example of the world is urged in opposition to them as a better standard of right and wrong than the Holy Scriptures*. Nevertheless we must insist with Samuel that this way is "right;" "the broad road" of sin and self-indulgence leads men to destruction; and "the narrow path alone of holiness and self-denial leads unto life! [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14)."

Nor is this way merely despised, as erroneous—it is also reprobated, as pernicious; and both those who teach it and those who follow it, are often deemed the very bane of society! While the drunkard and the whoremonger are respected, and excused, "he who departs from evil is considered as a prey, [Isaiah 59:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.15)," which all are at liberty to hunt and devour. But the testimony of Samuel, confirmed as it is by numberless other passages of Holy Writ, is sufficient to outweigh all that the blind votaries of sin and Satan can bring against religion. It is most assuredly, not only the right, but the "good" way; and though other ways may be more pleasing to flesh and blood, there is not any so productive of happiness, so perfective of our nature, or so conducive to the welfare of society.

Many, who feel convinced that fervent piety is both right and good—yet will not be persuaded that it is necessary. They acknowledge perhaps that ministers, and others who are detached from worldly engagements, should cultivate the fear of God; but a just attention to divine things seems to them incompatible with their own peculiar state and calling.

Let none however imagine that any lawful calling is an impediment to religion; Adam even in Paradise had work assigned him by God himself, as being no less subservient to the welfare of his soul than to the health of his body, [Genesis 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.15). The truth is, that religion is "the one thing needful;" nor though, like Samuel or David, we had a kingdom to govern, could we plead any exemption on account of the multiplicity or importance of our engagements. The Word of God to every living creature is, "Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man! [Ecclesiastes 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.13)."

That while we acknowledge our duty we may also be led to practice it, let us consider,

**II. The argument with which it is enforced,**"Be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you."

The Jews were singularly indebted to God for:  
their deliverance from Egypt,  
their preservation in the wilderness,  
their settlement in the promised land,  
and the many wonderful interpositions of God on their behalf in the time of their Judges.

But waving any further mention of them, let us call to mind the mercies given to us:

***~~1. Temporal mercies.~~***

Numberless are the blessings which every individual among us has received; as are those also, which are conferred upon the nation at large. But on the present occasion it will be proper to contemplate rather the privileges we enjoy in our corporate capacity. And should not these operate as inducements to fidelity and diligence in the service of our God? Does not every favor bestowed upon us address us, as it were, in the words of Samuel, "Only fear the Lord!" Does it not bind us also, according to the ability and opportunities afforded us, to teach others "the good and the right way?" Instead then of making our situation an occasion for carnality, or an excuse for lukewarmness, let us endeavor to "render to the Lord according to the benefits he has conferred upon us."

***~~2. Spiritual mercies.~~***

As the most signal mercies imparted to the Jewish nation were typical of far richer benefits reserved for the Christian Church, we should but ill-consult the scope of the text, and still less the advancement of our eternal interests—if we should omit to mention our obligations to God for spiritual blessings.

"Consider" then that stupendous act of mercy—the gift of God's dear Son! Consider that he was given up to death, even the accursed death of the cross, for us sinners, for the recovery of our souls from death and Hell, and for the restoration of them to the divine favor; how unfathomable is the mystery! How incomprehensible is the love!

The terms too upon which God will accept sinners; how easy, how simple, how suited to our lost and helpless nature! We have only to "believe in Christ, and we shall be saved, [Acts 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.31)." Can anything be more encouraging; or lay us under greater obligations to obedience?

Consider farther, the benefits we receive by believing:  
we are instantly brought into the family of God;  
we enjoy sweet "fellowship with the Father and the Son;"  
we have the sting of death taken away;  
and we have an eternal inheritance in Heaven!

Shall all this love have no constraining influence? Shall it not cause us to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, that we may both live to him who died for us, and glorify God with our bodies and our spirits which are his, [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14); [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1); [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20).

Yes, such were the opinions of an inspired Apostle; nor can any rational being controvert or doubt such self-evident deductions.

Let us then apply them in confirmation of the text, and fix them on our minds as motives to serve God with all our hearts.

Let us put away that worldliness and sensuality, which are the bane and curse of our souls.

Let us discard formality, that blinding, that deluding sin.

Let us also abhor hypocrisy, that basest of all sins.

Let us serve our God, not with a few outward ceremonies, but with the inward devotion of our hearts, [1 John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18).

Let us not study how we may contract our regards to him into the smallest possible space; but how we may glorify his name, and advance his interests.

And while we thus cultivate the fear of God in our own hearts, let us, with Samuel, labor to the utmost, that he may be feared and served by all around us.

***~~#295~~***

***~~SAUL'S IMPATIENCE~~***

**[1 Samuel 13:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 13.11-13)**

"What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time."

In a reply which Elihu made to Job, it is confidently asked, "Is it fit to say to a king, You are wicked; and to princes, You are ungodly? [Job 34:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.18)." To this I answer, that doubtless respect and deference are due to rank; but not to such an extent as to compromise fidelity to God, and fidelity to the souls of men. If a Herod take his brother's wife—then a servant of God must tell him plainly, "It is not lawful for you to have her." And if a Saul violates openly, before all, an express command of God—then a Samuel does well to interrogate him, "What have you done?" and to tell him with an authoritative tone, "You have done foolishly!" Even a young minister, in cases of a more flagrant nature, must consider himself as God's ambassador, and must "rebuke with all authority! [Titus 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.15)."

That we may understand exactly wherein Saul's conduct was exceptionable, I will show,

***~~I. How far Saul's conduct was good and commendable.~~***

We by no means condemn it altogether; for, in part, we think it deserving of praise. He did well,

***~~1. Saul did well in that he dared not to encounter his adversaries until he had implored help from God.~~***

What is more befitting than this? Surely we may all learn from it. For, in ourselves, we are unable to do any good thing; and to undertake anything in our own strength is the certain prelude to defeat, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). Nor is it in great and arduous matters alone that we should cry to God for help. Even "the thinking of a good thought" is beyond our power without him! [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5). Under all circumstances, therefore, we must betake ourselves to God, that he may "help our infirmities, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26);" and must "be strong only in the Lord, and in the power of his might! [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)."

***~~2. Saul did well in that he sought after God in the ordinances of God's own appointment.~~***

"Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings" were appointed by God himself.

Burnt-offerings were needed to express our great need of mercy, through the sacrifice of Christ.

Peace-offerings were needed to express our gratitude for mercies received through him.

Both of these were called for, and, in fact, are required of us also continually; because *there can be no situation so favorable, but we need mercy; nor any situation so distressing, but we have abundant cause for thankfulness to Almighty God*.

The direction given us is, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known to God, [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6)." *It is the due mixture of humiliation and gratitude that renders our prayers pleasing unto God.*The very praises of all the heavenly hosts attest this to be the proper frame of a creature in the presence of his Creator, [Revelation 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8-9); [Revelation 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.11). Therefore, while we applaud the union of both the offerings in the instance before us, let us take care to imitate it in all our addresses at the throne of grace.

The reproof, however, that was given him, requires me to point out,

***~~II. In what respects Saul's conduct was foolish and blameworthy.~~***

At first sight, it seems as if he had usurped the priestly office; but I think that the enormity of such a crime could not fail to have been noticed in the reproof that was administered. I therefore forbear to allege that as any part of the accusation that is to be brought against him. His crime seems to have consisted principally in,

***~~1. His unbelieving precipitancy, in curtailing the appointed time.~~***

It is evident, from the acknowledgment of Saul himself, that he had been commanded to wait seven days for Samuel, in order to receive direction from him. It is evident also, that though he had waited to the seventh day, he had not tarried to the close of it, but had, through impatience and unbelief, transgressed the divine command. His very apology shows this. His army were deserting him through fear; and the Philistines were just at hand—and he could not wait another hour, lest he should be overwhelmed before he had made supplication to his God. But why should he offer sacrifice, when that duty devolved not on him, but on Samuel alone? He might have prayed to God as fervently as he pleased, and have urged every soldier in his army to do the same. This would have been no offence; it would rather have been pleasing and acceptable to God. But he yielded to unbelief, instead of waiting patiently upon God in an assured expectation of his promised aid.

Now, the direction given by God to all his people is, "He who believes, shall not make haste, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16)." The promise made to *Abraham*, relative to the deliverance of his posterity from Egypt, was not performed until the very last day of the four hundred and thirty years was arrived; and, in appearance, the accomplishment of it was hopeless. But had God forgotten it? Or did he allow it to fail? No, "on that same day" that he had so long before designated, "he brought them out."

We, in like manner, "however long the vision of our God may tarry, should wait for it, assured that it shall not tarry one instant beyond the appointed time! [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)," and that "not a jot or tittle of God's Word shall ever fail."

***~~2. His unwarranted dependence on a merely ritual observance.~~***

He evidently thought that the performance of this ceremony was the only effectual way to secure for himself and his people a deliverance from their impending danger. But how absurd was this thought! *Could it be supposed that to disobey God's commands was the right way to conciliate his favor?* Or that the performance of a mere external ceremony would supersede the necessity for his powerful intervention? Might not a moment's reflection have told him, that "to obey was better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams! [1 Samuel 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.22)."

Yet thus it is with multitudes among ourselves, who, if they do but attend upon the house of God, and go to the table of the Lord, and perform a few other external duties, imagine that all shall be well with them. We forget that God looks at the heart; and utterly despises every offering we can present unto him, if it is not accompanied with real integrity, both of heart and life. His express declaration is, that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, especially when he brings it with a wicked mind! [Proverbs 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.27)."

Let us then be aware of this. Let us fast and pray, and use all other means of obtaining help from God; but let us not expect the blessing from the means, but only from God in, and by, the means. Then shall we never be disappointed of our hope, but shall have daily increasing occasion to say, "Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ!"

***~~Learn, then, from hence,~~***

***~~1. Not to account any sin light.~~***

If any sin could be accounted light, certainly this sin of Saul might be so esteemed; for the enemy that pressed upon him was numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, and well appointed in all respects; while Saul's whole army consisted of only six hundred men, and not a single sword or spear among them all, except with himself and his son Jonathan. Under all these disadvantages, he had waited until the seventh day; and never, until he saw his men deserting him, and expected the enemy to come down instantly upon him, did he offer the sacrifice; and even then he did it with great reluctance. Yet for this sin he lost the kingdom to which God had called him!

Now, we are apt to plead *excuses*just as he did; and to think that we are justified by a kind of necessity in our disobedience to God. But, whatever God has enjoined, that we must do, even though, for our obedience to him, we were to be cast the next hour into a fiery furnace, or a den of lions! I beg you, brethren, settle this in your minds as an invariable principle, that *nothing under Heaven can justify us in violating a divine command.*

***~~2. Wherein true wisdom consists.~~***

Whatever we may imagine, or whatever the world may say, disobedience to God will be found to be folly in the extreme; yes, and replete with danger, too, to our immortal souls. Wisdom and piety are one; and it is not without reason that, throughout all the writings of Solomon, they are identified.

I would earnestly entreat you therefore, brethren, not only to ask yourselves from day to day, "What have I done?" but to compare your doings with the commandments of God. Even your religious services I would wish to be brought to the same test, that you may see how far they accord with the divine command, and how far they differ from it.

God will not judge as we judge. No; he will judge righteous judgments, and will reject with abhorrence many of the services on which we place a very undue reliance. *To be accepted by him, your faith must be simple, and your obedience unreserved*. Abraham's conduct is the pattern which you must follow. "Go, Abraham, and offer up your son, your only son, Isaac." Here was no disputing against the divine command, nor any doubt in executing it, though he had three whole days to ruminate upon it. No! He knew, that if Isaac should be reduced to ashes upon the altar, God could raise him up again; and would do it, rather than allow his promise to fail. To the execution of God's command he therefore set himself without delay.

You must likewise also act with like promptitude and zeal, and "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." This will prove wisdom in the outcome; and will prove as conducive to your own happiness, as to the honor of that God whom you love and serve.

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***~~JONATHAN'S VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 14.6)~~***

Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few."

*So frequent are the wonders recorded in the Scripture, that we scarcely notice them*; yet so great are they, that it is rather owing to our inattention, than to any real exercise of faith, that we do not reject them as altogether incredible and fabulous. This account of Jonathan is inferior to few, either in the strangeness of his feats, or the magnitude of their results. That we may have a clear view of the matter, we shall show,

***~~I. The state to which the Israelites were reduced.~~***

***~~The consequences of their choice of a king began now plainly to appear.~~***

They had desired a king, and had persisted in their request, notwithstanding all the expostulations of Samuel; and God had complied with their request. But Saul had not possessed the throne of Israel two years, before his kingdom was overcome by the Philistines, and brought into a state of the basest servitude. The Philistines would not so much as allow the Israelites to have a blacksmith of their own, lest he should make arms for them; so determined were they to keep the Israelites in the lowest state of subjection. Yet while they were in this state, Saul was imprudent enough to smite a garrison of the Philistines, and thereby to give his enemies a plea for utterly destroying the whole nation. Accordingly the Philistines called all their forces together, "thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and foot soldiers as the sands on the sea-shore for number;" while Saul had but six hundred men, and not a single sword to be found among them all.

To make their situation still more deplorable, Saul presumed to invade the priestly office, and to offer sacrifices to God without waiting the full time for Samuel that he had been expressly enjoined to wait; and thus he provoked God to take away from him the kingdom, and to transfer it to a person who would prove more worthy of it. Thus speedily was the nation reduced to ruin under that government which they had been so anxious to obtain!

***~~Just so, such consequences may justly be apprehended by all who are bent upon their own wishes, in opposition to the mind and will of God.~~***

There is the same self-will in all of us; we do not like that God should choose for us; we think that we can contrive better for ourselves than he has done. If we feel any evil in existing circumstances, we do not so much consider how we may obtain his favor, as how we may ward off the effects of his displeasure. But *inordinate desire of any kind will bring its own punishment along with it*; and we shall all find at last, that *our truest happiness consists, not in the accomplishment of our own will, or the gratification of our own desires, but in the favor and protection of Almighty God!*Perhaps there is not a man to be found, who must not after mature reflection acknowledge, that, *if God had allowed him in some particular instance to attain his own wishes, or execute his own desires—he would have rendered himself the most miserable of the human race.*

But, if we see God's hand in their punishment, much more do we in their deliverance. Let us therefore consider,

***~~II. The means by which their deliverance was effected.~~***

When nothing but utter destruction could be expected, God was pleased to interpose for them. He stirred up the minds of Jonathan and his armor-bearer to go and attack a garrison, that, humanly speaking, was invincible even by a considerable force; and that too even in open day. They climbed up the rock in the very sight of their enemies, slew about twenty of them on the spot, spread terror through the whole camp of the Philistines, gave an opportunity for Saul and his adherents to pursue the fugitives, and would have utterly destroyed the whole Philistine army, if the rashness of Saul had not deprived his men of that refreshment which their exhausted strength required.

Wonderful was this victory, and most instructive; in contemplating it we cannot but see,

***~~1. That God can work by the weakest means.~~***

Nothing can be conceived more inadequate to the occasion than the means that were here used. But *God delights to magnify his own strength in his people's weakness, and to interpose for their deliverance in their greatest straits.*It is for this very purpose that he often waits, until we are reduced to the lowest extremity, [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36). It was for that end that he reduced the hosts of Gideon from thirty-two thousand to three hundred; that the glory of their victory might be all his own! [Judges 7:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.2-8). *Whatever straits then or difficulties we maybe in, we should consider that God is all-sufficient; and that "the things which are impossible to man, are possible with him."*

**2. That a hope of God's aid should encourage our exertions.**

Two things encouraged Jonathan; the one, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save, whether by many or by few;" and the other, "It may be that the Lord will work for us." And what greater encouragement can we want? For, "if God is for us, who can be against us?" When therefore we are tempted, from a view of our own weakness, to say, "There is no hope," we should call to mind "the great and precious promises" which God has given to us in his Word, and the wonderful deliverances he has given to his people in every age. *In dependence upon him we should go forth, fearing nothing*, [Psalm 27:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1-3). Being "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," we should gird on our armor, or even go forth with a sling and a stone against every enemy, not doubting but that, like Goliath of old, he shall before long fall before us.

***~~3. That faith in God will ensure to us the victory.~~***

"Who ever trusted in him and was confounded?" See what wonders have been wrought by faith in former ages, [Hebrews 11:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.32-35); and shall it have less efficacy now? Will it not still, as formerly, bring Omnipotence to our aid? Only have "faith as a grain of mustard-seed," and all mountains shall melt before you. While faith is in exercise, we need not be afraid of viewing the obstacles that are in our way. Be it so, the enemy is entrenched on an almost inaccessible rock, and we cannot even get to him but in such a way as must expose us to instant death. Be it so, that we have no one on our side, except perhaps a single companion as helpless as ourselves. Be it so, that our enemy is not only prepared for our reception, but laughing to scorn our feeble attempts against him. All this matters nothing; the victory is ours, if we go forth in faith; and not only "shall the devil flee from us, if we resist him thus in faith," but all his hosts also shall be put to flight, and "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

Let those then who are ready to give way to desponding fears, remember on what a "Mighty One their help is laid, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19)," and let them "be strong in faith, giving glory to God! [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)."

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***~~MOURNING FOR THE SINS OF OTHERS~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.11)~~***

"I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."

Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the LORD all that night."

Never can we be weary of contemplating Scripture history; so diversified are its incidents, and so instructive the examples it sets before us. *The whole life of Samuel, from his first dedication to God by his mother to the very hour of his death, was one uniform course of piety*. That particular part of it which I propose at present to consider, is his conduct in reference to Saul, when God declared his purpose to rend the kingdom from him, and to transfer it to another who would show himself more worthy of it; we are told, "Samuel was troubled, and he cried out to the LORD all that night."

In discoursing on these words, we shall notice:

***~~I. The pious grief of Samuel.~~***

Respecting this we shall distinctly consider,

***~~1. The grounds of Samuel's grief.~~***

Saul had disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, in sparing Agag the king of the Amalekites, together with all the best of the spoil, when he had been strictly enjoined to destroy everything, "man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

This, at first sight, might appear a venial fault, inasmuch as he had leaned to the side of mercy, and had acted in conformity with the wishes of his people; and had even consulted, as he thought, the honor of God, to whom he intended to offer all the best of the cattle in sacrifice.

But he had received a specific commission, which it was his duty to execute. He was not left at liberty to act according to circumstances; his path was marked out, and should have been rigidly adhered to.

It does not appear that he stopped short of his purpose, because he thought that the command itself was too severe; for, in the first instance, he set himself to execute it fully; but, if he had felt some reluctance on account of its severity, he had no alternative left him; *it was his duty simply to obey*.

When *Abraham*was called to come out from his country and from his kindred, he obeyed, though he knew not which way he was to direct his steps. And, when he was enjoined to offer up his own son Isaac upon an altar, he hesitated not to do it; notwithstanding he knew that on the life of Isaac, to whose lineal descendants all the promises were made, the coming even of the Messiah himself essentially depended. Had he judged it right to listen to carnal reasonings of any kind, or to put his own feelings in competition with his duty—he might have easily found enough to satisfy his own mind. But he knew what the duty of a creature to his Creator was; and he obeyed it without reserve.

And so should Saul have done. We will take for granted that all his excuses were true; (though we doubt much whether covetousness was not the true source of his conduct,) still they carried no real weight; and his listening to them was nothing less than an act of rebellion against God.

And was not this a sufficient ground for grief? Yes, and Samuel did well in that he was grieved with it.

Doubtless Samuel was also grieved on account of the judgment which Saul had brought on himself and on his family, by this act of disobedience. He pitied the man who had subjected himself so grievously to the divine displeasure; and pitied his children also, who were involved both in his guilt and punishment. When Samuel himself, indeed, had been dispossessed of the kingdom, we do not find that he was grieved either for himself or his children; but for Saul and his children he deeply grieved. In his own case, Samuel had nothing to deplore; while he fell a victim to the ingratitude of man, he had a testimony from the whole nation, and from God himself, that he had discharged his duty towards them with fidelity. But in the case of Saul, Samuel saw the man who had been specially called by God to the kingdom, now dispossessed of it by that very God who had appointed him, and under his heavy and merited displeasure. In a word, *the sin and the punishment of Saul formed in the mind of Samuel, ground of deep and sincere grief*.

***~~2. The expression of Samuel's grief.~~***

By God the sentence against Saul had been pronounced; and none but God could reverse it. But so often, and in such astonishing instances, had God condescended to the prayers of his servants, yes, to the prayers of Samuel himself, that this holy man did not despair of yet obtaining mercy for his unhappy king. He, therefore, betook himself to prayer, and continued in it all the night, hoping that, like Israel of old, he would at last prevail. With what "strong crying and tears" may we suppose he urged his suit! And what an extraordinary measure of compassion must he have exercised, when he could continue in supplication for a whole night together! Such had been his feelings towards the people at large, after they had rejected him, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord, in ceasing to pray for you! [1 Samuel 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.23)." And such is the proper expression of love, whether towards God or man; for it honors God as a merciful and gracious God; while it seeks to benefit man, by bringing down upon him the blessing of the Most High.

But, in contemplating his example, we are chiefly called to notice,

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from Samuel's grief.~~***

In this record we may see what should our conduct be:

***~~1. In reference to the sins of others.~~***

*It is amazing with what indifference the universal prevalence of sin is beheld by the generality of mankind.*Those evils which tend to the destruction of all social comfort are indeed reprobated by men of considerate minds; but it is in that view alone that they are reprobated.*As offending God, sins are scarcely thought of*; men may live altogether as "without God in the world," and no one will lay it to heart, or show the least concern about the dishonor which is done to God.

The eternal interests of men also, it is surprising how little they are thought of. Men are dying all around us, and no one inquires whether they are prepared to die; and, when they are launched into eternity, no one feels any anxiety about their state, or entertains any doubt about their happiness before God. *It is taken for granted that all who die are happy. Whether they sought after God or not—all is supposed to be well with them; and to express a doubt respecting it would be deemed the essence of uncharitableness!*

But widely different from this should be the state of our minds. We are not indeed called to sit in judgment upon men; but to feel compassion towards them, and to pray for them, is our bounden duty. David tells us that "horror seized hold upon him," and "rivers of waters ran down his cheeks, because men did not keep God's Law." The Prophet Jeremiah exclaimed, "O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

Thus was it also with Samuel, in relation to Saul; and thus should it be with us, in reference to all around us. To see them dishonoring God and ruining their own souls, ought to create in us the same emotions as were felt by the Apostle Paul, when he declared that he had "great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethren's sake." Even though we have no hope of doing them good—yet should we, like our blessed Savior, weep over them, saying, "O that you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things that belong unto your peace!" Nor should we ever cease to pray for them, in hope that God may be gracious unto them, and make them monuments of his sovereign grace!

***~~2. In reference to our own sins.~~***

Here is reason for the very same complaint. Men can violate every command of God, and feel no fear, no compunction. As for such a sin as Saul's, it would not even be deemed a sin.

People think: 'True, they have not strictly adhered to the divine command; but the command itself was too strict; and they complied with the solicitations of their friends; and they meant no harm.' Hence, in their prayers, if they pray at all, there is no fervor, no importunity, no continuance. A transient petition or two is quite as much as their necessities require.

But did Samuel feel such grief for another, and should not we for ourselves? Did he cry to God all night for another, and should we scarcely offer a petition for ourselves? Should the deposing of another from an earthly kingdom appear a judgment to be deprecated, and shall we not deprecate the loss of Heaven for ourselves? Truly, *in neglecting to pray for ourselves, we not only sin against God, but grievously sin also against our own souls!*

***~~Let me then address myself,~~***

***~~1. To those who are in a state of careless indifference.~~***

Alas! What a large proportion of every church does this comprise! What then shall I say unto you? To Samuel, whose grief for Saul was inconsolable, God said, "How long will you mourn for Saul? [1 Samuel 16:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.1)." But to you I must say, How long will you *refuse*to mourn for yourselves? Has not your impenitence continued long enough? Many, of you have sinned against God, not in one act only, but in the whole course of your lives; and that, too, not in a way of partial obedience only, like Saul, but in direct and willful disobedience!

Will not you, then, weep and pray? Remember, I entreat you, that if you will not humble yourselves before God, you must be humbled before long; and if you will not weep now, you must before long "weep, and wail, and gnash your teeth forever" in that place where redemption can never come, nor one ray of hope can ever enter! I beseech you, brethren, reflect on this; and now, while the sentence that is gone forth against you may be reversed, cease not to cry unto your God for mercy day and night.

***~~2. To those who are desirous of obtaining mercy from God.~~***

As great as was Samuel's interest with God, he could not prevail for Saul. But you have an Advocate, whose intercessions for you must of necessity prevail, if only you put your cause into his hands. This "Advocate is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is also the atoning sacrifice for your sins." To him John directs you; and, if you go to him, it is impossible that you should ever perish; for he has expressly said, "Him who comes unto me I will never cast out!" To have a praying friend or minister is a great comfort to one who feels his need of mercy; but to have One who "ever lives on purpose to make intercession for us," and "whom the Father always hears," this is a comfort indeed. Commit then your cause, brethren, into the Savior's hands; and you may rest assured, that, whatever judgments you may have merited at God's hands, "you shall never perish, but shall have eternal life!"

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***~~SAUL'S SELF-DECEIT~~***

**[1 Samuel 15:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.13-16)**

When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."  
But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"  
Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."  
"Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night."  
"Tell me," Saul replied.  
  
If the Holy Scriptures exhibit to us the most perfect patterns of righteousness, they also bring to our view men devoid of righteousness, and living characters of wickedness under all its diversified forms and operations. *In truth, if we read them only as records of past events, without an application of them to our own lives and bosoms—we may be amused and instructed by them, but we shall not be greatly edified. But if we view them as mirrors, in which our own character, and the characters of those around us, are reflected—then, indeed, do we reap from them the benefit which they were intended to convey.*

Let us, then, take this view of the history before us, and see in it the state of the ungodly world at this time. Let us see in it,

***~~I. Their presumptuous confidence.~~***

Saul had been commanded to destroy the whole nation of Amalek, and everything belonging to them; but he spared the best of their cattle; and yet boasted to Samuel, that he had "performed the commandment of the Lord."

In this we see the conduct of multitudes around us. We all have received a commandment to wage war with our spiritual enemies, and to "destroy the whole body of sin, [Romans 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.6)."

Not only is "our reigning lust" to be mortified, [Romans 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.12), but *every sinful disposition*, though it be as dear to us as "a right eye," or apparently necessary to us as "a right hand, [Matthew 5:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.29-30)."

But, while much remains unmodified, we take credit to ourselves as having fulfilled the will of God.

The great majority of men, if not living in very flagrant iniquity, think, and wish others to think, that they have fulfilled the will of God, so far at least as not to leave them any material ground for shame and sorrow on account of their iniquities. See the self-complacent state of all around us. In the habit of their minds, they plainly say, "We have performed the commandment of the Lord," and have ground for commendation on that account.

But they stand reproved, one and all of them, by,

***~~II. Their glaring inconsistency.~~***

The very beasts which Saul had spared, convicted him of falsehood. It was impossible for him to resist the evidence which the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen gave of his disobedience.

And is there not equal evidence of the self-deceit of those around us? You say that you have obeyed the voice of the Lord. Let me then ask:

What is this worldliness which is so visible to all who behold you? Is it not clear and manifest, that the great mass of those who take credit to themselves on account of their obedience to God, are as much *addicted to the world*as any other people whatever? They may be free from its grosser vices; but their cares, their pleasures, their company, their entire lives, show indisputably whose they are, and to whom they belong. They are altogether "of the earth, earthly."

What is this impenitence, which is as manifest as the sun at noon-day? Who ever sees their tears, or hears their sighs and groans on account of indwelling sin? Who ever beholds them crying to God for mercy; and fleeing, like the man-slayer, with all possible earnestness, to the hope set before him in the Gospel? Does the heart-searching *God*behold any more of this in the secret chamber, than *man*beholds in the domestic circle, or in the public assembly?

What is this indifference to heavenly things? It is as clear a demonstration of their disobedience to God, as were "the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen," of Saul's hypocrisy!

But in the reply of Saul to his reprover, we see,

***~~III. Their vain excuses.~~***

Saul cast the blame of his misconduct upon the people. Not only does he speak of them as the agents whom he could not control, but he declares that they were the authors of his disobedience, inasmuch as he was constrained to sanction their conduct through fear of their displeasure, verses 21 and 24.

This is the very rock on which all self-complacent Pharisees are accustomed to stumble. It is not owing to any lack of inclination in themselves, that they do not serve God more perfectly, they will say—but to their situation and circumstances in life. It would be in vain for them to stem the torrent that carries all before it. Were they to follow the Lord fully, and to carry into effect the commands of God according to their full import, they would be altogether singular; and therefore they conform to the will of others, not from inclination, but necessity.

But let me ask: Are we to obey man in opposition to God? Are we to "follow a multitude to do evil?" Even Saul himself acknowledged, that in such a compliance "he had greatly sinned, verses 21 and 24;" and we may be sure that no such excuses will avail us at the judgment-seat of Christ.

Let me, then, declare to you,

***~~IV. Their impending doom.~~***

Saul was rejected by God.

He might have urged in his behalf, that the command which had been given him, left him a discretion to exercise mercy; and, at all events, his desire had been to honor God with sacrifices which must otherwise have been withheld. But the commands of God leave nothing to our discretion. We are not at liberty to restrict any one of them; but are bound to execute them all in their full extent. And as Saul, in deviating from God's command, had, in fact, "rejected the word of the Lord; God in righteous indignation, rejected him, verse 23."

And what better fate awaits us who limit the commands of God?

*It is in vain for us to dispute against the commands of God, as too strict, or too difficult. We are not called to dispute, but to obey.*Nor is it a partial obedience that will suffice; nor are we at liberty to commute obedience for sacrifice. Nothing is left to us, but to obey; and, if we would please the Lord, we must "follow him fully;" our obedience must be entire and unreserved; and, if it is not unreserved, we are guilty of direct and positive "rebellion, which is declared by God himself to be, in his sight, even as idolatry;" for, whatever we may think to the contrary, there is little to choose between disobedience to the true God, and obedience to a false one, verse 23.

I declare, then, to all of you, my brethren, that, to whatever privileges you have been exalted by God himself, you will have reason to curse the day wherein you ever listened to man in opposition to God, or withheld from God the entire obedience of your souls. By whatever excuses you may palliate such conduct, I declare to you, before God, that it is rebellion against him, and that, as rebels, he will reject you in the day of judgment!

**As an application of this subject**, there is only one thing which I would say; and that is, Take the Holy Scriptures, in everything, for your guide.

Do not call anything "A hard saying [John 6:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.60)." You may not be able to understand the reasons of God's commands, or to appreciate his reasons aright, if they were stated to you. Doubtless, to study their real import is your duty; but when that is once ascertained, *you have nothing to do but to obey them. You are not to sit in judgment upon them, or to lower their demands*. If the whole world urges you to depart from them, you are never to comply. For God you are to live; and, if need be, for God you are to die. It is on these terms alone that you can ever be acknowledged as Christ's disciples, [Matthew 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.38-39). If, then, "you have been called to God's kingdom and glory," see that you "walk worthy of your high calling." "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you the crown of life!"

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***~~SAUL'S DISOBEDIENCE AND PUNISHMENT~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 15:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.22-23)~~***

But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."

The sins of God's enemies, and especially of those who obstruct his people in their way to Canaan, will certainly be punished; God indeed may bear long with them, even so long as to make them tauntingly exclaim, "Where is the promise of his coming?" but he will surely come at last, to their utter confusion and their eternal condemnation.

The Amalekites had very cruelly attacked the Israelites in the wilderness, and without any just occasion. God therefore gave them up to the sword of Joshua, and commanded that his people should in due time inflict upon them far more extensive judgments, [Deuteronomy 25:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 25.17-19). The time was now come that their iniquities were full; and therefore God commanded Saul to execute upon them the threatening which had been denounced several hundred years before. This command Saul neglected to execute as he should have done; and thereby brought upon himself the heavy displeasure of his God. We behold in our text,

**I. The sin reproved.**

It might appear a small thing in Saul to spare Agag and the best of the cattle, when he had been enjoined to destroy all; and his vindication of himself to Samuel has an air of plausibility about it, which might almost reconcile us to this act as not very exceptionable; but Samuel, in the words before us, characterizes the conduct of Saul:

***~~1. As rebellion.~~***

The *command*which had been given to Saul was exceeding plain and strong.

The *solemnity*with which it was given, "Hearken!" etc.

The *reason*assigned for it, "What Amalek did to Israel in the way from Egypt."

The *minuteness*to which the command came, "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and *infants*, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys!"

All of this showed that there was no option left him, no discretion; but that the whole was to be executed according to the command.

Yet behold, through pride and covetousness he departed from the command, sparing Agag, to adorn his triumph; and preserving the best of the flocks and herds, to enrich himself and his people. Thus by executing the command in part, and violating it in part, he showed, that he made his own will—and not the will of God, the rule of his conduct.

And what was this but rebellion against the Most High? It was justly so characterized by Samuel; and such is the interpretation which God will surely put on such conduct, wherever it be found. To be "partial in the law" is, in fact, to set aside the law; and to "offend against it willingly in anyone point, is to be guilty of all! [James 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10)."

***~~2. A stubbornness.~~***

Saul, on meeting Samuel, took credit to himself for having fulfilled the will of God, verse 13. Thus it is that sin blinds the eyes of men, and puffs them up with a conceit of having merited the divine approbation by actions which in their principle and in their measure, have been radically wrong.

Samuel, to convince him of his sin, appealed to "the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen;" but Saul, with stubbornness of heart, persisted in avowing his innocence; yes, after the strongest remonstrances on the part of Samuel, authorized as they were, and commanded, by God himself—Saul still maintained, that he had done his duty, and that the people only were to blame; nor were they materially wrong, since they had consulted no interest of their own, but only the honor of their God, verses 14-21.

Here *we see how sin hardens the heart also, and disposes men to resist conviction to the uttermost*. Thus it was with our first parents at the first introduction of sin into the world; both of them strove to cast off the blame from themselves, the man on his wife, and the woman on the serpent, [Genesis 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.12-13); and how ready we are to tread in their steps, every day's observation and experience will teach us.

Let us next turn our attention to,

***~~II. The reproof administered.~~***

In our eyes perhaps, this act of Saul may appear to have been only a slight and well-intentioned error; but in the sight of God it was a very grievous sin; for "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Whatever we may imagine, the neglecting to serve the true God is but little different, in the estimation of our Judge, from the engaging in the service of a false God. Hence we find that the reproof administered was precisely such as the occasion called for.

We shall consider it in two points of view:

***~~1. As exposing his sin.~~***

We are not to imagine that Samuel intended to disparage the sacrifices which God had commanded. The many testimonies which God had given of his favorable acceptance of them sufficiently showed, that, when offered in a befitting manner, with humility of mind and a view to the Sacrifice which would in due time be offered—they were highly pleasing in his sight. But, if put in competition with moral duties, and substituted for obedience, they are hateful in the sight of God! [Isaiah 1:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-16). He "requires truth in the inward parts;" and more values the tribute of a thankful or contrite heart, than the cattle on a thousand hills! [Psalm 50:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.8-14); [Psalm 51:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.16-17). The excuse therefore that was offered by Saul was only a mockery and an insult to his God. And *whoever shall attempt a substitution of outward services for inward integrity of heart and life, or shall think to atone for the lack of one by the abundance of the other, will deceive himself to his eternal ruin!*[Matthew 23:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.23).

***~~2. As denouncing his punishment.~~***

God had before threatened to deprive him of the kingdom for presuming to offer sacrifices without waiting for Samuel according as he had been enjoined; and now that punishment was irreversibly decreed, verse 26. A sign too was now given him, that it would in due time be executed; as he rent the garment of Samuel, whom he endeavored to detain—so would God rend from him that kingdom, which he was so unworthy to possess verses 27, 28. This itself was indeed but a slight punishment; but it was *emblematic*of the loss of God's eternal kingdom; a loss which no finite intellect can appreciate. Yet is that the loss which every creature shall sustain, who by his rebellion offends God, and by stubborn impenitence cuts off himself from all hope of mercy.

***~~We will conclude the subject with some advice arising from it:~~***

***~~1. Learn how to estimate the path of duty.~~***

We are very apt to think that right, which is most agreeable to our own wishes; and to lean rather to that which will gratify our pride or self-interest, than to that which calls for the exercise of self-denial. But we should be aware of the *bias*that is upon our own minds, and of our proneness to make the law of God bend to our prejudices and our passions. And we may be sure, that if a doubt exists about the path of duty, moral duties must be preferred to ceremonial; and, in general, it will be found safer to lean to that which thwarts our natural inclinations, than to that which gratifies them.

***~~2. Be open to conviction respecting any deviations from it.~~***

There is an extreme aversion in us all to acknowledge that we have done amiss. But to be "stout-hearted is to be far from righteousness;" and wherever God sees such a disposition, he will surely abase it, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6). We all see in others how ready they are to *justify*what is wrong, and to *extenuate*what they cannot justify. Let us remember that we also have this propensity; and let us guard against it to the utmost of our power.

Let us rather, if we have erred, desire to find it out, and not rest until we have discovered it. We would not, if an architect were to warn us that our house were likely to fall, go and lie down in our beds without carefully inquiring into the grounds of his apprehension; a sense of danger would make us open to conviction. Let us therefore not be averse to see and acknowledge our guilt before God, lest our conviction of its existence comes too late to avert its punishment.

***~~3. Let your humiliation be honest and complete.~~***

Saul confessed his sin, but still showed his hypocrisy by his concern to be honored before men, verse 30. Hence, though Samuel so far complied as to go with him, and to execute on Agag the judgment that had been denounced, verses 32 and 33—yet he left him immediately afterwards, and never visited him again, verse 35.

Oh, fearful separation! The friend who just before had wept and prayed for him all night, forsook him now forever. From henceforth Saul was given up to sin and misery, until at last the vengeance of an incensed God came upon him to the uttermost!

Would we escape his doom? Then let our humiliation be deep, and our repentance genuine! Let us be willing to take shame to ourselves both before God and man; and be indifferent about the estimation of man, provided we may but obtain the favor of a reconciled God!

***~~#300~~***

***~~GOD INSPECTS THE HEART~~***

**[1 Samuel 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.7)**

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart!"

What a solemn declaration is this! How interesting to every one of us! *The generality of professors, it is to be feared, scarcely think of themselves as in the presence of God; whereas his eye is immediately upon our hearts, inspecting the very inmost recesses of them, and marking every imagination of them with a view to a future judgment.*

The admonition, though arising out of particular circumstances, is general, and deserves from every one of us the most attentive consideration. The occasion of it was this:

God having determined to reject Saul from being king over Israel, and to place on the throne one who should fulfill all his will, commanded Samuel to take a horn of oil, and to anoint to the kingly office one of the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite. Samuel, the more effectually to cloak the real object of his mission, was directed to offer a sacrifice at Bethlehem, and to invite to it both Jesse and all his sons. Eliab, the eldest of the sons, came first before him; and Samuel concluded, from his majestic deportment and his stature, that he must be the person whom God had ordained to the office; but God rectified his mistake, and told him, that he did not form his estimate after the manner of men; for "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart!" A similar intimation was given to Samuel in relation to seven of Jesse's sons, who passed before him; in consequence of which, David, the youngest, was sent for, and "was anointed in the midst of his brethren." There was in his heart what God did not see in the heart of any of his brethren. There were in them many external recommendations; but he "was a man after God's own heart;" and to his internal qualities God had respect, in appointing him to the kingdom. Having thus seen the scope of the words as delivered on that particular occasion, we shall proceed to notice,

***~~I. The truth contained in them.~~***

God does inspect the hearts of men.

***~~1. He is qualified to do so.~~***

"He is light; and with him there is no darkness at all, [1 John 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.5)." "His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good, [Proverbs 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.3)." There is no possibility of going from his presence, "if we ascend to Heaven, he is there; if we make our bed in Hell, behold, he is there also. If we say the darkness shall cover us, the darkness and the light to him are both alike, [Psalm 139:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.7-12)." "All things are naked and opened before him," just as the sacrifices, when flayed and cut open, were to the inspection of the priest, [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13). "Hell and destruction are before him; and much more the hearts of men, [Proverbs 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.11)."

***~~2. He does so.~~***

"His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, [2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9)." "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates! [Psalm 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.4);" insomuch that he marks with the utmost precision every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts, [Deuteronomy 31:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.21). And, to preclude all possibility of mistake, he represents himself:  
as "searching the hearts" of men, [Revelation 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.23),  
as testing their thoughts, [Psalm 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.9),  
yes, as "pondering their hearts, [Proverbs 21:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.2),"  
and "weighing their spirits, [Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.2)."

This, I say, he does; and it is his exclusive prerogative to do so; as Solomon has told us, "You, even you alone, know the hearts of all the children of men! [1 Kings 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.39)."

***~~3. He does so with an express reference to a future judgment.~~***

Having ordained a future judgment for the express purpose of manifesting the justice and equity of his procedure, he notes everything in the book of his remembrance, and will "bring every *secret*thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil, [Ecclesiastes 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.14)." There is not a thought or counsel in the heart of any man which he will not then make manifest, in order to pass his judgment upon it, [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5); [Romans 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.16). Nay more, as every evil thought brings with it certain consequences, defiling the soul, hardening the heart, grieving the Holy Spirit, and dishonoring God—so he will hold us responsible for these consequences, as well as for the evil from whence they proceed. And of this he has warned us, saying, "I the Lord search the heart; I test the thoughts, even to 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)."

Such is the truth declared in our text. Let us now mark,

***~~II. Its aspect on our future destinies.~~***

We have seen that God had respect to the heart of David, when he appointed him to the kingdom. We are not to suppose that David was by nature better than other men; for he himself says, that "he was shaped in iniquity, and that in sin his mother conceived him, [Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.5)." Much less are we to imagine that David was justified before God by any righteousness of his own; for Paul assures us, that he was justified solely by faith in Christ, whose righteousness was imputed to him without any works of his own, [Romans 4:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.5-8). Nor can any of us hope to be exalted to Heaven on account of our own superior goodness; for we are all sinners before God; and, if ever we are accepted by him, we must be "accepted in, and through, his beloved" Son, "being found in him, not having our own righteousness, but the righteousness which is from God by faith in him, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)." Nevertheless, *though none will possess the kingdom on account of their own righteousness, none will possess it who have not previously been made truly righteous in their own souls.*

This truth being unquestionable, let me now, like Samuel, summon you all to the Sacrifice which is prepared for you in the Gospel; and let me declare *which of you God has ordained to the kingdom of Heaven*:

1. Who is this that first presents himself before me? He is one possessed of exemplary morality.

Surely, I say, this is the person whom God has chosen. Behold, how decorous his habit! how amiable his deportment! how unimpeachable his character! Doubtless, I must congratulate you as the happy person to whom I am authorized to declare God's designs of love and mercy.

No! says God; you have erred in judgment respecting him; you admire him, because of his outward appearance; but I look at the heart; and I command you to pass him by, because "I have refused him." As blameless as he appears, he is not accepted of me, because he is trusting in his own righteousness, and not in the righteousness of my dear Son, [Romans 9:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.31-32). He has "a form of godliness," it is true; but he is destitute of "its power, [2 Timothy 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5)." He is ignorant of his own state before me; he fancies himself "rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing; while, in reality he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!" *He is lukewarm in all that relates to me; and therefore I loath him, and shall cast him off with abhorrence,*[Revelation 3:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-17).

"He draws near to me with his lips; but his heart is far from me, [Matthew 15:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-9)." *I consider him, therefore, as no better than a whited sepulcher, beautiful without, but full of everything that is offensive within*. His self-righteousness and self-delight render him odious in my sight; and therefore dismiss him; and proceed.

2. Whom is it that I behold advancing next? He is the man, no doubt; for he is one that loves the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am in no fear of erring now. Behold, you Believe in Christ! Do you not? And you regard him as "all your salvation, and all your desire." You are highly valued, too, in the Church of Christ; you have more than mere morality; you "renounce all confidence in the flesh, and rejoice in Christ alone," I congratulate you.

Pause, says the Lord; you are deceived again. This is not the man whom I have chosen. He has embraced the Gospel, it is true; but "his soul is not upright within him, [Habakkuk 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.4)." "He has a name to live, but in reality he is dead, [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1)."

He has come into the fold; but he climbed over the wall; and is therefore, in my estimation, no better than a thief and a robber, [John 10:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.7-9).

He never came in at the strait gate.

He was never truly broken-hearted and contrite.

He never fled for refuge to the hope that was set before him.

He has taken up religion lightly, and he will renounce it lightly, "if tribulation should arise to him on account of the word, he will presently be offended; and in the time of temptation he will fall away, [Matthew 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.21)." Dismiss him; for "he has not the root of the matter in him, [Job 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.28); [Matthew 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.6);" and therefore is none of mine.

3. Now then, I trust, I cannot err; for he whom I now see has long made an honorable and consistent profession of religion.

I think I have long seen you a regular attendant on the house and ordinances of God. I have long seen you a supporter of the Gospel, and a friend of all who profess it. You have withstood many a storm of temptation and persecution; and have maintained a good profession before many witnesses. Of you, therefore, I can have no doubt. Draw near, and receive the tokens of God's favorable acceptance.

But what do I see here? What! Lord, am I deceived again? Yes! You still are attracted too much by the outward appearance. He is not the man whom I have chosen. "He has left his first love, [Revelation 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4);" he is "a backslider in heart," if not in act; and therefore "shall be filled with his own ways, [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.14)." See what a hold the world has upon him; and how all "the seed that has been sown in his heart, is choked, so that he brings forth no fruit to perfection [Luke 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.14)." He gives me but a divided heart, and therefore cannot be accepted of me, [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2). He once embraced my covenant; but "he was not steadfast in it;" "his heart was never right with me [Psalm 78:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.8); [Psalm 78:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.37);" he never "followed me fully." He "says he is a Jew; but he lies, [Revelation 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.9);" "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)."

Beloved brethren, it is not in the power of man to point out, with certainty, which of you shall inherit the kingdom of God. It is probable enough that there is some obscure *David*, unthought of by man—yet chosen of God, and through grace endued with that integrity of heart, which many, who make a figure before men, are destitute of, and who, though last in man's esteem, shall be first in God's esteem.

***~~But, as the event can be determined ultimately by God alone, let me entreat you all:~~***

***~~1. To examine carefully your own hearts.~~***

This we are commanded to do; and we should do it with all imaginable fidelity and care. We should not, however, rest in our own endeavors, but should "beg of God to search and try us, and to see whether there be, unperceived by ourselves, any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)." Desperate is "the deceitfulness of the human heart; who can know it?" There are thousands who "think themselves to be something, when they are nothing, [Galatians 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3)." Remember, I beg you, not to be too confident of your own state; but, after the strictest search, adopt the modest diffidence of Paul, and say, "Though I know nothing against myself—yet am I not thereby justified; but He who judges me is the Lord, [1 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.4)."

***~~2. To give yourselves unreservedly to God.~~***

This is the very improvement which David himself, in his dying counsels to Solomon, teaches us to make of this subject, "You, Solomon, my son, Know the God of your father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts! [1 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9)." God "requires truth in the inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6);" nor will he accept any, who are not, like Nathanael, "Israelites indeed, and without deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)."

Remember, a kingdom is at stake; and not an earthly kingdom—that shall soon pass away, but a kingdom that shall be possessed forever. Bear in mind, too, that whoever you deceive, you cannot deceive God; and that, whatever you may judge respecting yourselves, or others may judge of you, "God's sentence, and that alone, will stand! [Jeremiah 44:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.29);" for "not he who commends himself shall be approved; but he whom the Lord commends, [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18)."

***~~#301~~***

***~~DAVID'S VINDICATION OF HIMSELF~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 17:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.29)~~***

"Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?"

*It is impossible for any man so to conduct himself in this world, as to avoid censure; but it is desirable so to act, as not to deserve censure.*The rule prescribed for us, in Scripture, is this, "Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world! [Philippians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15)." Like our blessed Lord, we must expect to have our words and actions misconstrued by wicked men; but we should labor to be able to say, with him, "Which of you can convict me of sin? [John 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.46)." The appeal which David makes to his indignant brother, in my text, is precisely that, which, when blamed by anyone for an action that has offended him, we should be prepared to make, "What have I now done" that was deserving of blame? Or what have I done, which was not called for by the circumstances in which I was placed?

Let me,

***~~I. Unfold to you David's vindication of himself.~~***

Mark:

***~~1. The blame imputed to him.~~***

He had been sent, by his father, to inquire after the welfare of his brethren; and he had executed his office with all practical expedition, verses 20, 22. But, while David was conversing with his brethren, Goliath came in front of the Israelitish army, as he had done both morning and evening for forty successive days, to challenge any individual to single combat. David heard his impious defiance, not of Israel only, but of Israel's God, and was filled with indignation against him; and, having heard what honors Saul had engaged to confer on anyone who should encounter this giant, he expressed his willingness to undertake the task, and to risk his own life in defense of his king and country. Not that he conceived himself able to cope with this mighty man; but he knew that God was all-sufficient for those who should trust in him; and he doubted not, but that God would give him the victory over this insulting foe.

For this his brother Eliab severely reproved him, imputing his professed zeal to pride and vanity, and a desire to see the battle, which was at that very instant about to commence. He reflected on him, too, as having deserted his proper post, and as neglecting his proper duty; though he knew the end for which he had come there, and by whom he had been sent.

***~~2. His vindication of himself.~~***

Lovely was the spirit of David on this occasion. He did not "render evil for evil, and railing for railing;" but, with meekness and modesty, and yet with a firmness expressive of conscious innocence, he appealed to all around him, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" Have I manifested a grief of heart that my nation should be so insulted, and an indignation of mind that Jehovah himself should be thus defied? Have I expressed a willingness to expose my life in the service of my king, my country, and my God; and is evil to be imputed to me for this? Is there anything in this deserving of blame? Besides, "Is there not a cause" for what I have said and done? Does not the insolence of this haughty champion call for it? Does not the dispirited state of my own countrymen require it? Does not, also, the honor of my God demand it? And is there any time to be lost? In the space of another hour this gigantic foe may be out of reach; or the battle may have begun; and the time for honoring my God, and benefitting my country, may be forever lost? Why, then, am I to have all manner of evil imputed to me, for that which is in itself most commendable, and which the occasion so imperatively demands?

David being undoubtedly an example to us in this matter, I shall,

***~~II. Take occasion from it to vindicate those who stand forth as champions in the Christian cause.~~***

***~~They, in their place, must expect to incur censure from an ungodly world.~~***

Their conduct will be condemned, as unfitting in people of their age and station; it will be traced also to pride, and conceit, and vanity, as its real source; and it will be represented as an occasion and a plea for neglecting their proper business in life. The Christian that will serve his Lord and Master with fidelity, shall be sure to meet with some measure of the treatment to which the Savior himself was subjected, "If they call the Master of the house Beelzebub," then let not those of his household hope that they shall be allowed to escape reproach. Even the friends and relatives of a Christian, and especially if he be young, will be among the first to vent their indignation against him. Why should he be singular, and venture to adopt a conduct not sanctioned by his superiors? Why should he, by his indiscreet forwardness, cast a reflection upon all his brethren as wanting in zeal? Why does he not content himself with discharging his own proper duties, without interfering in matters that are too high for him? What can actuate him in all this, but a vain desire of distinction, or a hypocritical pretension to qualities which he does not possess? In this way shall not his *actions*only, but his *motives*also—be judged by those who have not the courage or the piety to follow his example.

But the faithful Christian may adopt the very appeal which David made to those who censured him.

"Now what have I done" that calls for this reproof? to be condemned for manifesting a love to God, and a desire to wipe away the reproach that is cast on Israel? When I see the great adversary of God and man exulting in his might, and putting to flight all the armies of Israel, is it wrong in me to enter the lists against him, and to enroll myself as a soldier of Jesus Christ, to maintain his cause? What, if I am weak and incompetent to the task, is it any evil to confide in God, and to believe that he will "perfect his strength in my weakness?" Methinks, in an undertaking like this, I should meet with encouragement rather than reproof; for in all that I do, in fighting the Lord's battles, I do only what is the duty of every living man, whether he be old or young, and whether he be rich or poor.

I ask too, "Is there not a cause" for all that I have done? Does not the great enemy of God and man carry, as it were, all before him? Is there not a lack of bold and intrepid soldiers to face him? Do not even the armies of God's Israel need to be encouraged by some bright example? Does not the king of Israel, by "exceeding great and precious promises," call us to the conflict? And will not the honor that he will award to us be a rich recompense for our utmost exertions?

As for David, he might have been preserved, though all his brethren had perished; but who shall live, if he forbear to fight the good fight of faith? Surely, if God's honor be impugned; if his enemies triumph; if we, in our very baptism, engaged ourselves to be soldiers of Jesus Christ, and to fight under his banners; if there be no safety for us but in fighting; and if eternal happiness depend on our maintaining the conflict until we have gained the victory; then "is there a cause" for our most strenuous efforts; and all blame must attach, not to us who fight, but to those who decline and discountenance, the combat.

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

***~~1. Let none be discouraged from engaging in the service of Christ.~~***

You must expect to "endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and that your greatest foes will be those of your own household. You know that a martial spirit is infused with care into the minds of those who enlist into the armies of an earthly prince; and shall not the same pervade those who have undertaken to fight the Lord's battles?

I say then to all of you, Offer yourselves as volunteers in His service; fear no danger to which you may be exposed; and rely altogether upon Him who has called you to this warfare. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;" and fear not but that you shall be "more than conquerors, through Him who loved you!"

***~~2. In maintaining your steadfastness, look well to your own spirit.~~***

Persons do harm when they vindicate themselves in an unfitting temper and spirit. We are to "instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves." "A soft answer turns away wrath, [Proverbs 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.1);" and "he who rules well his own spirit, is greater than he who takes a city, [Proverbs 25:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.28)." It is impossible not to admire the spirit of David on this occasion; let it be transfused into your minds; and, "instead of being overcome of evil, learn, under the most trying circumstances, to overcome evil with good."

***~~#302~~***

***~~DAVID AND GOLIATH~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 17:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.45-46)~~***

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel!"

*That God acts in a sovereign way in the distribution of his favors, is a truth to which proud man is very averse; yet does it meet us in every part of the Holy Scriptures.* We have seen it in the elevation of Saul to the regal office; it appears also in the selection of David, whom Samuel was ordered to anoint as successor to the throne, [1 Samuel 16:1-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.1-13). We behold it now again in raising up David, while yet a youth untrained to war, to slay Goliath, from whom all the army of Israel fled. It might rather have been expected that Jonathan, who had already shown a most extraordinary valor, should stand forth as a champion on this occasion; or at least that some valiant man should have been found in the camp to espouse his country's cause; but God had ordained that David should possess the throne of Saul; and by this means he began to educate, as it were, the youth for his destined office.

In the words before us we have David's address to his antagonist just on the commencement of his engagement with him; and from them we shall be led to notice,

***~~I. The character of the combatants.~~***

***~~In Goliath we behold a proud, self-confident blasphemer.~~***

He was of gigantic stature, (above eleven feet in height, or, at the lowest possible computation, ten feet,) and possessed strength in proportion to his size. His armor was such as would have almost borne down a man of moderate strength, verse 4-7; and, clad in this, he deemed himself invulnerable and irresistible. Hence, while he stalked in proud defiance between the two hostile armies, he, in mind and spirit, presumed to defy even God himself!

Characters of this description are by no means uncommon in the world; for, though we behold not in these days men of such extraordinary bulk, we behold the same pride of heart in multitudes around us, who, glorying in their own bodily or intellectual powers, use them only as instruments of aggrandizing themselves, and of insulting God, [Psalm 12:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.3-4); [Psalm 73:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.6-9).

***~~David, on the contrary, was humbly dependent on God alone.~~***

Being sent by his father to visit his brethren, he came to them in the ranks just at the time that this proud blasphemer was challenging the hosts of Israel. Filled with indignation at his impiety, and desirous to vindicate the honor of his God, David manifested a wish to accept the challenge; and, when reproved by his eldest brother, he meekly but firmly persisted in his purpose, saying, "Now what have I done? Can't I even speak? verse 29."

On being brought to Saul, and warned of his incompetence to contend with such a mighty and experienced warrior, he showed at once what his true motives were, and in whom his confidence was placed. He had before experienced the protection of God, in two conflicts with a lion and a bear, which he had slain, when they rose up against him; and he doubted not but that God would crown him with similar success in his conflict with this uncircumcised Philistine, verse 33-36.

Saul would have lent him his own armor for the combat; but David found it only an encumbrance; and therefore went forth unarmed, except with a sling, and five stones in his shepherd's bag, confiding, not in any human means, but in the strength of the living God. Hence when Goliath scorned his youthful appearance, and derided his preparations for the conflict, David replied in the words of our text, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty!"

How striking was this contrast! How exemplary was the conduct of David! And how illustrative of the spirit in which the true Christian goes forth against his spiritual enemies, and prepares to combat the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil!*

The close of our text leads us to notice,

***~~II. The outcome of the conflict.~~***

***~~According to all human expectations it must be decided in favor of Goliath.~~***

There was, as it should appear, no room for competition between the combatants: David a youth, a shepherd, unused to war, and destitute, as we may say, either of defensive or offensive armor. Goliath, a man of immense strength, trained to war from his very youth, and armed with all that the ingenuity of man could furnish; his armor altogether impenetrable to the stones, with which alone the youth was prepared to oppose him.

***~~But Goliath's strength was weakness, when opposed to the God of Israel.~~***

The first stone which David cast at him, was directed by an unerring arm, and an almighty power; it pierced the forehead of Goliath, and in a moment realized the youth's prediction. Thus was the proud boaster "delivered into David's hand;" and David, unprovided with any sword of his own, took the sword of his adversary, and with it cut off his head. No sooner did the Philistines behold their champion dead, than they fled from Israel with terror, and yielded themselves an easy prey to their pursuers.

We forbear to suggest the various reflections naturally arising in the mind from this event, because God himself has told us,

***~~III. The design of this particular event.~~***

It was intended,

***~~1. For the instruction of the world.~~***

Men in general think but little of God; and *because they do not see him, they are ready to suppose that he does not interfere in the affairs of men.*They imagine that they may despise his authority, and pour contempt on his people—with impunity; and, if left, like Goliath, to prosper for a season, their presumption is proportionally increased, [Ecclesiastes 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 8.11). But God is no unconcerned spectator of his creatures' conduct; he marks down everything in the book of his remembrance; and will vindicate his own honor at the appointed season; perhaps in that moment, when his adversary conceives himself most secure.

Think of this, you who abuse your strength and acumen to the purposes of criminal indulgence, and who vaunt of your excesses in debauchery of any kind. Think of this also, you who oppose and deride religion. Remember whom it is that you are insulting! Goliath thought that he was defying Israel; but his defiance was in reality hurled against Jehovah himself.

Just so, you, though probably unconscious of it, are in reality fighting against God himself. And "will you continue to provoke HIM to jealousy? Are you stronger than he?" "Will you be strong in the day that he shall deal with you? Will you thunder with a voice like his?" Ah, cease from this mad warfare, and cast down the weapons of your rebellion, and humble yourselves, while yet God's sword of vengeance is unsheathed.

Behold Goliath prostrate on the ground, a monument of human folly, and human weakness! Behold him placed for a monument to all succeeding ages, that "God resists the proud;" and that "him who walks in pride, He is able to abase!" God delivered Goliath into David's hand on purpose that "all the earth might know that there is a God in Israel! verse 46."

***~~2. For the consolation of God's Israel.~~***

Great and mighty are the enemies of God's people; and most unequal is the contest in which they are engaged. They may well say, "We have no power or might against this great company that comes against us." But in this event God has especially provided for their encouragement; he gave success to David, that "all the assembly of his people might know, that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, verse 47." In HIM must be our trust; in his strength must we go forth against our enemies; we must "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." We must arm ourselves with the weapons which he has provided; and though they appear to the eye of sense to be as useless as a sling and stone—yet shall they be made effectual through his power. Let us "take hope as our helmet, righteousness as our breastplate, truth for our belt, the Gospel of peace for our shoes, faith for our shield, and the Word of God for our sword," and we need not fear either men or devils; for "He who is in us, is greater than he who is in the world!" "We shall be made more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Gird yourselves then to the battle, expecting "God to perfect his own strength in your weakness."

"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong! [1 Corinthians 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.13)," and soon you shall have cause to say, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

***~~#303~~***

***~~SAUL'S ENVY OF DAVID~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.9)~~***

"And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David."

*There is not a baser principle in the human heart than envy!*If we notice the connection in which it is usually mentioned in the Scriptures, we shall see at once what a hateful disposition it is. Paul, speaking of the state of mankind by nature, says, "They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice, [Romans 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.29)." Showing what may be the state even of the Christian world, when distracted by contentions and disputes, he says, "lest there be envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings . . . [2 Corinthians 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.20)." In these two passages we behold envy drawn to the very life; in the one, as restrained within certain limits by the mounds of a religious profession; and in the other, as breaking down every restraint, and inundating the whole man.

For an illustration of it in all its most odious characters, we need look no further than to the passage before us; where Saul is represented as giving himself up entirely to the dominion of envy. In order to set it before you in its true colors, we shall consider,

***~~I. The grounds of envy.~~***

Envy is a grudging to another the possession of some good, which we ourselves desire. I say, of some good; for no man wishes evil to himself; the object therefore that excites the passion of envy must be good. It need not indeed be really and intrinsically good; it is sufficient if it is good in the estimation of the person who beholds it.

In Saul, envy was excited by the praises which were bestowed on David on account of his success against Goliath; the women, whose office it was to celebrate great actions with songs and music, ascribed to David the honor of slaying myriads of his enemies, while they spoke of Saul as slaying only thousands. This mark of distinction was painful to the proud heart of Saul, who could not endure that another should be honored above himself.

It is precisely in the same way that envy is called forth by distinctions of every kind. Any endowments, whether natural or acquired, are sufficient to provoke this passion in the bosoms of men. Beauty, courage, genius, though they are the gifts of nature, and therefore not any grounds of glorying to the people who possess them—are yet greatly envied by those who wish to be admired for those qualities. In like manner, the attainments acquired by skill and diligence, together with the wealth or honor consequent upon those attainments, are objects which universally inflame this malignant passion.

It must be observed, however, that this passion is called forth only where some degree of rivalry exists. A physician does not envy the triumphs of a warrior, or the success of a great lawyer; nor do they, on the other hand, envy his advancement to the summit of his profession; it is in their own line only, and towards those with whom there exists some kind of competition, that these feelings are excited; and it is by watching the motions of our hearts in reference to people so circumstanced, that we shall detect the workings of this passion within us.

This passion may exist, not in individuals only, but in bodies of men; as, for instance, in schools, or colleges, or universities, or kingdoms; for, as every one may be said to possess a share of that honor which belongs to his own peculiar party, each one must feel a saving interest in exalting that party, and a proportionable degree of pain when its honors are eclipsed.

As strange as it may appear, religion itself may be made an occasion of bringing into exercise this vile passion; for though no envious person can delight in piety on its own account, he may desire the reputation attached to it, and consequently may envy him who really possesses it. What was it but Abel's superior piety, and the tokens of God's favor given to him, that instigated Cain to imbrue his hands in his blood?

We are expressly told also, in the history before us, that when Saul saw that David behaved himself very wisely, and that God was with him, he feared and hated him the more! verse 12, 14, 15, 28, 29.

And why was the Apostle Paul so hated and persecuted, not only by the avowed enemies of Christianity, but by many also who professed to reverence the Christian name? Was it not that his light shone more bright than that of others; and that the success of his labors was proportionably increased? Yes, it was owing to this that the Jews were filled with envy, when they saw the multitudes which sought to avail themselves of his instructions, [Acts 13:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.45); [Acts 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.5); and that less popular ministers in the Christian Church labored to undermine his influence, "preaching Christ even out of *envy*and strife," that by so doing they might draw over to themselves his converts, and so "add affliction to his bonds, [Philippians 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.15-16)."

Having seen the grounds from whence envy springs, let us next consider,

**II.** **The operations of envy.**

In the history before us, as contained in this and the two following chapters, we behold envy in as strong a point of view as it can well be placed. From the moment that Saul became enslaved by envy, he was so blinded as not to behold the excellence of David's character; he was so hardened as to be insensible to all the obligations which he, and the whole nation, owed to him; and he was so infatuated, as to seek incessantly his death. Repeatedly did Saul endeavor to destroy David with his spear. When he had failed in these attempts, he sought to ensnare David by engaging him to marry his eldest daughter, and then giving her to another; and afterwards by inducing him to expose his life to the sword of the Philistines in order to obtain his younger daughter in marriage. When he had failed in this also, he issued an order to Jonathan and to all his sons to kill David; and, when convinced of the injustice of this command, and pledged in a solemn oath to recede from his wicked purpose, he again renewed his attempts to murder David; and sought to gratify himself with seeing the murder effected, if not of perpetrating it with his own hand; and, when he did not succeed in that, he still pursued the fugitive to Naioth, where Samuel dwelt, sending different messengers, and at last going himself, to apprehend him; and even attempting to destroy Jonathan himself for pleading David's cause.

Now we grant that such efforts as these are very rare; for, in truth, very few have it in their power to pursue the object of their envy with such murderous and unrelenting rancor as Saul. But the tendency of this passion is the same in all; it produces in all a permanent aversion to the person, so that the very sight of him is painful; and occasions a desire, if possible, to bring him down to a level with ourselves. His worth and excellence will be so far from pacifying our wrath, that it will rather augment it; and the brighter his character shines, the more shall we be offended at it. "Envy is" justly said to be "as rottenness in the bones! [Proverbs 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.30)." The disease lies deep; it creates uneasy sensations throughout the whole man; and is out of the reach of any common remedy. Though it may not operate so powerfully as to excite a desire to kill him who is the object of it—yet it invariably so affects the mind as to dispose us to detract from his merits, and to rejoice in his misfortunes.

Nay more, we shall be ready, if not by overt act—yet at least by secret connivance, so *to lower him in the estimation of others*, as to prepare the way for the more easy exercise of their hostility towards him; and then shall rejoice in his fall, pleasing ourselves that it has been accomplished without any intervention on our part; and, if he is removed by death itself, it will excite the feeling of satisfaction rather than of pain and grief!

Well is this represented by Solomon as one of the greatest evils upon earth, and as stamping "vanity and vexation of spirit" upon all things here below, that "for a good work, a man is envied of his neighbor, [Ecclesiastes 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 4.4)." For, however "cruel and outrageous wrath" may be, it may be withstood; but "who," says Solomon, "can stand before envy! [Proverbs 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.4)."

Happy shall we be if, by any prescriptions we may offer, we may be enabled in any degree to promote,

***~~III. The cure for envy.~~***

No conduct on the part of those who are the objects of it can eradicate envy from the hearts of others. They may indeed put a veil, as it were, over their own virtues, so as to give less occasion for the exercise of envy; but nothing that they can do can prevent the disposition from being cherished by those around them. But we may all impede envy's influence over our own hearts:

***~~1. By contemplating the vanity of earthly distinctions.~~***

How poor and empty are those vanities which men so greatly affect! The satisfaction arising from wealth or honor is far less than people generally imagine. Only let us reflect:  
with what difficulty honors are obtained;  
with what pain and trouble honors are often accompanied;  
how easily honors are blasted;  
how little honors can do for us under pain or sickness;  
and how soon honors are terminated by death  
—and we shall see that honors are unworthy the effort with which they are sought, or the regret with which they are lost!

From such a view of them David exhorts us to look with indifference on the advancement of others, and to content ourselves with the pursuit of honors that shall never fade, and of happiness that shall never disappoint our most optimistic expectations! "Do not fret because of evil men or be *envious*of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart! [Psalm 37:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.1-4)."

***~~2. By cultivating the knowledge of our own hearts.~~***

*If we envy others, it is from an idea that we ourselves deserve the honor that is conferred on them.*But, if we knew the extent of our own demerit, as we are viewed by a holy God, we would rather account the lowest possible degree of honor above our desert; yes, we should rather be filled with wonder and with gratitude, that we are not held up as objects of execration and abhorrence! This would lead us willingly to "take the lowest place;" and consequently would lay the ax to the root of that accursed principle, which makes the elevation of others a ground of our own disquiet.

***~~3. By seeking a thorough conversion unto God.~~***

This alone will be attended with complete success. When the heart itself is renewed after the divine image, these hateful qualities will be banished from it. Hence this is the prescription which the inspired writers give for the first removal of the sin, [Romans 13:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.13-14), and for the subsequent prevention of the return of envy, [1 Peter 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.1-2); [Proverbs 23:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.17); [Galatians 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.16).

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who indulge this malignant spirit.~~***

The natural man is universally in a greater or less degree under the influence of envy, [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3); [James 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.5); and, though lightly considered by the world at large, envy is an evil which will exclude from Heaven every person that is under its dominion, [Galatians 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.20-21). O that the guilt and danger of it were more generally and more deeply considered!

But experience proves that even professors of religion may in a very awful degree be led captive by envy. What shall we say of such? what, but that "they are carnal, and walk as men, [1 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.3)." Whence is it that so many dissensions and disputes arise in the Church of God, and are often carried to such a fearful extent? Is there nothing of this principle of envy at work? Is not envy "the root of bitterness that springs up and defiles them?" Yes, James gives us the true account, both of the principle itself, and of its operation in the Church; he tells us also, what will be the bitter consequence of yielding to envy's influence, "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice!" [James 3:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.14-16).

Let those who pretend to piety, look well to their own hearts, and tremble lest, while their "voice is Jacob's voice, their hands be the hands of Esau." The true line of conduct for a Christian is that of Jonathan; who, knowing that he would be eclipsed by David—yet sought by all possible means to protect his person and advance his interests. Let Jonathan's character, as here portrayed, be contrasted with that of Saul, and be ever before our eyes for daily imitation!

**2.** Those who are the objects of envy.

Marvel not, you holy and circumspect Christians, if your characters be traduced by envy and detraction. "Those who render evil for good will be against you, because you follow that which good, [Psalm 38:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.20)." You must not expect to be treated better than your Lord and Master was. But study the character of David; see how meekly he bore his injuries; see how studiously he rendered good for evil; see how he "walked wisely before God in a perfect way." This is a conduct worthy to be followed, and shall assuredly bring with it an abundant recompense.

***~~#304~~***

***~~DAVID'S FEAR OF SAUL~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 20.3)~~***

"There is only a step between me and death!"

It is justly said, that "oppression destroys a wise man's reason, [Ecclesiastes 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.7)." One there was, who endured it in every form, and to its utmost possible extent; and yet never uttered an unadvised word, or betrayed a temper which his bitterest enemies could condemn. Jesus, after years of persecution, could give this challenge to his enemies, "Who of you convinces me of sin?"

But fallen man, however upheld for a season, has generally betrayed his weakness when his trials have been heavy and of long continuance. We admire the conduct of David in many respects, and think him on the whole a very exalted character; but yet, on some occasions he fainted, and yielded to unworthy apprehensions respecting the final outcome of his troubles. Such was the state of his mind when he uttered the words which we have just read; and which, though containing a general and acknowledged truth, were not such as he would have uttered, if he had not given way to desponding fears.

*"There is only a step between me and death!"* We shall consider these words in this two-fold view:

***~~I. As a general and acknowledged truth.~~***

***~~The general representations which are given of life in the Scriptures, strongly mark its shortness and uncertainty.~~***

Life is light, and as unsubstantial as "a vapor [James 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.14)."

Its length is but as "an hand-breadth, [Psalm 39:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.5)."

The rapidity with which life passes away is compared to "a runner," or to "an eagle hastening to its prey, [Job 9:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.25-26)."

Such is life's extreme shortness, that life is like "a dream, [Job 20:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.5)," or "a shadow, [Psalm 102:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.11)."

So short does the whole of life appear in retrospect, that it is "but as yesterday when it is past, [Psalm 90:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.3-6)."

How justly then may it be said, that *there is only a step between us and death!*

***~~The brevity and uncertainty of life must be regarded in that light by all people without exception.~~***

Old age or sickness may give some additional force to the expression in our text; but neither the youngest nor the most vigorous has any more certainty of life than the feeblest of mankind! Disease or accident may assault one as well as another; so that none can "boast of tomorrow; for we know not what a day may bring forth!" So numerous indeed are the instances of people removed suddenly, or in the very midst of life, that we cannot but acknowledge the truth and solemness of the declaration before us.

But, to obtain a just view of our text, we must regard David's words:

***~~II. As an assertion arising out of the peculiar circumstances of David at that time.~~***

In this view it was the dictate of unbelief. We blame not David for using with all diligence the means of safety; for if he had neglected to use all just precautions under an expectation that God would fulfill his Word at all events, he would have tempted God; just as our Savior would have tempted him, if he had cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple. But when God had assured him that he would posses the throne of Israel, and had actually confirmed the appointment by a sacred unction, it befit David to give credit to the Word of God, and to rest assured, that neither men nor devils should eventually disannul it.

There was indeed such malignity in the heart of Saul, that nothing but Omnipotence could prevent the execution of his plots against David; but David should have known that "there is no might or power against the Lord," and that "the counsel of the Lord shall surely stand;" and in the confidence of this, he should have been satisfied that Saul could not prevail against him. However just therefore his expressions were as applied to men in general, we cannot approve of them as applied to his own case; he should not have said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul! [1 Samuel 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 27.1)," but rather, "Since God is for me, who can be against me? [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)."

**Having thus obtained a just and accurate view of the words before us, we may enter more largely into the improvement which should be made of them.**We may notice from them,

***~~1. How frail the best of men are, when brought into heavy trials!~~***

On the whole, David's faith was remarkably strong; but here it failed; and, if it had not been strengthened from above, he would utterly have fainted. This he himself acknowledges, after he had recovered from this momentary depression, [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1); [Psalm 27:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.3); [Psalm 27:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.5); [Psalm 27:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.13).

It has justly been observed, that all the most eminent saints in Scripture have failed in that very grace for which they were most renowned:

*Abraham*, the great pattern and example of faith, repeatedly denied his wife through unbelief.

*Moses*, the meekest of the human race, "spoke unadvisedly with his lips."

*Job*, whose patience is proverbial, "cursed the day of his birth."

Thus all have been left to show that their strength was not in themselves; that if left to themselves, they were as weak as other men; and that it is in God only that any just confidence can be placed, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool!"

Let us bear this in mind, both for our humiliation and our encouragement. If we have been enabled to maintain a holy and consistent conduct, let us remember that it is "by the grace of God we are what we are!" If we are tempted to look up to the saints of old as soaring to heights that can never be attained by us, let us remember, that the grace which wrought effectually for them, is equally sufficient for us; and that "we also can do all things through Christ strengthening us!"

***~~2. What is the proper use and office of faith.~~***

*Faith is not to supersede, but to encourage, our own endeavors*, and to assure us of our successful termination of them. When to human appearance the difficulties are insurmountable, then is the season for faith to show itself, and "against hope to believe in hope."

This was the operation of *Abraham's*faith; he considered not the age of himself or of his wife, which precluded all hope of issue in the natural way, but expected that God would effect by miracle what could be effected in no other way. Doubting neither the power nor the veracity of God, he was willing to wait God's time, and confident that he would not be disappointed of his hope, [Romans 4:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20-21) and [Hebrews 11:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17); [Hebrews 11:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.19).

Had David's faith wrought thus on this occasion, it would have borne him up amidst the waves of trouble that rolled over him in quick succession.

This then is what we recommend to all.

Are you bowed down with a sense of guilt? Lay hold on that promise, that "Christ will never cast out any who come unto him."

Are you assaulted with grievous temptations? Remember who has said, that "you shall not be tempted above what you are able, but that you shall have a way to escape, or be enabled to bear it."

Do your corruptions appear invincible? Rely on him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you."

If your troubles are of such a magnitude as to threat your immediate destruction, rest yourselves on the promise of Jehovah, that "all things shall work together for your good."

Be satisfied that "He is faithful who has promised," and that "not a jot or tittle of his Word can fail."

***~~3. What is the wisdom of every man.~~***

None of us have any such warrant to expect a continuance of life as David had; and therefore his observation respecting the *shortness*and *uncertainty*of life should be admitted in its utmost force. Ignorant then as we are whether the very next step may not carry us into the eternal world, we ought to inquire with ourselves: Whether it would take us to Heaven or to Hell? O what a thought is this! What madness is it not to dwell upon it more than we do, or to delay for a moment our preparation for the eternal state!

We would call on all of you:  
the aged, who know for a certainty that their time cannot be long;  
the sick, who are warned by the disorders that are yet upon them;  
the young, who are in the prime and vigor of life;  
we would entreat all without exception, to stand ready for death and judgment!

O beloved, "prepare to meet your God!." Think of the multitudes that have been summoned to his tribunal unprepared; and be thankful that there is yet one step between you and death. The Lord grant that, whenever that step is taken, you may have an abundant entrance into the realms of bliss! [Mark 13:33-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.33-37).

***~~#305~~***

***~~DAVID'S FORBEARANCE TOWARDS SAUL~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 24:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.4-6)~~***

The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD."

Knowing what we do of the depravity of human nature, we would scarcely conceive that men could attain to such heights of virtue as are recorded in the Holy Scriptures, if we did not know that those records are of divine authority. This observation is verified in the history of Abraham, of Moses, and of *David also, who, though a very faulty character in some respects, was in other respects a star of the first magnitude*. We are called on the present occasion to notice David's conduct towards Saul; and to consider him under a three-fold relation:

***~~I. As a subject towards his prince.~~***

Never had man more just occasion to withstand his prince than David; the inveteracy with which Saul labored to destroy him was incessant. See the three preceding chapters. Yet how did David act towards him? God had now placed Saul within his power; (for Saul lay down to sleep in a cave where David and his men were concealed,) but David would not touch him; yes, though importuned by his own men, and urged to consider Saul's exposed situation as an indication of the divine pleasure, he not only would not smite Saul with his own hand, but would not allow anyone else to smite him; and even when, for the fuller discovery of his own innocence, he had cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, his conscience smote him as having offered an indignity to his sovereign; so tenderly did he regard not only the life, but the honor also, of his king.

In this he was a *pattern*to all succeeding ages; for though the different governments of the world give different degrees of power to the supreme magistrate, and of liberty to the subjects—yet in every country under Heaven must the magistrate be considered as God's representative on earth, and must be "obeyed, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake, [Romans 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-2); [Romans 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.5)." Under circumstances of an unfavorable nature, there should be a readiness in us to palliate, rather than to expose and aggravate, his misconduct; and a *willingness rather to submit to evils, than by violent resistance to endanger the welfare of the community*. The character of Christian citizens is, that they are "the quiet in the land."

***~~II. As a saint towards his oppressor.~~***

The injuries done to David were really "for righteousness' sake." Like Jesus, of whom he was an eminent type, "he was hated without a cause." This consideration must have added ten-fold poignancy to all his afflictions. To be conscious that he was continually laboring to cut off all occasion of offence, and yet to find himself persecuted with unrelenting fury, was most distressing to his mind. Yet, as Saul himself confessed, David returned nothing but good for evil, verse 17.

But such is the true line of every Christian's duty. We should "not render evil for evil to any man, 1 Thessalonians 5:14," but rather love our enemies, and do good to them, [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44). This is the true way to soften the hearts of our enemies, and to ensure a final victory over them. Compare verse 16 with [Romans 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.20-21).

***~~III. As a believer towards his God.~~***

As to avenging himself, David knew that God was the Judge of all, and would in due time vindicate his righteous cause, and punish his unrighteous oppressor; to God therefore he left what belonged to God alone, verse 15. Moreover, though God had promised him the kingdom, David left God to fulfill his promise in his own time and way. Doubtless he felt great distress of mind under all his trials; but he committed himself to God in prayer, and looked for deliverance from him alone. The 57th Psalm was written on this very occasion. See the title, and verse 1-6. In verse 6 he seems to refer to the very event in our text; Saul came to destroy David, and inadvertently exposed himself to be destroyed by David.

Thus, however great and complicated our trials are, we should take no hasty step [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16), but "commit ourselves to God as a faithful Creator, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19)," and expect assuredly the final accomplishment of all his promises, [Psalm 37:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.5-6).

***~~#306~~***

***~~DAVID KEPT FROM AVENGING HIMSELF ON NABAL~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 25:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.32-33)~~***

David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands."

[N.B. Preached on May 14, 1812, being three days after Mr. Perceval's assassination.]

The fidelity of the sacred historians is observable in every part of the divine records. A partial friend, or a person who was unduly concerned about the honor of religion, would have cast a veil over the facts which are contained in this chapter. They are, it must be confessed, extremely humiliating, and constrain us to exclaim, "Lord, what is man!" In the general we behold "the man after God's heart" acting with a holy consistency, and meriting the character of a most exalted saint; but here we see him rushing to commit the most horrid iniquities, and restrained only by the special intervention of God's providence.

In contemplating the history before us, we shall see,

**I. What evils men would commit if left to themselves.**

***~~We do not wonder at the churlishness of Nabal.~~***

Such characters are common; men, who, in point of temper, are "such sons of Belial, that a man cannot even speak to them, verse 17;" and whose every act constrains you to associate with their names the idea of folly, verse 25. They are worthless in themselves—yet contemptuous towards others; they are profuse and intemperate in convivial entertainments, but hard-hearted and niggardly in reference to the indigent and distressed But,

**We are amazed at the cruel resentment of David.**

The provocation which he had received was certainly great. He had been the greatest benefactor to his country. He was persecuted only for righteousness' sake. Though driven to great straits, he had never allowed his soldiers to relieve his needs by plunder. He had afforded a protection to Nabal's property and servants, without any remuneration whatever. He was peculiarly in lack of necessary provisions at this time; and from the preparations which Nabal had made for his feast he might have been supplied without any material inconvenience. His message to Nabal was most courteous and kind; yet Nabal's answer was insolent in the extreme.

This however did not justify such fierce resentment as David manifested. He might justly have complained of Nabal; perhaps in his circumstances he might have been justified in demanding as a right what had been refused him as a gift. But to think of murdering Nabal, of murdering also every male belonging to him, was as atrocious a design as ever entered into the heart of man. Who would have conceived that such a thought should ever enter into the mind of him, who had so recently spared his most malignant enemy, and had been condemned in his own conscience for even cutting off the skirt of Saul's garment?

***~~It shows what great corruption there is in the human heart.~~***

Truly the heart of man is "desperately wicked." Even though renewed by divine grace, we are no longer able to stand, than while we are upheld by God himself. *However long we may have persevered in holy obedience, we are yet liable to fall*. However great the temptations which we have withstood in times past, we have no security but that we may be overcome by the smallest. Yes, there is nothing so vile, but we may be led to commit it—if we are not every moment strengthened from on high.

Who can contemplate the fall of *Noah* after his deliverance from the Deluge, and of *Lot*after his exemplary piety in Sodom, and not tremble for himself, lest he be overcome in an unguarded hour? "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls!"

The subject further leads us to notice,

***~~II. How much we owe to God for his providential restraints.~~***

***~~David expresses his obligations to God for delivering him from this temptation.~~***

A servant of Nabal, fearing the effects of his master's message, informed his mistress of the whole transaction; bearing testimony at the same time to the kindness and integrity of David's conduct; and Abigail immediately adopted the most prudent methods of pacifying David's resentment. Without loss of time she took a liberal portion of the provisions that had been prepared for the feast, and went with them herself to meet David. Happily she met David in the way; and by her consummate address completely disarmed his wrath, and averted the calamity which would have speedily ruined her whole family.

Instantly David recognized in her the divine interposition; and, while he blessed her for her advice, he blessed God for sending her to obstruct his bloody and vindictive purposes. It is worthy of observation, that David took scarcely any notice of her liberality which supplied his present needs, but fixed his whole attention on the deliverance which he had experienced from his own relentless fury; and well might he bless God for that interposition, whereby he was preserved from the blackest crime he could have perpetrated, and possibly too from the penal consequences of it to all eternity!

***~~And have not we also reason to adore our God for similar restraints?~~***

Let us reflect on our past experience, even in relation to revenge. Have we never had our minds so irritated and inflamed, as to feel a readiness to avenge ourselves? Are we sure, that if a murderous instrument had been at hand, we would not have used it? Have not others yielded to that temptation, who were to all appearance as little exposed to it as we; and can we be certain that a little further provocation would not have produced the same effect on us?

But let us inquire also in reference to other sins. Have criminal desires never risen so strong in our hearts, that we have owed it rather to some providential restraints, than to our own abhorrence of iniquity, that they were not actually fulfilled? *We have witnessed often enough the falls of others; and to whom must we ascribe it if we ourselves have not fallen in like manner?*Must we not say with the prophet, "You O Lord, have wrought all our works in us [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12)." Truly, if we would call to mind the various temptations which we have at any time experienced, and the various methods which God has used for our deliverance, we would behold such evidences of his paternal care, as would fill our hearts with wonder, and our mouths with praise!

Such are the reflections arising from a general view of our subject.

***~~From a more particular inspection of it we may learn:~~***

***~~1. What a dreadful evil is revenge.~~***

There is nothing so cruel, but a vindictive spirit will impel us to it. While under the influence of revenge, we overlook all consequences; we think nothing of the misery which we may entail on people that are innocent. David was not content with murdering Nabal, but would murder also every male belonging to him, though not one of them was a partaker of Nabal's fault. Thus the incendiary, or the duelist, contemplates not for a moment the miseries he may inflict on others; the welfare of a whole nation would be of no account in his eyes, when compared with the gratification of his revenge!

O let us guard against the first risings of this malignant passion, [Proverbs 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.11). let us bear in mind, that vengeance is not our prerogative, but God's, [Romans 12:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.19); and let us seek rather that noblest of all victories, "the overcoming of evil with good, [Proverbs 24:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.29); [Proverbs 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.21-22)."

***~~2. What a blessing is a faithful admonisher.~~***

David could scarcely express the obligation he felt to Abigail for her heavenly counsel. Thrice he blesses her, and God for her. And what reason have we to be thankful for:  
the instructions of our parents,  
the counsels of our friends,  
and the admonitions of our ministers!

We shall never know from what evils we have been preserved by them, until the whole book of God's remembrance shall be opened to us.

In the same light we may view those various circumstances of our life which may have appeared most calamitous. The loss of our health or property may have been thought afflictive at the time; but who can tell what he might have perpetrated, if these messengers of mercy had not been sent to arrest him in his course?

Let us then receive as from the Lord all those people or events, which may lead us to reflection. Let us in particular be thankful for reproof; and bear in mind, that *almost any other person is a more competent judge of the propriety of our conduct, than we ourselves can be when under the impulse of any strong passion*. If our friend possesses the wisdom and address of Abigail, let us value him the more; but, if not, let his advice be nevertheless welcome to our mind; and let him be highly esteemed by us in proportion to his fidelity, [Proverbs 9:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 9.8-9); [Proverbs 25:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.12); [Proverbs 28:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.23).

***~~3. What need have we all to pray against temptation.~~***

We may, like David, have withstood the greatest trials—and yet fall, like him, by those which are comparatively light. We are far from being at all times alike. We have not a stock of grace at our own command. It is not the light of one hour, or of one minute, that will suffice for the next; nor is it any measure of grace already received, that will enable us to stand fast in the Lord. We must receive fresh communications every moment, and look continually to the Lord for guidance and support. Let us then beg of God to "hedge up our way with thorns, [Hosea 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.6-7);" and, if preserved by him from falling, let us acknowledge him as the only source of our stability, [Psalm 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 26.12); [Psalm 41:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.12-13).

***~~#307~~***

***~~THE UNBELIEVING FEARS OF DAVID~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 27.1)~~***

But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand."

***~~Of the dispositions of men, their fellow-creatures can judge only by external signs, either in word or deed. But God discerns them as they exist in the inmost recesses of the heart, and puts a just construction upon every motion there.~~***

It does not appear that David had disclosed to anyone his feelings on the occasion before us; but the all-seeing God has told us what was the language of his heart, "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul."

It will be a profitable subject for our consideration, if we inquire,

***~~I. In what light we should regard these fears of David.~~***

***~~Beyond all doubt, there was great occasion for fear.~~***

The malignity of Saul against him was deeply noted. From the moment that Saul heard people celebrating the slaughter of ten thousands by David, while they ascribed the slaughter of only thousands to him, he "eyed him from that day, and forward, [1 Samuel 18:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.7-9)." The benefit which David had conferred in the slaughter of Goliath was of no account in his mind; so rancorous is "envy, even as rottenness in the bones! [Proverbs 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.30)." Even on the very morning after this victory did Saul "cast his javelin at David, to smite him to the wall;" yes, twice was this effort made by Saul for David's destruction; and "twice," as it were by miracle, "did David avoid the stroke, [1 Samuel 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.11)."

Bent on the destruction of David, Saul had recourse to every expedient he could devise. He offered him his elder daughter to marry, and afterwards his younger daughter Michal; and set his servants to work upon his ambition to accept the offer, on purpose to involve him in war with the Philistines, so that he might fall by their hands, [1 Samuel 18:17-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.17-25). And when David had accomplished double the task imposed upon him, it only provoked the enmity of Saul so much the more against him, [1 Samuel 18:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.25); [1 Samuel 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.27); [1 Samuel 18:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.29).

Not having succeeded in this device, he "ordered Jonathan his son, and all his servants, to kill David, 1 Samuel 19:1;" which, if Jonathan had not made it known to David, would, by one or other of them, have been effected. And when, by the expostulations of Jonathan with his father, the order was revoked, and safety was guaranteed to David under the sanction of an oath, yes, and when fresh services to a vast extent were rendered by David, still did Saul's heart burn with rage against him, insomuch that he again cast a javelin at him to destroy him, and sent messengers to watch and assassinate him in his own house, [1 Samuel 19:4-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 19.4-11); and to the fidelity of his wife alone he owed his preservation, 1 Samuel 19:11-17.

Still, with relentless fury, did this blood-thirsty monarch pursue him, with three successive bands of murderers; yes, and he himself also followed with a fourth, to seize and destroy David, [1 Samuel 19:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 19.18-24). Yet, notwithstanding the clearest possible interposition of God in his behalf, did Saul still determine upon his death, [1 Samuel 20:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 20.31), and even cast a javelin at his own son for presuming to intercede for him, [1 Samuel 20:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 20.32-33).

And when David had fled to Gath, and in his way had obtained from Ahimelech the priest, under pretext of being on urgent business from Saul himself, some temporary supply of food, together with Goliath's sword; Saul, on hearing of it, slew no less than eighty-five priests by the hand of Doeg his informant, and then smote the whole city also with indiscriminate rage, "both men and women, children and infants, and oxen, and donkeys, and sheep, with the edge of the sword, 1 Samuel 22:18-19."

Besides his own immediate servants, Saul had traitors in confederacy with him, and armies to execute his murderous projects. The men of Keilah, a fortified city, which David, with great prowess, had saved from the Philistine armies, instead of requiting his kindness to them as they ought, would have betrayed him into the hands of Saul, if David had not escaped from them, [1 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.5); 1 Samuel 23:12-13. "Every day did Saul seek him" with indefatigable vigilance; so that he must have fallen, if God had not, as it were by miracle, preserved him, [1 Samuel 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 23.14). David had concealed himself in the woods, in the wilderness of Ziph; and the Ziphites, instead of affording him protection, voluntarily offered to deliver him into the hands of Saul, if he would come down to take him; and, in the wilderness of Maon, where David had taken refuge on a rock, did Saul actually encompass him with his armies, and would have apprehended him, but that he was forced suddenly to abandon his enterprise, in order to repel an invasion of the Philistines. With no less than three thousand men did Saul pursue him, as soon as he had rid himself of the Philistine invaders; so determined was he not to rest until he had slain David! [1 Samuel 24:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.2).

But that which most of all shows the reason which David had for fear, is, that Saul persevered in his wicked efforts, amidst all imaginable checks, both from God, and from his own conscience. In the wilderness of Engedi, David and his men were hidden in a cave. Saul, unconscious of any danger, went into that very cave wherein they were; and David, unperceived by Saul, who possibly might have lain down to sleep, cut off the skirt of Saul's robe; and then followed him out of the cave with the skirt in his hand, and showed him how easily he might have put an end to the contest by the destruction of Saul himself.

On that occasion the murderous tyrant was overcome with gratitude; and with tears acknowledged, that his enmity against David was unmerited in the extreme, [1 Samuel 24:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.4); [1 Samuel 24:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.8); [1 Samuel 24:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.16-17).

Who would suppose, that, after such kindness, this wicked monarch could ever again renew his murderous attacks? Yet, on the Ziphites again offering their traitorous services, did Saul go down again to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand men to seek him; and there again did he experience, at the hands of David, the same forbearance as before; and had the same decided evidence of it given him as before, by seeing the very spear that was at his bolster, and the cruse of water that was near it, in the hands of David, who might have slain him with the same facility that he had taken them! [1 Samuel 26:5-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.5-16).

On this occasion, Saul, a second time, acknowledged the injustice of his conduct towards David, and foretold that David would ultimately prevail, [1 Samuel 26:21-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.21-25). But how was it possible for David to place any reliance on the professions of such a man? Or, when the enmity of Saul was so deeply-rooted, so inveterate, so active, so widely diffused, and so continually persevering—how could David, who was the object of it, do anything but fear, and anticipate at last a fatal outcome? It is but justice to the character of David to state thus minutely the grounds he had for fear, more especially because we are constrained to say, that,

***~~Nevertheless, in entertaining desponding fear, David sinned.~~***

God had promised to David that he should sit upon the throne of Israel, [1 Samuel 15:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.28-29); [1 Samuel 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.12) with [Psalm 89:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19-24); and *it was not in the power of man to make void the divine decree*. Indeed, God had already shown, by his various interpositions in his behalf, that under his protection we are safe, even though men and devils should combine their efforts to destroy us. David should have remembered this, and not suffered anything to shake his faith in God.

I do not mean to say, that it was easy to exercise faith under such circumstances, and to preserve unruffled composure in the midst of so many perils. Conscious of our own infirmity, we can easily make allowance for him; but the point we have in hand is, to determine the quality of David's conduct on that occasion; and we are constrained to say, that he should have, like his great progenitor, "against hope, believed in hope, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18);" and have believed, that though he were actually slain, God would rather raise him again from the dead to sit on the throne of Israel, than allow one jot or tittle of his Word to fail, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19). Thus it was that *Abraham*acted in reference to Isaac; and thus should David also have been "strong in faith, giving glory to God, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20)."

But that we may bring this matter home to our own bosoms, it will be proper to inquire,

***~~II. What similar apprehensions we have to guard against.~~***

God has given to his people promises of exaltation to thrones of glory. But they also are surrounded with many enemies, and are exposed to many and severe conflicts. Hence they also are sometimes overcome with desponding fears; and are ready, "in their hearts" at least, "to say, I shall one day perish by the hands of my great enemy." Now it is no uncommon thing to hear the parallel drawn between David and them; and to infer, from the sinfulness of David's fears, a corresponding sinfulness in theirs. That we may enter justly into the comparison, I will state,

***~~1. The similarities there is between the cases.~~***

God has doubtless given us "a covenant ordered in all things and sure;" and his *promises*are so "exceedingly great and precious," that we may well rest upon them with most unshaken affiance. In that covenant, God provides:

for our *acceptance*with him, through the blood of his dear Son;

for our *renovation*after his own divine image, through the influences of his Spirit;

for our *perseverance*in the ways of holiness even to the end,

and for our final admission to his heavenly kingdom.

He assures us, that he will "never allow anyone to pluck us out of his hands, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)." And, because we may well suspect the effect of our own weakness, he engages "never to depart from us to do us good; and to put his fear into our hearts, that we may never depart from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)."

This covenant He has even "confirmed by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for him to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)."

But, on the other hand, our conflicts with our spiritual enemies are exceeding heavy, and with little intermission. The *world*, the *flesh*, the *devil*, are all confederate against us. They are diversifying their attacks in endless variety, while within our own bosoms there are traitors ready at all times to deliver us up into the hands of our enemies. Thousands of times are we saved from them, almost as by miracle; and enemies, which we thought were slain, rise up against us with renewed vigor; while Satan, baffled in one assault, goes and takes with him seven other spirits, mighty as himself, to renew the contest.

Is it to be wondered at, then, if the saints are sometimes discouraged, and ready to fear that they shall one day perish by these continual assaults? Or can they be considered as sinning against God, if they sometimes give way to desponding apprehensions?

To answer this, I will proceed to state,

**2. The difference between the cases.**

David was confessedly and altogether wrong; for the promises which had been made to him were personal, and were irrespective of any moral qualities in him. But those which are made to us, pertain to characters only; and then alone become ours, when we attain the character to which the promises are made.

For instance; not a promise in the whole book of God belongs to us, until we repent and believe the Gospel; so that, before we can actually apply the promises to ourselves with an assurance of our interest in them, we must inquire whether we have come to God in his appointed way. To expect the accomplishment of them to our souls without this, were presumption; so that, to ascertain the precise quality of our feelings, we must inquire carefully, what is the special ground of our fear. If we are afraid lest God should forget his promises, or leave us to perish, notwithstanding that we trust in him, our belief is highly criminal; but, if we doubt whether we have really come to Christ in his appointed way, we may be doing the very thing which our situation most imperiously calls for. "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)," is a divine command; and, until we have an evidence in ourselves that we have fled to Christ for refuge, any confidence of our acceptance with God would be a fatal delusion.

The truth is, that men's difficulties on this subject have arisen, in a great degree, from not distinguishing properly between the graces of faith and hope.

Faith has respect to the word of promise; and to be weak in the exercise of faith, is highly sinful.

Hope has respect to the thing promised; and that ought to vary according to the evidence which there is of our title to it.

If, therefore, we would judge how far our state of mind really corresponds with that of David, we must bear in remembrance this necessary distinction, and apply it to our state as occasion may require.

***~~Let me, then, impress upon your minds these necessary hints:~~***

**1. Learn to distinguish between what is good and what is evil, in Christian experience.**

Distinguish carefully between *faith*and *presumption*, on the one hand; and between *fear*and *unbelief*, on the other.

That which many call faith, is nothing but an unfounded confidence of their own acceptance with God; and a greater curse cannot befall us, than the attainment of such a faith as that.

On the other hand, that which many call unbelief, is a sense of our liableness to fall and perish; and a greater blessing than that cannot be bestowed on any child of man.

To all I say, and to all God says, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" for "blessed is the man who fears always." Of God's power or willingness to save you, it is not possible to be too fully assured; but of your own actual acceptance with him, your assurance must be in exact proportion to the *evidence*of it which is displayed in your life and conduct.

***~~2. Let your anticipations be under the influence of faith.~~***

*Whatever God has spoken in his Word, shall surely come to pass.* Now the Word of God has said:

"Unless a man is born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

"Unless you repent, you shall all perish."

"He who believes not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him."

"Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

Now you may anticipate the salvation of every penitent and believing saint, as surely as if you saw him in Heaven!

Just so, you may anticipate the damnation of every impenitent and unbelieving sinner, as surely as if you saw him already in Hell!

This, indeed, must be taken into the account, that it is supposed they retain their characters; for otherwise they shall actually change their respective dooms; the man who becomes righteous shall reap the fruit of his righteousness; and the man who departs from his righteousness, shall parish under an accumulated load of guilt and misery. This is God's own express declaration, [Ezekiel 18:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.26-28); and his dealings with men in the last day shall be in strict and uniform accordance with it. Our ways may be unequal; but "his ways are, and shall be equal, [Ezekiel 18:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.29)."

***~~3. Let nothing operate to drive you from God.~~***

David said, "There is nothing better for me, than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines," and for this he is generally condemned, and perhaps justly too; though I cannot forget, that our Savior, under somewhat similar circumstances, was carried by divine direction into Egypt.

But respecting us there can be no doubt. Everything must drive us rather *to*God, than *from*him. Persecution, temptations, yes, even sin itself, must have this effect. We have no refuge whatever, but in God; and if, like Jonah, we were in the belly of Hell itself, we must cry unto him. Then "shall all things eventually work together for good." *Our very fears shall tend to keep us from undue confidence, and constrain us to cast ourselves more entirely upon God.*And, if once they produce this blessed effect, we may rest assured, that not all the universe combined "shall ever separate us from his love! [Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.38-39)."

***~~#308~~***

***~~THE WITCH OF ENDOR~~***

**[1 Samuel 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 28.15)**

Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."

That such a thing as witchcraft has existed, we cannot doubt; but what were the incantations used, or what power Satan had to work with and by them, we know not. Certain it is, that in the days of our Lord, Satan appears to have had a greater influence over the *bodies*of men than he possesses at this time. And as that was permitted of God for the more abundant display of Christ's power, so it is probable that an extraordinary influence over the *minds*of men may, through the divine permission, have been sometimes exerted by Satan, that the evil tendency of that influence might be the more clearly seen, and the excellence of the divine government be more justly appreciated.

As for the various instances of witchcraft recorded in uninspired books, we can place no dependence whatever upon them; because there is often an undue degree of credulity even in great and good men, and a readiness to receive any report that is astonishing, without sufficiently examining the grounds on which it stands. But what is recorded in the Scriptures we may well believe; because it is revealed by One who cannot err.

The account given us of the witch of Endor is one of the most remarkable in the Scriptures; though there are in it some difficulties, which have occasioned a diversity of opinions respecting it. That, however, we may place it before you in an easy and instructive point of view, we shall consider the history of Saul connected with it; and particularly,

***~~I. The state to which Saul was reduced.~~***

***~~This he himself specifies in the words of our text.~~***

Long and obstinately had Saul continued to sin against the convictions of his own conscience; until at last he had provoked God to depart from him. While he was forsaken of his God, the Philistines made war against him, and invaded the land. Then he felt the need of an Almighty Protector, and sought to obtain direction and help from his offended God. But now God would not be found of him, or take any notice of his supplications. In various ways had God been accustomed to communicate his mind; but now he would return "no answer, either by Urim, or by a prophet, or by a dream."

***~~Such, alas! is but too frequently the state of ungodly men.~~***

There are many who violate habitually the dictates of their own conscience, until they "vex," and "grieve the Holy Spirit," and utterly "quench" his sacred motions. No wonder if at such times trouble comes upon them; for indeed the whole creation are ready to "avenge the quarrel of God's covenant," whenever he shall withdraw from us his protecting hand; and whatever our trials are, or from whatever quarter they come, they will be incomparably heavier, from the consciousness that "God himself is become our enemy."

Under their trials the most hardened of men will begin to relent, and will "pour out a prayer when God's chastening hand is heavy upon them." "When God slays them, then they will seek him," as the Psalmist says. But at such seasons they are often made to feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord." They call upon God, but "he will not hear them, because their hands are full of sin, [Isaiah 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.15);" yes, he even "laughs at their calamity, and mocks when their fear comes, [Proverbs 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.26-28)." He has repeatedly declared, that thus he would treat all who should "set up idols in their hearts, [Ezekiel 14:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.1-7); [Ezekiel 20:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.1-3) with [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18)." Melancholy indeed is their state, who have no access to God in their troubles, nor any communications from him for their supports. Yet we can have but little acquaintance with the house of mourning, if we have not met with many such cases in the world.

Such was the unhappy state of Saul. Let us next proceed to notice,

***~~II. The expedient to which Saul resorted.~~***

Now he wished for the counsel of that minister, whom when living he neglected and despised, and,

***~~To obtain an interview with Samuel, he took recourse to a witch.~~***

In former days Saul had exerted himself, agreeably to God's command, [Leviticus 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 20.27), to banish witchcraft from the land; and now could not prevail on this woman to use her enchantments, until he had profanely sworn that no punishment would be inflicted on her. At his earnest entreaty, she prevailed to bring up Samuel before him. Many learned men have thought that Samuel himself did not appear, but that Satan assumed his shape and garb. But there is no intimation in the history that this was the case; on the contrary, every expression has directly the opposite aspect; and it seems that even the witch herself was beyond measure astonished at the unexpected success of her incantation.

It is urged on the other hand, that a witch could never prevail to bring Samuel from the grave, or his soul from the mansions of the blessed. True, but God might see fit to send Samuel on this occasion, to confirm all the threatenings which he had denounced when living; nor is there any weight in the objection, that he speaks of being "disturbed," and "brought up," because this was only popular language suited to the prevailing notions of the day; and when he speaks of Saul and his sons being "with him on the morrow," he can only mean, that they should be removed into the invisible world by death. It seems clear, that, as God afterwards sent a *living*prophet to reprove Amaziah's application to the heathen idol, so now he sent a *departed*prophet to reprove in Saul a similar offence. Compare [2 Kings 1:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.1-6) where the cases, and the outcome of them, are much alike.

Of what avail was this interview with Samuel? Samuel himself put the question to Saul, "Why do you ask of me, seeing the Lord has departed from you, and is become your enemy?" Vain indeed was that hope which sought in a broken cistern what the fountain alone could supply.

***~~Equally vain are those refuges to which sinners flee, when they are forsaken by their God.~~***

*Men in a time of trouble will catch at anything for comfort!* Some will endeavor to drown reflection in the cares or pleasures of the world; while others take refuge in infidelity; but not even Saul's expedient was more vain than these; for what is there either in business or pleasure to satisfy a guilty conscience? Or what can infidelity adduce to disprove the truths which it would set aside? Such are the expedients, whatever they may be, whereby we labor to supply the place of an offended God.

From the close of the history we learn,

***~~III. The misery Saul brought upon his own soul.~~***

***~~Great indeed were his disappointment and distress.~~***

*Behold the melancholy sequence: dejection, desperation, suicide!* He fainted and fell as soon as ever he heard the fate that awaited him; and was with great difficulty persuaded to take such refreshment as was necessary for his support. But no humiliation of soul did he manifest; nor, as far as we see, did he present to God one single petition. He sank down in sullen desperation, determining to meet his fate, but using no effort to obtain mercy at the hands of God. The battle terminated according to the word of Samuel; and Saul himself, to prevent the mortification of falling alive into the hands of his enemies, fell upon his own sword, and put an end to his own existence! [1 Samuel 31:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 31.4).

***~~But such are generally the effects of seeking in the creature, what can be found in God alone.~~***

Many are oppressed with great dejection of mind; but if they would search out the causes of their trouble, they would find it generally to spring from unmortified lusts, and unrepented of iniquities. And how often does dejection lead to despair! As strange as it may seem, it is easier to abandon oneself to a hopeless despondency, than to renounce beloved sins, and persevere in a pledge inquiry after God. Yes; the heart, instead of relenting, is more generally "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;" and when we begin to say, "There is no hope," then we add, "I have loved idols, and after them will I go!" The close of all is, in too many cases, suicide. Men finding no relief in God, fly to death itself as the only remedy for the troubles of life. Ah! unhappy men, who venture thus to rush into the presence of that God, who has hidden his face from them!

**Let us learn then to beware**:

**1. Beware of impenitence in sin.**

*Many who, like Saul, have been hopeful in their beginnings, fall from one sin to another, until they set both God and conscience at defiance.* But however sweet sin may be in the mouth, it will prove as bitter in the belly! Sin will destroy all peace of mind, all hope in God, all prospect in eternity. O let it not be harbored in our hearts! Whatever our besetting sin is—let us never rest until we have repented of it, and washed it away in the Redeemer's blood, and obtained the victory over it through the power and grace of God. If not purged out, sin will defile and destroy our whole souls.

***~~2. Beware of seeking help in the creature.~~***

God is the only refuge of sinful man; wherever we may look, there is no help for us in any other. Not only are men and devils unable to assist us; even all the angels in Heaven would be incapable of affording us any effectual help. Whatever creature we rest upon, it will prove only "as a broken reed, which will pierce the hand that rests upon it."

We must learn in every difficulty to say with Jehoshaphat, "Lord, I have no power against this great company that comes against me, neither do I know what to do; but my eyes are upon you! [2 Chronicles 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.12)."

***~~3. Beware of giving way to despondency.~~***

To despair, is to seal our own condemnation. We must never conclude, that, because God has forsaken us, "he will be no more entreated." Had Saul himself truly and sincerely implored mercy at his hands, God would not have utterly cast him off. "God never did, nor ever will, say to any: Seek my face in vain, [Judges 10:10-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.10-16)."

***~~#309~~***

***~~ENCOURAGEMENT IN GOD~~***

***~~[1 Samuel 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.6)~~***

"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

In seasons of prosperity, the superior happiness of a Christian is not visible to all; but in adverse circumstances, he has a manifest advantage over others. The ungodly, when the cisterns from whence they draw their water are broken or emptied, have no comfort left. But when every stream is dried up, the godly have still access to the Fountain itself. This was experienced by the Church of old, [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18), and it is beautifully exemplified in the history before us. David was in great trouble, being suspected by the Philistines, plundered by the Amalekites, and threatened by his own soldiers—but in the midst of all, he encouraged himself in God.

We shall show,

***~~I. What reason he had to do so.~~***

Though reduced to the greatest extremities, David derived encouragement:

***~~1. From the perfections of God as revealed in the word.~~***

He was no stranger to the character of God as it was revealed to Moses, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7), or to the unnumbered illustrations of it which the history of his nation afforded him; consequently he knew that *there was nothing too hard for God to effect, or too great for him to give*.

***~~2. From the experience which he himself had had of God.~~***

The lion, the bear, the Philistine giant, and the murderous rage of Saul—had given him abundant proofs of God's superintending providence, [1 Samuel 17:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.37); [1 Samuel 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 18.11); 1 Samuel 19:10-11. These he called to mind in this season of trial and distress [Psalm 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.6); [Psalm 77:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.10-11), and wisely judged, that, with such a Friend on his side, he had no cause for fear, [2 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.10).

**3. From the covenant which God had made with him.**

God had covenanted with him to give him the throne of Israel; hence he was assured that his life should be spared until this promise was accomplished. It was in this view that he was enabled to call God, HIS God; and the thought of this relation to God added ten-fold confidence to his soul.

While we admire the conduct of David in this particular, let us consider,

***~~II. What reason we have to do likewise.~~***

***~~Certainly the grounds of David's encouragement are equally calculated for our support.~~***

God is still the same almighty and gracious Being as ever; his arm is not shortened, nor is his ear heavy with respect to us. We may also see much of his goodness in our own experience. Wonderful have been the ways in which he has dealt with us for the awakening, preserving, and sanctifying of our souls. He has also covenanted with us that "he will never leave us nor ever forsake us! [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5)," nor shall one jot or tittle of his Word ever fail. Are not these then grounds of encouragement to us as well as to David?

***~~But we have far greater reason to encourage ourselves in God than David had.~~***

We have seen more stupendous displays of God's power.

David had read of the wonders wrought in Egypt and the wilderness. But what were these wonders when compared with the victories gained over all the passions and prejudices of the world by the preaching of a few poor fishermen?

We have beheld more astonishing exercises of God's love.

The history of the Jews records many instances of God's love towards them. But what were these when compared with the gift of his dear Son to die for us, and of his Holy Spirit to renew us? These things are as much beyond anything that David had ever seen, as the substance is beyond the shadow.

We have experienced more abundant proofs of God's faithfulness.

How many promises, made to the Church at large, have been accomplished by the mission of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit! And all the members of the Church, from its first establishment to the present moment, have found the promises of the Gospel fulfilled to them in their season! In proportion therefore as God's faithfulness has been tried and ascertained, our confidence in him must be increased!

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

***~~1. Let us endeavor to secure God as our God.~~***

Unless God is ours, we can have but little reason to encourage ourselves in him. Let us then look to Christ, that through him we may find acceptance with God—so shall God be our Friend, our Father, and our "eternal great reward, [Genesis 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.1); [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12); 2 Corinthians 6:18."

***~~2. Let us encourage ourselves in God.~~***

We must expect to meet with many difficulties and troubles; nor can we find any grounds of encouragement in ourselves; but in God there is all that we can either need or desire. Are we then discouraged by outward difficulties or inward corruptions? let us direct our eyes to him, as our compassionate, almighty, and ever faithful Friend. Let us, like David, chide our unbelief, [Psalm 43:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 43.5); and henceforth say with him, "In the day of my trouble I will call upon God! [Psalm 86:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.7)."

**2 SAMUEL**

***~~#310~~***

***~~THE DEATH OF ABNER~~***

**[2 Samuel 3:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 3.31-34)**

Then David said to Joab and all the people with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner." King David himself walked behind the bier. They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner's tomb. All the people wept also. The king sang this lament for Abner: "Should Abner have died as the lawless die? Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. You fell as one falls before wicked men." And all the people wept over him again.

[This message was given just after the assassination of Mr. Perceval.]

After the death of Saul, David was anointed king in Hebron; but still he reigned over one tribe only; for Abner had prevailed on the other eleven tribes to adhere still to the house of Saul, and to make Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, their king. From the unselfishness and forbearance which David manifested during all the persecutions which he experienced from Saul, we can have no doubt but that e would have rested satisfied with the government of one tribe, until God in his providence should open the way for the full possession of the throne of Israel; but Ishbosheth and his adherents accounted David an usurper, and therefore waged incessant war with him for seven years, [2 Samuel 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 2.10-11) with [2 Samuel 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 3.1).

At last however a circumstance occurred, which seemed likely to effect the promised union of all the tribes under David as their head. Ishbosheth had offended Abner by accusing him of immoral conduct with a concubine of Saul; and Abner, filled with resentment, determined to transfer his allegiance to David, and to carry over all the eleven tribes with him. Ishbosheth, knowing that Abner's influence would effect this measure, acquiesced in it, and submitted to the terms prescribed by David as a preliminary to the league which should be made between them; he sent and took Michal, Saul's daughter, from Paltiel her husband, and gave her up to David, from whom she had been wrongfully withheld.

Everything was now ready to be carried into execution; Abner had succeeded in his conference with David, and nothing remained but to bring over the heads of the eleven tribes to the plan proposed. But behold, the treachery of Joab defeated and destroyed the plan. Joab, just returned from an expedition against the Philistines, heard what Abner had done; and immediately expostulated with David on his credulity, for allowing Abner so to impose upon him; and then, sending privately in David's name to Abner, as though some further communication with him was wanted, he met Abner on his return, and took him aside, and slew him.

This murderous act of Joab's, together with its attendant circumstances, will furnish us with some very useful, and, at this time, seasonable observations.

We observe then,

**I. That there is no crime so atrocious, but a person under the influence of a vindictive spirit will commit it.**

Revenge was the principle from which Joab, in concert with his brother Abishai, acted on this occasion, verses 27, 30. Abner had slain his brother Asahel; and they sought to avenge his death. But if they had candidly considered, they might have found in this matter an occasion for gratitude rather than resentment; for Abner had exercised towards Asahel a forbearance and tenderness that could not reasonably have been expected; nor had lifted up a hand against him until the last extremity, [2 Samuel 2:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 2.20-23).

They were blinded however by their own passion, and overlooked everything for the gratification of it. Joab never once reflected on the baseness of the action he was about to perpetrate, nor on the loss which David and the whole nation would sustain, nor on the account which he should one day give of it to God; but with horrid treachery, and deliberate cruelty, plunged the dagger into the stomach of Abner!

Alas! alas! how awfully has this scene been renewed among us! It was no political animosity, but revenge alone, that instigated the murderer to the commission of his crime. Under the influence of that infernal passion he proceeded in the most deliberate manner to execute his cruel purpose. Thoughts of mercy and compassion found no place in his bosom. The injury that would be done to a fellow-creature, (who would in one instant be hurried into the presence of his God,) the bereavement that would be felt by all his family, and the loss that would be sustained by the whole nation, (a loss to all appearance irreparable,) seemed to him as nothing, when weighed against the gratifications of revenge. Nay, the thought of his own account that he should have to give at the judgment-seat of Christ could interpose no bar to the execution of his design. Yes, after the perpetration of the deed, he justified his act, continued impenitent to his dying-hour!

*Ah! what an evil is revenge!*What need have we to guard against the very thought of it rising in our hearts! Truly, we know not to what an extent the inundation may reach, when once the smallest breach is made in the dam that obstructs this current, [Proverbs 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 17.14).

We all are called upon at this time to mourn on the sad occasion:

***~~II. It is certain that the crimes of individuals will be imputed to us as national, if they are not nationally reprobated and deplored.~~***

Of this David was aware; and therefore he endeavored to avert the guilt from the nation, by calling on them all to humble themselves before God, and to express their abhorrence of the crime in penitential sorrow, verses 28, 29, 31. On this occasion he himself set the example: he mourned, he wept, he fasted; he followed the corpse to the grave; he poured out the most pathetic lamentations over it; reflecting with just severity on the atrocity of the crime; and lamenting that he had not power to inflict punishment on the offenders, verses 33, 34, 35, 39; and it was greatly to the honor of his people that they participated so deeply in his affliction. All approbation of the crime was thus formally disavowed; and the guilt of it was made to rest on him who had committed it.

We rejoice that a universal abhorrence of the assassination has been expressed in our land; or, if there have been any so abandoned to all sense of duty both to God and man as to approve the deed, they have made themselves partakers of the crime, and contracted in the sight of God the guilt of murder. We would however remind you all, that this should be a season of deep humiliation among us, and of earnest prayer. We must mourn over the deed, and wash our hands in the blood of our great Sacrifice, if we would not have the guilt of blood imputed to us, or visited upon our land, [Deuteronomy 21:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.1-9).

It is some consolation to us however to consider,

***~~III. Whatever obstructions arise, God's purposes shall surely be accomplished.~~***

The establishment of David on the throne of Israel was now nearly completed; yet in the very moment of its completion, as it were, was it counteracted by this horrid crime; the influence that was to accomplish the measure was destroyed; and the rival monarch deterred from his purpose. No prospect now remained but that of continued war; and the very counsels of Heaven appear to have been defeated. But God's counsel shall stand, though the expected instrument of its accomplishment is taken out of the way, and the greatest obstacle to its accomplishment remains. Accordingly in an unlooked-for way, the point was effected, and the promise made fifteen years before to David, was fulfilled.

We did hope, that by the elevation of him, whose loss we deplore, to the government of this country, God had designs of mercy toward us; and we have reason to adore our God for the benefits which through his instrumentality our nation has received. Such a character, all things considered, has rarely been seen at the head of our affairs; for *piety is but a rare associate with political power*. But, if the *channel*of God's mercy is withdrawn, the *fountain*still is full; and if we plead with him to pour out his benefits upon us, he will yet find other channels through which to communicate them to our land.

True it is, that this is a season of uncommon difficulty, and the political horizon is gloomy in the extreme. No person being found to take the lead in our government; and new difficulties arising, by means of Russia being just about to be again involved in war with France; but we hope that our nation shall yet be preserved a blessing to the world; and that all the efforts which are making for the enlarging of our Redeemer's kingdom, and which were sanctioned and aided by him whom we have lost, will yet be honored with success. "The kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ;" and, though darkness should yet increase upon us, we hope and trust that "in the evening time it shall be light."

But though God's counsel shall stand, we are not the less accountable to him for our actions; nor can we doubt but,

**IV. That however men may escape punishment in this world, their sins shall be recompensed in the world to come.**

To that tribunal David looked forward, when he saw that "the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him;" and he found consolation in the thought, that "the Lord would recompense the doer according to his wickedness, verse 39." It was a misfortune to him to have a subject so powerful, that he could set the laws at defiance.

Through the goodness of God, the laws of our land are enforced; and the atrocious act that has been committed has met with its deserved recompense. But there are sins of a less heinous nature, which are committed daily with impunity. Let us not however suppose that they will be unnoticed by the Judge of the living and dead. The vindictive *thought*will there be judged, as well as the vindictive *act*. Yes, and the impure *desire*also, as well as *adultery*itself! For *God will bring into judgment every secret thing*, whether it is good or evil.

Nor will there be any respect of persons with him. Now there is a kind of partiality in favor of the rich and great; evils are allowed in them, which, if committed by people of the lower class, would be reprobated and abhorred; but the high and the low will hereafter be equally tried by the unerring standard of God's law, and be judged "according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." Let not the *hope of impunity*therefore encourage any man to sin; for God has warned us, that "though hand join in hand," (yes, though earth and Hell should unite for the protection of any,) "the wicked shall not go unpunished!"

***~~#311~~***

***~~UZZAH'S PUNISHMENT FOR TOUCHING THE ARK~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 6:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.6-9)~~***

"When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God. Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah. David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?"

The noblest use of power is to exert it for God. So David thought; for no sooner had he attained the quiet possession of the throne of Israel, than he determined to bring up the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim, where it had remained in obscurity perhaps for seventy years, and to place it in Jerusalem, where it might receive the honor due unto it. But, as people striving in the Grecian games "were not crowned except they strove lawfully," and conformed to the rules prescribed for them—so neither can they be accepted who exert their influence for God, except they use it agreeably to the dictates of His revealed will. Accordingly in this very act David met with a repulse; the person whom he employed to bring up the ark was struck dead upon the spot; and the whole plan was disconcerted; yes the very frame of David's mind also was changed, from joyous exultation, to vexation, sorrow, and despondency.

Let us contemplate,

***~~I. The punishment inflicted on Uzzah.~~***

Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, having long had the charge of the ark in their father's house, undertook to drive the cart whereon it was to be conveyed to Jerusalem. Ahio went before to prepare the way, and Uzzah drove the oxen; but, when they were arrived at the threshing-floor of Nachon, the oxen by some means shook the ark; and Uzzah, apprehensive it would fall, put forth his hand to keep it steady; and for this offence he was struck dead upon the spot!

Now at first sight it appears as if this punishment was exceedingly disproportionate to the offence; but we shall be of a very different opinion, if we consider,

***~~1. The offence committed.~~***

This was of a complicated nature; it was the offence, not of Uzzah only, but of David, and of the whole nation. As it related to Uzzah, it was highly criminal; for God, in the orders he had given respecting the removal of the ark from place to place, had directed that only the priests should touch the ark, or anything belonging to it; and that the Levites should carry it; and so strict was this order, that it was enforced by the penalty of death, "The sons of Kohath shall bear it (by its long staffs;) but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die! [Numbers 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 4.15)." Now Uzzah was not a priest; and therefore he should on no account have presumed to touch the ark. It may well be supposed, that this violation of God's command was the fruit of a habitual irreverence, which a long familiarity with the ark had nourished in his mind; and therefore God took this occasion of punishing his presumption.

But David, also, and all the nation were to blame; for the very accident that occasioned Uzzah to put forth his hand, arose from their criminal neglect. God had given plain directions about his ark; and had ordered that it should be carried on the shoulders of the Levites. The other articles belonging to the tabernacle were large and cumbersome; and for the conveyance of them God had given wagons and oxen; but "to the sons of Kohath he had given none; because the service belonging to them was, to bear the ark upon their shoulders, [Numbers 7:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 7.6-9)." Why then was this forgotten? Why did David and all the priests and people presume to substitute another way, different from that which God had prescribed? The Philistines, it is true, had sent home the ark in this way; but they knew nothing of the directions given in the law, nor had they any of the sons of Aaron with them to employ in that service. Were these ignorant heathens a fit pattern for David to follow, in direct opposition to the commands of God? If David did not know what God had commanded in relation to the ark, should he not have examined; or should he not have inquired of the Lord, as he had so recently and so successfully done in reference to his conflicts with the Philistines? This neglect then was highly criminal, and justly merited the rebuke it met with.

***~~2. The reason of noticing it with such severity.~~***

Besides the enormity of the offence, there was additional reason for punishing it with severity, arising out of the very nature of that dispensation. *God had shown himself so gracious and condescending towards that nation, that there was great danger lest they should entertain erroneous notions of his character, and overlook entirely his majesty and greatness. Indeed even his condescension itself would be undervalued, unless they should be made sensible of his justice, his holiness, and his power*.

Hence on many occasions He had taken care to blend some displays of his power with the manifestations of his love.

When he came down upon Mount Sinai to give them his law, he accompanied the revelation with solemn demonstrations of his greatness.

When he had sent fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifices on his altar, and to declare his acceptance of them, he destroyed Nadab and Abihu by fire for presuming to burn incense before him with fire different from that which he had kindled, [Leviticus 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.1-2).

When a single individual in the nation had offended him, he withdrew his protection from all, until the person was discovered and put to death, [Joshua 7:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.5); [Joshua 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.11-12).

Thus, he was now allowing the symbols of his presence to be transported to Jerusalem; and the people would be ready to think that they had conferred an honor upon him; he therefore showed them, that *no service could be accepted by him, unless it were regulated by a strict adherence to his revealed will*; and that while they received from him such signal tokens of his favor, they must at the peril of their souls conduct themselves towards him with the profoundest reverence, [Leviticus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.3). In this view the judgment inflicted upon Uzzah was an instructive lesson to the whole nation, and is a standing proof that "God is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all those who are round about him, [Psalm 89:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.7)."

We lament however to observe,

***~~II. The effect it produced on the mind of David.~~***

*Truly the best of men are but weak, when they are visited with any heavy trial.* As fervent as David's mind was, no sooner was he thus rebuked than he was filled,

***~~1. With proud resentment.~~***

It is probable that there was in his mind an undue degree of delight, from the idea that he was the honored instrument of thus exalting and glorifying his God. To meet therefore with such a check, in the midst of all his fame, and in the presence of all the great men of the nation, was very mortifying to his pride; and in an instant he betrayed what was in his heart! Had he been displeased with himself, it had been well; but "he was displeased" with God, whom he considered as dealing wrongfully and unjustly towards him.

*Alas! that so good a man should indulge such an unhallowed disposition!*Had he himself corrected one of his little children, he would have expected the child to conclude of course, from the very correction itself, that something was amiss in him, though he could not immediately see wherein the evil of his conduct lay; and should not David have exercised that same temper towards God? Should he not have concluded that *God was too wise to err, and too good to do anything which was not strictly right?*Should he not have acted, as he did on another occasion, "I was silent and opened not my mouth, because You are the one who has done this?" *It is characteristic of the vilest of men to fly, as it were, in the face of God*, [Isaiah 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.21). Yes, it is their very employment in Hell to curse him for the judgments he inflicts! [Revelation 16:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.9-11).

Did such a temper then befit "the man after God's own heart?" No, he should rather have said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to Him! [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)." "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, [Micah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.9)." But in this conduct of his, we have a lamentable illustration of that proverb, "The foolishness of man perverts his way, and his heart frets against the Lord! [Proverbs 19:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.3)."

**2. With unbelieving fear.**

He now concluded that God was a hard master, whom it was impossible to serve; he therefore would not venture any more to take to himself the ark, "He was afraid of the Lord, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me?" This was a slavish fear, and utterly unfitting one who had so often experienced the most signal tokens of his favor. This was to act like the rebellious heads of the tribes, when, in their contest with Aaron for the priesthood, God had decided the cause against them, [Numbers 17:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 17.12-13). Or rather it was a repetition of the conduct of the Philistines upon a precisely similar occasion, [1 Samuel 5:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 5.10-11).

But this was very unfitting his generally noble character. He should rather have instituted an inquiry into the reason of the divine procedure; and should have humbled himself before God for the errors that had been committed. For this he might have found precedents in plenty in the Sacred Records, [Joshua 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.6); [Judges 20:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 20.26); but he yielded at once to despondency, and dismissed the whole assembly of Israel, and left the ark to be taken in by anyone that was bold enough to receive it.

Such was his unhappy frame on this occasion; and such, alas! is the temper of many under the chastisements of the Almighty; they are ready to say, "It is in vain to serve the Lord; there is no hope; I have loved idols, and after them will I go".

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

***~~1. Let us be especially on our guard, when we are engaged in the service of our God.~~***

*God is a jealous God, and will not be trifled with!* The conduct which would be connived at by him among the heathen, will provoke him to anger when observed among those who enjoy the light of Scripture revelation; and in proportion as we have the knowledge of him, may a conformity to his will be justly expected of us, [Amos 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.2). Happy would it be, if the professors of religion would lay this thought to heart! for, so far are they from having any dispensation from the practice of morality, that a far higher tone of morals is expected of them; they are called upon to "shine as lights in the world," and to "be holy as God himself is holy!"

And must not this thought be pre-eminently interesting to those who are engaged in the service of the sanctuary? "What manner of people ought they to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" Sins even of ignorance are highly criminal, [Leviticus 5:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.17-19); but most of all in those of the priest. Compare the offerings required in [Leviticus 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.3); [Leviticus 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.13-14); [Leviticus 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.27-28). Let those then who "bear the vessels of the Lord be clean, [Isaiah 52:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.11)." Let a holy fear attend them in all their ministrations, lest, instead of finding acceptance with their God, they bring on themselves the heavier and more signal judgments. Miserable it is to die; but most of all to "die by the ark of God!"

***~~2. Let nothing divert us from the path of duty.~~***

If, when engaged in the service of our God, we meet with obstacles which we did not expect, let us search to find wherein we have done amiss. But let us not yield to despondency, as if it were impossible to please the Lord. Let us examine the Sacred Records, and pray for the teachings of the Holy Spirit, that "we may know what the good and perfect and acceptable will of God is;" then may we hope for success in our undertakings, and shall have tokens of God's acceptance both in this world and the world to come. This may be applied to ministers with good effect.

***~~#312~~***

***~~DAVID DANCING BEFORE THE LORD~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.14)~~***

"And David danced before the Lord with all his might."

True religion is, indeed, a source of joy. In this light it was viewed by the angelic host, when they proclaimed to the shepherds the birth of our Savior, saying, "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy!" And thus was it found to be by the converts on the day of Pentecost, the Ethiopian Eunuch, the people of Samaria, [Acts 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.8); [Acts 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.39), and by all, in every place, who received the word aright, [Acts 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.3). The Psalms of David place this matter beyond a doubt, they being almost one continued effusion of praise and thanksgiving.

In the history before us we have an extraordinary exhibition, strongly confirmatory of this truth. David was bringing up the ark of God to Jerusalem; and so strong were the emotions of joy within him, that, in the presence of not less than thirty thousand of his subjects, he danced before the Lord with all his might.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The expressions of David's joy.~~***

Certainly, at first sight, it appears strange that a monarch, stripped of his royal robes, and clad in the simple clothes, should be dancing thus extravagantly, as it might appear, at the head of all his subjects. But he was serving and honoring his God; and therefore, under any circumstances, his joy would be great. But it was exceedingly heightened:

***~~1. By his reflections upon the past.~~***

The ark, with the exception of one short interval, had abode at Kirjath-jearim, for nearly fifty years, where it had been carried twenty years after its restoration by the Philistines who had captured it. David had greatly desired to bring it up to Jerusalem, where he had prepared a tabernacle for its reception. He ordered it to be put on a new cart, and drawn by oxen, in the manner in which the Philistines had restored it; forgetting that God had given special commands, that none but the Kohathites, who were Levites, should carry it; and that they should never either behold or touch it, but that it should be covered, and they should bear it by means of the staffs which were made for that purpose.

In its progress, the ark was shaken, at the threshing-floor of Nachon; and Uzzah, one of the conductors of it, put forth his hand to hold it up, lest it should fall; and for this error God struck him dead upon the spot! This judgment was intended as a rebuke, not to Uzzah only, but to all the priests and Levites who were present; and especially to David, who had been so regardless of the divine commands, with which he doubtless was well acquainted, and of which he ought to have been most strictly observant.

By this judgment David was disheartened, and he dared not to proceed, lest he himself, also, should be subject to the divine displeasure. Accordingly, the ark was turned out of its course, and carried to the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite. But during its continuance there, for the space of three months, such manifest and extraordinary blessings flowed down upon Obed-edom and all his family, that David was assured that God was reconciled towards him; and, inspired with fresh zeal, he proceeded again to bring it up from thence, taking especial care that everything should be conducted in God's appointed way. After advancing only six steps, he stopped to offer burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; and then he felt in his soul, that God had accepted this service, and would crown it with good success, [1 Chronicles 15:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 15.1-3); 1 Chronicles 15:11-15.

Now, to enter into David's feelings aright, we must mark the contrast between this present effort and that which had so lately failed; and we must remember, that, not content with expressing his gratitude to God by secret aspirations, he strove, by his open and visible acknowledgments, to inspire all his people with the same ardent gratitude with which his own bosom was filled. This will account for what might otherwise appear extravagant in this outward demonstration of his joy.

***~~2. By his anticipations of the future.~~***

The ark was the symbol of the divine presence; and by having it at Jerusalem, he hoped that he should have more easy access to Jehovah at all seasons, and bring down, both on himself and all his people, a rich abundance of spiritual blessings! Of this, David himself informs us in the 132rd Psalm, which he wrote on that express occasion. He tells us, that he had sworn he would not come up into his own house, nor go up into his bed, until he should have found out a place for the Lord, a habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. He then adds, "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah, (Kiriath-jearim,) and found it in the fields of the wood; and we will go into his tabernacle, and worship at his footstool."

Then, declaring what his prayers to God should be, he anticipates the future advent of the Messiah, and states the answers he should receive to his prayers, repeating the very words of his petitions as the precise terms of God's promises, "The Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation. This is my rest forever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread; I will also clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud; I have ordained a lamp for my anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame; but upon himself shall his crown flourish, [Psalm 132:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.1-7); [Psalm 132:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.13-18)."

After such prospects as these, can we wonder at any expressions of his joy, however ardent, or however extraordinary? Methinks, his zeal in this instance was temperance, and his excess was sobriety.

And now let me show,

***~~II. What occasion we also have for joy at this time.~~***

*This whole matter was typical of our blessed Lord's ascension into Heaven.* In the 68th Psalm, written by David on this occasion, he says, "The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord [has come] from Sinai into his sanctuary. When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious--that you, O LORD God, might dwell there! [Psalm 68:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.17-18)." And Paul quotes these very words as declarative of our Lord's ascension to Heaven, and the out-pouring of the Spirit upon his Church as the very bestowment of those gifts which he had obtained for her, [Ephesians 4:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8-12).

Here, then, we have already marked for us the nobler grounds of joy which we possess at this time,

***~~1. In the dignity of the person so exalted.~~***

*The ark was dignified as a shadow and an emblem of the Lord Jesus*; but we commemorate the exaltation of the Lord Jesus himself. And I wish you particularly to notice how this also was announced by the holy Psalmist, "Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty, he is the King of glory! [Psalm 24:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 24.7-10)."

***~~2. In the richness of the benefits imparted by him.~~***

In the passage before mentioned we see, in a general view, the gifts which our ascended Savior bestows upon his rebellious subjects. But who can recount them all, or even estimate so much as one of them aright?

See the first-fruits of those benefits on the day of Pentecost; and behold them spread over the face of the whole earth, and poured out in the richest possible abundance at this day. See the Savior "seated at the right hand of God, far above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come!" See how God has put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all, [Ephesians 1:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.20-23)." See him "exalted thus, and having a name given him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father! [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11)."

All these his victories must be contemplated, and all the felicity of his redeemed people both in time and eternity, before we can estimate, in any measure, what ground we have for joy in the resurrection and ascension of our blessed Lord.

My dear brethren, only view these things by faith as David did, and even your lowest notes will resemble those of "that sweet singer of Israel." "God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise! [Psalm 47:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 47.5-7)."

But it will be profitable to inquire,

***~~III. How far the expressions of our joy should correspond with David's.~~***

In point of *ardor*, we should not fall short of him, but should, if possible, exceed him. Yet in the *mode*of expressing our joy, I think he is not a proper pattern for us.

***~~1. There is a great difference between his dispensation and ours.~~***

The *Jewish dispensation*abounded with "carnal ordinances;" and every service of the saints was marked with outward and visible signs. Every penitent that would obtain mercy from the Lord must carry his appointed offering, and conform in everything to some peculiar law. The same must be done by those who would return thanks to God for mercies received.

But we, under the *Christian dispensation*, are to enter into our chamber, and shut our door, that we may not be seen by men, but be seen by Him only whom we serve—the heart-searching God, [Matthew 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.6).

The *Jews*needed the priests to mediate between God and them.

But *we*may approach God, every one of us for ourselves, through that One Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ; yes, and may enter into the holy of holies itself, through the blood of his sacrifice which he once offered for us on the cross, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22). This, then, marks a broad line of distinction between David's services and ours, and renders such "bodily exercise" as his, unsuitable to us.

***~~2. Our frame of mind should be more spiritual and more refined.~~***

I will not say that the body is not to participate in the emotions of our minds; for in this our fallen state such a sympathy must of necessity be called forth by any intense feeling, whether of joy or sorrow. But there is a delicacy and refinement in the Christian's feelings; and the less they savor of what is physical, the better. A Christian's joy is "the joy of the Holy Spirit;" and when it rises to the highest pitch, so as to be utterly "unspeakable," it is then a "glorious joy," such as the glorious saints and angels experience in Heaven, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8). Behold all of them before the throne of God; they are all prostrate on their faces, while yet they sing praises to God and to the Lamb. Their joy is a meek and holy joy; and I am sure that such is the joy that befits us in this lower world, compassed as we are with so many infirmities. I would rather recommend that, because it will be less likely to cast a stumbling-block before us, and less likely to deceive your own souls.

I am far from justifying Michal for casting such severe reflections on David. But her spirit shows what feelings will be generated in the bosoms of the ungodly, by anything which seems to border on excess. By an inattention to the feelings of others, we may do considerable injury both to ourselves and them also. Our Lord, therefore, cautions us "not to cast our pearls before swine, lest they turn again and rend us." On such occasions, I think, we should rather put a veil over our faces, as Moses did, than blind them by a splendor which they cannot bear. Yet we are not so to regard the ungodly, as to be deterred from serving God in any, and in every, way that he requires. But if we bear in mind the infirmities of others, we may the better hope to allure them to the service of God, and to bring them to a participation of all the blessings which we ourselves enjoy.

***~~#313~~***

***~~DAVID DANCING BEFORE THE LORD~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.22)~~***

"I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes."

A measure of firmness is necessary in the whole of our interaction with mankind, to prevent us from being drawn aside from the path of wisdom into a compliance with the prejudices and passions of those around us. But in all that pertains to religion it is more especially necessary; because in opposition to true piety, the current is exceeding strong; and we must inevitably be borne away by it, if we do not cleave unto our God with full purpose of heart.

The great and powerful may be supposed to be more free than others from the influence of public opinion; but their very elevation exposes them to storms and tempests more than others; and they have therefore the more need of firmness, to bear up against the taunts with which they will be assailed, in proportion as their zeal for God is ardent and conspicuous.

David was a mighty monarch; yet not even he could serve God according to his conscience without exciting the contempt and indignation of one most nearly related to him. But from the words which we have just read, we see how manfully he withstood the temptation. Let us notice,

***~~I. The trial he met with.~~***

**This was very severe.**

He was bringing up the ark to Mount Zion; and had good reason to believe, that the service he was performing was pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. Hence his soul overflowed with joy; and in the fullness of his heart, "he danced before the Lord with all his might, verse 14." "As the ark came into the city, Michal, Saul's daughter, looking through a window, saw him leaping and dancing before the Lord, and despised him in her heart, verse 16."

Unconscious of the impression he had made on her mind, he went home to bless both her and all his house; but instead of finding the reception which he had expected as suited to the occasion, he was greeted with reproaches more keen and scandalous than one should have supposed it possible for the most ingenious malice to invent, "When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" verse 20."

How must he be thunder-struck, if I may so say, with such a greeting as this! To hear such a construction put upon his conduct! to be accused of an act which no one that was not lost to all sense of decency would commit even in private, and much less in the presence of thousands! to be accused of committing this too under the guise of religious zeal! and to hear this accusation from the lips of his own wife, and in language too as acrimonious and insulting as Hell itself could inspire! and all this at a moment when his soul, inflamed only with love to God, was enrapt into the third heavens! How inconceivably painful must this have been! Methinks, the cursings of Shimei were nothing in comparison with this.

***~~Yet do we see in this, what all who are zealous for their God must expect.~~***

*Religious zeal is hated by the world, who will never fail to misconstrue it as proceeding from some hateful principle, and as forming a cloak for some hidden abomination. Pride, conceit, fanaticism, and hypocrisy, are usually considered as the springs of action to those who profess godliness*, especially if they bear any conspicuous part in the service of their God—their very activity is made the ground of accusation against them. Thus it has been in every age.

David "wept and chastened himself with fasting; and that was turned to his reproach, [Psalm 69:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.9-11)." John the Baptist came in an abstemious way; and the people said of him, "He has a devil!" The Lord Jesus Christ came in a way more suited to the liberty of the gospel dispensation; and his enemies took occasion from that to revile him as a "gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners! [Luke 7:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.33-34)."

Thus it is also in the present day; and thus we must expect to find it; for "the servant cannot be above his Lord; if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household, [Matthew 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.24-25)." Our blessed Lord has told us, that, "if the world hated him, they will hate us also [John 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18);" that they will "speak all manner of evil against us falsely for his sake, [Matthew 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.11);" and that they will even think they render service to God by putting to death his most faithful servants, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2).

Nor will any eminence in rank, or power, or talent, or wisdom, or piety, exempt us from this lot. If David could not escape it, then neither can we. If Paul was said to be "beside himself [Acts 26:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.24)," then those who tread in his steps must not expect to be regarded as of a sound mind. Nor will this opprobrious treatment proceed only from avowed enemies; our nearest friends and relatives will often be foremost in the assault; and "our bitterest foes may be those of our own household, [Matthew 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.36)."

Having seen somewhat of David's trial, let us consider,

***~~II. The determination he formed in consequence of it.~~***

Neither abashed nor irritated, he calmly avowed his unalterable determination,

***~~1. To serve his God without fear.~~***

If to bear this open testimony for his God, and to glorify him thus in the sight of all Israel, was to render himself vile, "he would be more and more vile" as long as he lived. A noble resolution this, and worthy to be adopted by every man! *Are the servants of Satan bold, and shall Jehovah's servants be cowards? Shall the ungodly commit all manner of iniquity without shame, and the godly be ashamed of walking in the ways of righteousness?* No! there should be a holy energy in the soul of every saint, a readiness to rise to the occasion, however formidable that occasion is; he should have within him the elasticity of a strong well-tempered spring, whose reaction is always augmented by the pressure. If true religion is ridiculed through the whole land, so that not a second family could be found in all Israel to adhere to God, we should 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)." Reproach for Christ's sake should be regarded as an honor, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41). And, though not coveted—persecution yet be welcomed as the truest riches, [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26). It should be considered as a precious gift of God for Christ's sake, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29), and be gloried in as a participation of Christ's sufferings, and a means of advancing his glory, 1 Peter 4:12-14.

We should be cautious indeed not by extravagance or misconduct of any kind to merit reproach; but, if it comes for righteousness' sake, we should rejoice in it, and glorify God for it, "taking pleasure in it," as a testimony in our favor, and a pledge of an accumulated and everlasting weight of glory! [1 Peter 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.15-16), [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10), [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17), [Luke 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.13), [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12), [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17).

Nor is it only against *reproach*that we should stand, but against the most envenomed *persecution*that men or devils can raise against us. We should be moved by no threats, however cruel; but be ready to lay down our lives for Christ's sake, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24), and account martyrdom a ground, not of pity and condolence, but of congratulation and joy, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18).

**2. To abase himself without shame.**

The chief reason of Michal's rage was, that she thought David degraded himself by this public exhibition, which, however it might have befit one of his inferior servants, was unsuited to his dignity. But David felt that a monarch in the sight of God is no more than other men; and that any elevation of rank which he possessed above others was rather a call to honor God the more, and not a reason for withholding from God any expression of gratitude and love. Hence he determined to regard himself as on a level with the least and lowest of his subjects in everything that had respect to God. Nor would he value himself on this as an act of condescension, and thus convert humility into pride; but he would really be in his own estimation, what he professed before others to be, "less than the least of all the saints, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8)," unworthy to "be a door-keeper in the house of his God, [Psalm 84:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10)," or to unloose the latchet of his Master's shoes, [John 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.27).

And this is the frame of mind which we also should cultivate. So far from regarding earthly distinctions as a reason for rendering to God a more measured service, as though the highest acts of piety were fitted only for the vulgar—we should consider wealth, honor, learning, and influence of every kind, as talents committed to us for the purpose of honoring God with them, and of rendering our example more effectual for the good of others.

And while the world is reproaching us for the excess of our piety, we should be ever abasing ourselves on account of our defects in piety. If we keep in view the perfect requirements of God's law, and the unbounded obligations which he has laid us under by the gift of his only-begotten Son—then how infinitely short of our duty will our best services appear! "Our very righteousnesses, in this view, will be as filthy rags! [Isaiah 64:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.6)," in which we can never hope to appear before God, and which can never come up with acceptance before him, until they have been washed in the Redeemer's blood! [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14).

Thus, whether men admire or reproach us for our piety, we should equally abase ourselves, as in reality deserving neither their admiration nor their reproach, but rather their pity on account of the defectiveness of our services, and the smallness of our spiritual attainments.

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who cast reproaches on the saints.~~***

Behold Michal and David on this occasion, and say, whether you would not rather be the persecuted saint, than the malignant persecutor? Is there a creature in the world who must not acknowledge the superiority of David's state, in the midst of all the ignominy that was cast upon him?

Such then is the state of God's people in the midst of all the calumnies with which they are loaded, and such is the light in which their calumniators are regarded by Almighty God.

In the instance before us, God marked his displeasure against Michal, by inflicting the curse of barrenness upon her to her dying hour, verse 23. And he warns us also in the most solemn manner to avoid the rock on which she split, "So scoff no more, or your punishment will be even greater! [Isaiah 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.22)."

If we choose not to serve God ourselves, let us beware how by scoffing and ridicule we discourage others; for our Lord tells us, that "It would have been better for us that a millstone were hanged about our neck, and we were cast into the depths of the sea, rather than causing one of his little ones to stumble, [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6)."

To perish under the guilt of our own sins will be terrible enough; but to have "the blood of others also required at our hands" will be an inconceivable augmentation of our guilt and misery. This then would I entreat of all who despise and persecute the followers of Christ. Look into the Scriptures; see whether you approve of Cain, of Ishmael, of Michal, of Festus, or of any who bear the stamp and character of revilers in the Sacred Records. See whether in your consciences you do not rather side with Abel, and Isaac, and David, and Paul, and all the other sufferers, "of whom the world itself was not worthy! [Hebrews 11:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.38)." And if your own consciences bear testimony to the saints, dare not to walk in the steps of their oppressors, persecuting the living saints, while you raise memorials to the dead, [Matthew 23:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.29-31).

***~~2. Those who are called to sustain reproaches.~~***

Think it not strange that reproach is cast upon you for righteousness' sake; for thus it has been from the beginning, "Those who have been born only of the flesh ever have persecuted those who are born after the Spirit," and so they will continue to do even to the end.

You may, if you please, avoid persecution, "if you will be of the world, the world will love its own." But are you prepared to sacrifice all your hopes and prospects in the eternal world? James says, that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God; and that those who will be the friends of the world, must be the enemies of God."

Say then: Are you in doubt which of the alternatives to choose? What good can the world do you by its friendship, or what evil can it inflict by its enmity? To kill the body is the worst that they can do. But what will not God do for his faithful servants? What will he not inflict on those who turn back from him? Can you think of being denied by Christ before the assembled universe, and not tremble, [Matthew 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32-33). O consider this, and you will not hesitate a moment whom to serve; but will "choose that good part which shall never be taken away from you." You will gladly "suffer affliction with the people of God, and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the whole world!"

***~~#314~~***

***~~DAVID'S GRATITUDE~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.18-19)~~***

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?"

***~~It is a great comfort to reflect that the dispositions of our hearts are noticed by God, and, if good, are well-pleasing in his sight. There are many holy desires and purposes which we are not able to accomplish; which yet are accepted before God, as much as if they had been carried into effect.~~***

David had conceived a wish and determination to build a house for God, in order that the ark, which was the symbol of the divine presence, might no more dwell within curtains, while he himself was dwelling in a house of cedar. But God did not allow him to execute his purpose, on account of his having shed much blood in war, 1 Chronicles 22:8; nevertheless he commended the desire ("you did well that it was in your heart, [1 Kings 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.18).") and made it an occasion of discovering to him the honor that was to be conferred on him and his posterity. Struck with the majesty and condescension of God, David went in before him, and burst forth into these expressions of devoutest adoration. We shall show,

***~~I. What grounds David had for gratitude and thanksgiving.~~***

Though David was not allowed to gratify his own inclinations in the particular before mentioned—yet he found abundant cause of thankfulness in,

***~~1. The mercies already given to him.~~***

He had been taken from a very low employment, verse 8; chosen in preference, not only to all his own family, but also to the whole nation; preserved in the midst of numberless dangers; exalted in due season to the throne prepared for him; made victorious over all his enemies; and brought to a state of unrivaled power, affluence, and prosperity, verse 9. *On a review of these mercies, he could not but be astonished at the divine goodness to him, or refrain from proclaiming it with rapturous admiration.*

***~~2. The mercies yet further promised to him.~~***

God had promised that he would have a son, on whom the honor of building a temple should be conferred; yes, moreover, that the Messiah also should spring from his loins, and sit upon his throne forever and ever, verse 12-14 with [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5). In comparison with this, David observes that all his personal advancement was "but a light matter;" and then, as utterly at a loss to express his sense of the divine goodness, he exclaims, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Is this the way in which mean and worthless men, such as he felt himself to be, are treated by their fellow-creatures? See [1 Chronicles 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 17.17). No; it is peculiar to God, who magnifies his own sovereignty in conferring the richest benefits on the most unworthy of mankind!

But however distinguished a favorite of Heaven David was,

***~~II. We have still greater reason for gratitude and thanksgiving.~~***

Let us view our obligations to God,

***~~1. Our general obligations.~~***

As creatures, we were originally formed of the dust of the earth; yet, though so base in our original, we were distinguished above the whole creation by having a rational and immortal soul breathed into us, and a capacity given us to know, to love, to serve, and to enjoy God. Let any one of the human race reflect on this, and say, whether he has not reason to adore the goodness of God, who has given him powers so infinitely superior to any that are possessed by the brute creation, and faculties that shall enjoy eternal blessedness. Let but this elevation of our nature be considered, and we shall exclaim, with profoundest reverence, "Who am I, O Lord God, that you have brought me hitherto?"

As sinners, we have still further ground for praise. We are by nature base; but by practice we have been inexpressibly vile. Yet when we were deserving of nothing but his wrath, God loved us, and gave his own Son to die for us.

Further, when we were even trampling on the blood that was shed for us, he sent his Spirit to reveal his Son in our hearts, and both to fit us for his glory, and to bring us safely to the possession of it.

And "is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Man selects those who are great and worthy, in order to bestow on them his richest favors; but God, in choosing us, "has lifted the beggar from the dunghill, to set him among princes, and to make him inherit a throne of glory! [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8)." O what marvelous condescension is this! and what gratitude does it demand at our hands! "Who is a God like unto you! [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11)."

**2.** **Our particular obligations**, as compared with David.

In no respect are the obligations here specified to be put in competition with those given to us. Was he chosen from the base estate of a shepherd? Look at the state from which God has chosen us. *We were fallen, guilty, hell-deserving creatures, utterly incapable of ever restoring ourselves to his favor; yet did God set his love upon us, and elevate us, not to an earthly throne, but to a crown and kingdom in Heaven itself!*And not from earthly enemies, such as David had to encounter, has he preserved us, but from all the powers of darkness, against whose wiles and devices it was not possible for us to stand, if we had not been upheld by his almighty power and grace.

And though it must be confessed, that to be the progenitor of the Messiah was an inconceivably high honor—yet to be savingly interested in him, and united to him as members of his mystical body, and made fellow-heirs with him of all the glory and felicity of Heaven, is an infinitely higher honor. And all this is given to us, so that in all the points which David enumerates, we are far above him:  
our *election*is from a far more degraded state;  
our *elevation*is to a far higher throne;  
our *preservation*is from far greater dangers, and more powerful enemies;  
and our destiny is to an infinitely higher honor than any which a carnal relation to Christ could confer!

How well then may we exclaim, What are we, that we should ever be brought to such a state as this?

**That this subject may be brought home more powerfully to our hearts and consciences, let us comprehend it under two pertinent reflections**:

***~~1. How astonishing has been God's love to us!~~***

Well may we say with David, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" No; nothing like it ever did, or could, exist among men.

*Man*selects the most worthy as the objects of his love. But *God*has chosen the most unworthy, even us, who had reduced ourselves to the condition of the fallen angels, and deserved nothing but their portion at his hands.

*Man*confers but small benefits, which, however valued by his fellows, scarcely deserve a thought. But *God*confers riches and honors which far exceed all human comprehension.

*Man*soon repents of the favors he has conferred, when those on whom he has bestowed them prove themselves unworthy of them. But "the gifts and calling of *God*are without repentance" on his part, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29); yes, "if it had not been that He was unchangeable, not a soul among us could ever have been saved, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6)."

Further, what *man*bestows is but for a little time; the present short life is the only season wherein we can possess any benefits conferred by man. But what *God*bestows, he gives forever and ever; and death, so far from terminating our felicity, brings us into the most complete and everlasting enjoyment of it.

"Behold then, what manner of love is this with which the Father has loved us!" Truly, if David was quite overwhelmed with the favors conferred on him, then much more may we, whose obligations are so infinitely higher, and more permanent than his!

***~~2. How faint and cold is our love to him!~~***

See David coming into the presence of his God, and sitting in the temple before him. His mind is quite filled with a sense of gratitude, and words seem altogether inadequate to express his feelings. Yet, notwithstanding our obligations to God so infinitely exceed his, how rarely has God ever seen us in the posture of David! Many of us, it is to be feared, have never spent so much as one hour in our whole lives, in his contemplations, and in his exercises.

Do you ask, How shall I attain his frame? Beg of God to work it in you by his Spirit. And especially do as he did. He determined to promote to the very utmost of his power the honor and glory of his heavenly Benefactor; and then it was that God revealed to him all the purposes of his grace respecting the raising up of a son from his loins to execute the work which he had contemplated, and to make that son of his the progenitor of the Messiah himself. In like manner, improve for God all the faculties and powers that you possess; and in honoring God you yourselves shall be honored. Only exert yourselves for God, and everything which you do, or only devise, for him, shall return in blessings into your own bosom!

***~~#315~~***

***~~THE PROMISES AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER~~***

**[2 Samuel 7:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.27)**

"O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer."

If we were to judge from the infinite distance which exists between the Creator and his creatures, and especially between a holy God and sinful man, we should say, it was vain, if not impious, to imagine that any request of ours could enter into the ears of Jehovah, or that he could by any means be induced to notice it with his favorable regards. Indeed, if God had not, of his own sovereign mercy, commanded us to spread our needs before him, and assured us of an answer to our supplications, Beelzebub himself might as well hope for acceptance in prayer, as we. But "God has given *us*exceeding great and precious promises;" which we may plead with him, just as David pleaded in the passage before us.

David had desired to build a house for the Lord; and Nathan, the prophet, had encouraged him in his purpose. But God, not willing that David, who had shed so much blood, should execute that office, devolved it upon one who should spring from his loins verse 12, 13; at the same time assuring David, that God would make his family to be of long continuance upon his throne, "The Lord tells you that he will make a house for you, verse 11."

Encouraged by this promise, David poured out his soul before God in prayer, saying, "Now, O Lord God, the word that you have spoken concerning your servant, and concerning his house, establish it forever, and do as you have said verse 25." Then, apologizing, if I may so speak, for presuming to offer such a prayer, he refers expressly to the promise before specified, and assigns that as the ground on which he had found it in his heart to pray this prayer. Then he goes on, again and again reverting to this in vindication of himself, "And now, O Lord God, you are that God, and your words are true, and you have promised this goodness unto your servant. Therefore, now let it please you to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken it; and with your blessing let the house of your servant be blessed forever! verse 28, 29."

Now, in speaking upon this subject, I will show,

***~~I. The connection which exists between the promises of God and our prayers.~~***

***~~1. The promises of God are our warrant for asking.~~***

Pardon, peace, holiness, glory! How should it be, that we, sinful creatures, should dare to ask such blessings at God's hands? But God has promised them all. *There is not any one thing that an immortal soul can need, which is not the subject of an express promise in the Word of God*. Moreover, he permits his sinful creatures to come to him "as his remembrancers." By this very name are his suppliant people designated, [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7); and every one of them is authorized to spread his promises before him, saying, "Remember your word unto your servant, wherein you have caused me to hope, [Psalm 119:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.49);" and "do unto me as you have said, verses 11, 16."

***~~2. The promises of God are our security for receiving.~~***

God is altogether immutable, both in his *nature,*[Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6); [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17), and in his *Word*, [Hebrews 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17). "Sooner should Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of his Word should fail, [Matthew 24:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.35)." As for difficulties, we have nothing to do with them. Sarah sinned in allowing these difficulties to have the least influence upon her mind; for "Is anything too hard for the Lord? [Genesis 18:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.10-14)."

*Our confidence cannot possibly be too strong, when we have an express promise to rely upon*. We should have this as an abiding principle within us; as a principle which no difficulties whatever should shake, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent; has he said, and shall he not do it? or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)." Never did anyone trust in the Lord, and find himself disappointed of his hope. As Joshua appealed to all Israel, so may we appeal to every believer in the universe, "You know, in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass unto you; and not one thing has failed thereof! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

From the example of David I will further point out,

**II. Our duty in relation to God's promises.**

***~~1. We must embrace the promises as made over to us in Christ Jesus.~~***

It is "in Christ alone that they are all Yes, and Amen! [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20);" and it is to those only who are in Christ by a living faith, that any of them are made. True, indeed, there are general promises given to those who come to Christ, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28); [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37); but we never have any part in them, until we actually perform the conditions on which alone they are given.*The Covenant of grace provides for us all that we can ever stand in need of.* But we must "lay hold on that covenant," and on "Jesus the Mediator of that covenant," before we can possess the blessings of it. Let this not be forgotten. Let us not suppose that we are to obtain mercy in ways of our own devising. We must come to God by Christ; we must plead what Christ has done and suffered for us; we must trust in him alone. There is "no access to God, for any of us, but by Him, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6); [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18);" "nor is there any name but His, whereby any man can be saved, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12)."

***~~2. We must treasure the promises up in our minds, in order to plead them before God.~~***

In going to God, we greatly honor him, when we remind him of his promises, and declare our entire dependence on them. See the example of Jacob, who for his power in prayer was surnamed Israel. [Genesis 32:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-28). He had been assured, in a dream, that God would be with him in all places, and never leave him until he had fulfilled to him his promises in their fullest extent, [Genesis 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.15). Fully twenty years afterwards, Jacob, in a season of great distress, reminded God of this promise, saying, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my Father Isaac, the Lord which said unto me, Return unto your country and to your kindred, and I will deal well with you; deliver me, I beg you! For you have said, I will surely do you good! [Genesis 32:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.9); [Genesis 32:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.11-12)."

Just so, we should bear in mind the promises which God has given us, and present before him those which are in a more peculiar manner suited to our state. This will give us confidence before God; and it will infallibly secure to us an answer of peace; for "this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us; and, if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him, [1 John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.14-15)."

***~~3. We must wait with patience for the fulfillment of God's promises.~~***

God may not answer, either at the time, or in the manner, that our impatient spirits may wish. But though we may ask of him, we are not to dictate to him. *We must wait His time, and leave everything to His disposal.*The saints of old "saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, [Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13)." Thus must we do. *Times and seasons must be left to God, who alone knows what will be eventually best for us.*If we "have found it in our hearts to pray unto him," we may be sure of two things; first, that God himself has put it into our hearts to pray; and next, that he therefore put it into our hearts to pray, because it was previously in his heart to give. It is "through faith and patience that we are to inherit the promises, [Hebrews 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.12);" and the more dark his dispensations, whether of providence or of grace, may be, the more must we "hold fast our confidence in him," saying, "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him! [Job 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.15)."

***~~#316~~***

***~~NATHAN'S PARABLE~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 12:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.1-7)~~***

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

"Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

***~~God, in the disposal of his gifts, does not conduct himself by any such laws as are necessary for the regulation of human actions. He is a Sovereign who may deal with his creatures as he pleases, without "giving account to us of any of his matters." Accordingly we find that sometimes he has exercised a severity beyond what we, with our limited apprehensions, might have expected. At other times he has shown mercy, where we would have expected nothing but the heaviest judgments.~~***

We have lately seen God striking Uzzah dead for a well-meant error, and taking the kingdom from Saul for not waiting quite so long for Samuel as he should have done. But in our text we behold him sending a prophet unto David to bring him to repentance, after the commission of such crimes as cannot be contemplated without horror and amazement. But "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts."

The conduct of David as portrayed in our text, together with the means used by Nathan to humble him for it, lead us to show,

***~~I. To what an awful extent a man's conscience may be seared.~~***

We read of people whose "consciences are seared as with a hot iron! [1 Timothy 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.2);" and such was now the state of David.

One would have supposed that, after the commission of adultery with Bathsheba, he would have been scarcely able to endure his existence through the agonies of his mind; but he was only concerned about concealing it from man; accordingly, on finding that her pregnancy must of necessity lead to a discovery of the crime, he adopted various means to deceive Uriah; and when he did not succeed in them, he sent an order to Joab to expose, and to desert, him in battle, so as to ensure his death by the hands of the enemy. One would suppose that such complicated crimes as these should awaken him. Yet behold for nine or ten months he was, as far as appears to us, altogether insensible of his guilt.

At the same time he was quick-sighted enough to the crimes of others, and severe in the extreme against the man, whom Nathan represented as oppressively taking the favorite lamb of a poor neighbor in preference to one out of his own flock; he deemed that man to be worthy of death, because he had shown no pity; and adjudged him to pay four-fold for the injury he had committed.

Who can reflect on this without utter astonishment? That so holy a man as David, who had been so honored of the Lord, and had done so much for the honor of his God, should be left to fall in so grievous a manner, and to lie for so long a time impenitent in his sins!

Who can look upon it, and not weep for him?

Who can look upon it, and not tremble for himself?

But awful as this state of mind appears, it is, alas! too common in this world.

Such enormous crimes indeed as those of David are not common; but *who has not committed some evils which ought to have humbled him in the dust before God?*Yet who has not continued months, and even years, without ever abasing himself with humiliation and contrition? Who has not shown a strange insensibility with respect to the guilt he has contracted? We can easily discern the faults of *others*, and can censure them with severity; but towards our *own*faults we are most blind and most indulgent!

Nor must we be considered here as referring altogether to those who despise religion. It is a common evil, and is even found in the house of God! There are professors of religion who are as blind to their own sins, as if they never had known what sin was; and who, if their misdeeds are unknown to man, continue for years unhumbled in the sight of God! Yes, there are too many, who are both blinded and "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin;" and, if ever God should give them true repentance, they will be as much astonished at their present insensibility, as now they are at that which is recorded in our text.

Seeing then how callous a man's conscience may become, let us inquire,

***~~II. In what way may the conscience be most successfully excited to perform its office.~~***

Much may be learned from the conduct of Nathan on this occasion:

***~~1. We should endeavor to divest men of the self-love that blinds them.~~***

This was well contrived in the parable that Nathan spoke. David did not see the drift of the parable as relating to himself, and therefore felt no personal interest in his decision. Hence his judgment was free, and his determination of the cause unbiased. Had he been aware that he was about to condemn himself, he would have been far more indulgent towards the offending person.

Now this mode of convicting people, who would have revolted at any plainer dealing, has been frequently practiced with good effect. It was to such an expedient that Joab resorted, in order to prevail on David to recall his son Absalom from banishment, 2 Samuel 14:5-11; [2 Samuel 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 14.20); and by a similar device a prophet constrained Ahab to condemn himself for sparing Benhadad, whom God had delivered into his hands to be destroyed, [1 Kings 20:35-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.35-42). Our Lord himself also frequently adopted the same method of counteracting the prejudices of the Scribes and Pharisees, [Matthew 21:40-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.40-45).

By such means a person is silenced at once, and is "condemned out of his own mouth." True indeed, in cases where the mind is open to conviction, these precautions are less necessary; but the sentence that is founded on such grounds is always less offensive, because the criminal passes it upon himself.

**2. We should however combine fidelity with confrontation.**Sooner or later we must come to the point, "You are the man!" We are to consider ourselves as messengers of the Most High God, who has said, "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully, [Jeremiah 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.28)." *We must not fear the face of man! Our concern for his welfare must swallow up all dread of his displeasure*. The consideration of the *account*which we must one day give to God, must impel us, even at the peril of our lives, to bear a faithful testimony in his service.

Behold the boldness of Elijah in reproving Ahab, [1 Kings 18:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.17-18); [1 Kings 21:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.19-21); and of John in condemning the incestuous commerce of Herod, [Matthew 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.4). These are the examples which we must follow, when milder methods have proved ineffectual; but our object must always be, not merely to acquit ourselves to God as faithful monitors, but to win the souls of those whom we admonish. The recollection of our own weakness, and proneness to fall, must ever render us as tender as possible towards our fallen brother, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted, [Galatians 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.1)."

***~~Let us then, in the view of this history, learn,~~***

***~~1. To tremble for ourselves.~~***

Did *David*fall? Then who then is safe?

Did *David*sink into such an obdurate state? Then who has not reason to dread lest he be given over to a reprobate mind?

Clear enough it is from whence repentance must proceed, whether in its first commencement, or in its further progress; if God works it not in us by his Holy Spirit, we shall be altogether as insensible as a rock of adamant! *Let none of us then indulge a proud security, or imagine ourselves out of the reach of temptation, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!"*

***~~2. To rejoice in God.~~***

O what mercy did God display on this occasion; that instead of cutting off the royal miscreant by some signal judgment, he sent a prophet to awaken his drowsy conscience, and bring him to repentance!

We lament indeed, that many have taken occasion from David's fall to make light of sin; and from his recovery, to imagine, that God will never execute his threatened judgments; but we have reason to bless our God that such a *monument of mercy*has been exhibited in the Scriptures.

How many thousands of backsliding Christians have been restored by means of this one example! We are now encouraged to say to all, however heinous their iniquities have been: "Return, O backsliding children; and God will heal your backslidings, and love you freely." "Only acknowledge your iniquity," and then "it shall not be your ruin."

Is there anyone among us who has become hardened in his sins? O, hear what God says to his people of old, "I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, [Isaiah 57:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.17-18); and seek "repentance unto life," even that "repentance which is not to be repented of."

***~~#317~~***

***~~DAVID'S HUMILIATION AND ACCEPTANCE~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13)~~***

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

*It is scarcely to be conceived to what a degree sin will blind the eyes, and harden the heart! We see indeed that the ungodly world will commit every species of iniquity without either shame or remorse; but who would imagine that a person enlightened, renewed, and sanctified by the Spirit of God, should in the space of a few days be reduced by sin to a state of utter obduracy?*Yet such was the change which one single temptation speedily effected on him who was "the man after God's own heart."

The circumstances of David's crime are so well known, that they need not at present to be enlarged upon. But his long impenitence, his apparent forgetfulness of his horrid deeds, and his excessive severity against a man whose fault bore no proportion to his own, are less noticed; though they cannot fail to strike every one who reads the account of his conversation with Nathan. By an apposite and well-wrought parable, the Prophet Nathan had led David inadvertently to pass sentence against himself; and then availed himself of the opportunity to charge home upon him the crimes he had perpetrated. Then it was, and not until then, that David felt a just sense of his guilt; though nine months at least had elapsed since his criminal immorality with Bathsheba—yet his conscience had slept, until it was now awakened to perform its office. On this occasion he confessed his sin to Nathan; and received from Nathan a consolatory assurance, that his iniquity, as heinous as it was, was pardoned.

There are two points to which the text directs our attention;

***~~I. David's humiliation.~~***

There does not at first sight appear anything worthy of notice in David's confession; but, if we examine it carefully, we shall find in it several things which indicated a deep and true repentance.

***~~1. David acknowledged his sin as an offence against God.~~***

The evil of sin in this view is generally overlooked; and the quality of actions is appreciated and determined by their effects on society. Hence the offences which are committed solely against God, such as unbelief, impenitence, self-righteousness, and the like—are never condemned by the world, or even considered as blemishing the moral character at all; while such crimes as theft and perjury render a man universally execrated and abhorred. But *it is from its relation to God that sin derives its principal malignity; its chief heinousness consists in its being:  
a violation of God's law,  
a contempt of his authority, and  
a practical denial of all his attributes*.

If any sin whatever could deserve to be marked with superior infamy on other considerations, it would surely be the crimes which David had committed; yet, in adverting to these very actions, *David passes over their criminality in relation to man, and notices them only as offences against God!*See [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4).

Joseph's views of sin perfectly agreed with those of David. See [Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9). This shows that he had just views of his conduct; and that the grounds of his humiliation were precisely such as the occasion required.

***~~2. David made no attempt to extenuate his guilt.~~***

*Unhumbled people uniformly endeavor to palliate their faults.*

*Adam*cast the blame of his transgression on Eve; and Eve transferred it to the serpent, [Genesis 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.12-13).

*Saul*, when reproved for sparing Agag and the chief of the spoil, shifted the blame from himself upon the people; and, as far as it still attached to him, excused himself as acting involuntarily, and as overawed by the people, [1 Samuel 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.15); 1 Samuel 15:24.

But *David's*mouth was shut; he uttered not one single word in extenuation of his crimes; as heavy as Nathan's charge against him was, he fell under it. This was another excellent proof of his penitence and contrition; and *it is certain that wherever real humiliation is, the penitent will be more ready to aggravate his guilt, than to palliate and excuse it.*

***~~3. David manifested no displeasure against his reprover.~~***

Men in general, and great men in particular, are very apt to take offence when told of their faults. They think themselves at liberty to insult God as much as they please; but no one must take the liberty to maintain the cause of God in opposition to them. Some indeed have been found, in different ages, who have ventured to speak with faithfulness to monarchs; but they have always done it at the peril of their lives. See [1 Kings 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 13.4); [1 Kings 21:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.20); [1 Kings 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.8) and [2 Kings 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.9) and [2 Chronicles 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.10); and frequently have paid the penalty of death for their presumption, [2 Chronicles 24:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.21); [2 Chronicles 25:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.16) and [Matthew 14:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.3-5); [Matthew 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.10).

But in the present instance no displeasure at all was manifested; on the contrary, we have reason to think that Nathan was more endeared to David than ever by his fidelity, since David afterwards called one of his own children by the prophet's name, 2 Samuel 5:14; and showed confidence in him to the last hour of his life, 1 Kings 1:24; [1 Kings 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 1.27); [1 Kings 1:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 1.32-34). In this therefore we have a further evidence of the sincerity and depth of David's repentance.

**4. David was willing to take shame to himself even before men.**

*There is nothing which men will not do in order to conceal their guilt from men!*They will "add iniquity to iniquity," and perpetrate murder itself, in order to avoid the shame to which their crimes have exposed them. How keenly was Saul affected by Samuel's refusal to honor him before the people! *The dread of that public dishonor pained him more than all the denunciations of God's wrath!*1 Samuel 15:25-30.

But the reproaches of men, however severe, were of no account in David's eyes; that which pained him was, that he had given occasion for those reproaches, and that God would be dishonored by them; and therefore, though he thereby published and perpetuated his own shame, he wrote some of his penitential Psalms, and set them to music for the use of penitents in that and all succeeding ages. Being "vile in his own eyes," it was a matter of small concern to him that he was vile also in the eyes of others. He loathed and "abhorred himself," and therefore submitted readily to be abhorred by others.

The truth of his repentance being manifest, we proceed to notice,

***~~II. His acceptance with God, consequent upon his repentance.~~***

Very remarkable was the answer of the prophet to the royal penitent:

**1. David's acceptance with God was immediate.**

There was no interval of time between the confession of David and the reply of Nathan. *The very instant that David repented, God forgave him.*This is particularly noticed by David himself as a marvelous expression of God's love and mercy, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and you forgave the iniquity of my sin, [Psalm 32:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.5)." We would have expected that God would suspend his forgiveness, until David should have evinced the truth of his repentance by a subsequent life of piety; but "God's ways and thoughts are not like ours; yes rather, they are as much above ours as the heavens are above the earth! [Isaiah 55:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.8-9)."

*God acts in a way worthy of himself. His grace is his own, to dispose of according to his sovereign will; and he dispenses it to whoever, and in whatever way, he sees fit.*He shows, if we may so speak, peculiar pleasure in manifesting his compassion towards repenting sinners. He represents himself as falling on the neck of the *returning prodigal*, and as interrupting his confessions by testimonies of his parental love and pardoning grace. Towards the *dying thief*also our incarnate God displayed the same readiness to forgive, in that he not only complied with his petition, but far exceeded, without one moment's hesitation, his most enlarged desires! [Luke 23:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.42-43).

Thus has he given us a practical commentary on his own gracious declarations, and demonstrated, for our comfort, that he is "slow to anger and ready to forgive."

***~~2. David's acceptance with God was attested.~~***

Nathan spoke, not as a man who suggested only a surmise or doubtful opinion, but as a prophet who was inspired to declare what God had really done. God did not will that his repenting servant should be kept in suspense; and therefore ordered Nathan to communicate to him the joyful tidings, not that God *would*put away his sin, but that he *had*put it away, and that the penal consequences of his transgression would never come upon his soul.

It is thus that God frequently acts towards his people; as he made known to David by his prophet, so he reveals to them by his Spirit, that their iniquities are forgiven, and their sins covered! See [Isaiah 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.7); [Isaiah 38:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.17); [Zechariah 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 3.4). He desires not the constrained service of a slave, but the willing and grateful obedience of a child. "Though he cause grief—yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies, [Lamentations 3:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.32);" and will cause his believing people to enjoy an assured sense of their acceptance with him, [Isaiah 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.1) and [Romans 8:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-16).

***~~3. David's acceptance with God was complete.~~***

The sins which David had committed were from that very moment "blotted out as a morning cloud!" Neither his adultery nor his murder, nor one particle of guilt of any kind, was imputed to him. There were indeed some *temporal judgments*entailed upon him:  
the fruit of his adulterous commerce was blasted, and his child stricken with death;  
David's own wives were all defiled publicly by his son Absalom;  
and the sword, according to Nathan's prediction, never departed from his house.

These things however were merely temporal, and were designed as much for the benefit of others as for his correction; they tended to impress on all a sense of the malignity of David's crimes; and to show that, *however God might pity and forgive a sinner—he utterly and unchangeably abhorred sin!*

But, notwithstanding these remembrancers of his iniquity, his sin was "cast, as it were, into the very depths of the sea!" as ours also shall be, if we truly repent; nor will God ever remember them against us any more forever! [Micah 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18-19); [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12).

***~~We may learn then from this account,~~***

***~~1. The blessing of a judicious and faithful minister!~~***

The method which Nathan used in order to reach the conscience of David, was extremely judicious; and when he had succeeded in making an interposition, then he commenced a direct confrontation, *"You are the man!"* Had Nathan been less cautious, he had probably shut the ears of his royal master; and had he been satisfied with offering some vague hints, he would have failed to impress David's callous mind. But by a happy union of wisdom and fidelity, he gained his point, [Proverbs 25:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.12).

Well was it for David that he had such a prophet in his court; for, without Nathan's admonitions, David might probably have become more and more obdurate, until he had perished in his sin!

Thus should all esteem themselves highly favored by God, if they have *a minister, who, while he fears not the faces of men, has a tender love for their souls.*They should gladly listen to his admonitions, and thankfully receive his reproofs; they should make it a continual subject of their prayers, that his Word may come with power to their souls, to awaken them to a sense of sin, and to bring them to the enjoyment of salvation.

***~~2. The boundless extent of God's mercy!~~***

Who would have conceived it possible that such sins as David's should be so soon forgiven? But, "as God's majesty is, so also is his mercy." "He delights in mercy;" and "waits that he may be gracious unto us." His message to us is, "Only acknowledge your transgressions that you have sinned against the Lord your God, [Jeremiah 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.13)." And for our encouragement he declares, "If any says, I have sinned, and it profited me not; I will deliver him from going down into the pit, and his soul shall see the light, [Job 33:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.27-28)."

Let us then carry all our sins to God. Whether they have been more or less heinous in the sight of men, let us not continue under the guilt of them, when they may be so speedily forgiven. Let us remember, that, in and through Christ, God is reconciled to a guilty world; and that, while "they who cover their sins shall not prosper, whoever confesses and forsakes them shall find mercy! [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)."

***~~#318~~***

***~~AMNON AND TAMAR~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 13.15)~~***

"Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!"

The Word of God will surely be fulfilled in due season; and *every threatening in it, as well as every promise, will be accomplished*. God had, with most astonishing mercy, so far pardoned the iniquity of David, as to remit all punishment of it in the eternal world; but, as his sin had produced a public scandal, and had caused the name of God to be blasphemed through the land, God warned him by Nathan that he should be visited with troubles through life; with troubles in his own family, not unlike to those which he himself had brought on the family of Uriah.

Accordingly we find that these troubles speedily commenced. His eldest son Amnon, the heir to his throne, developed an immoral desire after his half-sister Tamar; and so violent was his passion, that his health was visibly impaired by it. By the advice of his friend Jonadab, he laid a plan for getting her within his reach; and then, when she would not consent to his wicked purposes, he effected them by force. But no sooner had he accomplished his wishes, than his love was turned into a most inveterate hatred; insomuch that, as our text informs us, "the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her." Now *this change of his mind gives us a deep insight into human nature*; and affords us occasion for many profitable remarks upon,

***~~I. The "love" of the ungodly.~~***

As it is not our design to dwell more than is necessary on the particular event that is here recorded, *we shall consider personal attachment as comprehending both love and friendship*. Now love, in this extended sense, may exist in a very high degree where there is no religious principle; it may even in some respects vie with the most exalted instances that are to be found in the Church of God; with the love of Jacob to Rachel, for the sake of whom seven years of servitude appeared but as a few days, [Genesis 29:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 29.20); and with the friendship that subsisted between David and Jonathan, whose love for each other exceeded even the love of women, [2 Samuel 1:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 1.25-26). But it must be confessed, that far the greater part of that which passes for love and friendship in the world, is unsound; and that even the best of it is very defective. For the elucidating of this point we shall show,

***~~1. The criminality of that "love" which is evil.~~***

Behold that "love" which is spoken of in our text; it was exceeding ardent—but it was selfish, cruel, and impious. It had respect to nothing but personal gratification. It sought that gratification at the expense of the honor, the interest, the happiness of the object beloved; and it trampled under foot every law whether human or divine.

In the case before us this is plain and obvious; and it will be found that very much of that which is called love and friendship, is of precisely the same stamp and character. It is scarcely needful to advert to that which issues in the seduction of innocence, and a dereliction of the seduced object to all the horrors of infamy and want; yet, how many thousands, of the lower classes especially, have reason to deplore and execrate the existence of such love, among their family, their friends, or their acquaintances! Nor is the friendship of innumerable classes both in higher and lower life unlike to this.

Behold the gambler; he has his "friends" to whom he is strongly attached, not for any valuable qualities in them, but because they administer to his pleasure; but so cruel is his attachment, that if he can win from them all that they possess, he will gladly do it, though he thereby reduce both them and their families to the lowest ebb of misery and ruin.

In like manner the people that unite for what is called conviviality and merry-making; what are these, but confederates against the God of Heaven and earth, associated together to encourage one another in a contempt of his majesty, and a violation of his laws! If men unite for the purposes of plunder, or in resistance to the constituted authorities of the land, we conceive that we do them no injustice, when we speak of them as thieves or rebels; nor will God designate by any gentler terms the union of those who uphold one another in a systematic opposition to his holy will. Whatever is the particular line of conduct they pursue, whether the more flagrant one of open licentiousness, or the more approved one of sober sensuality, their love is selfish, because it centers in self; it is cruel, because it seeks its own ends without regard to the happiness of others; and it is impious, because it is a conspiracy to banish God from the world.

***~~2. The deficiency of that "love" which is good.~~***

Nothing is more honorable than virtuous love, nor anything more delightful than friendship founded on virtuous principles. But still if the attachment is merely that which springs from natural affections, it is defective—it is defective in its *foundation*, its *exercise*, its *continuance*.

That cannot be perfect which has not piety for its basis. Our love to each other should spring from our love to God, and have respect to his image in the person beloved. *The person's conformity to God's mind and will should be the reason, and the measure, of our love to him.*Where this is not the case, the union will be in danger of being dissolved by that very thing which ought most powerfully to cement it. If one of the parties becomes pious, the change will only produce alienation of heart in him whose attachment was founded on natural qualities or attainments; the *correspondence of sentiment which is essential to love*will have ceased; and the most ardent affection will from thenceforth either be changed into hatred, or subside into cold respect.

As the foundation of merely natural attachments is defective, so also is the exercise; for how can our love aim at the spiritual welfare of its object, when we ourselves have no spiritual sensibility? We may do much, and suffer much, for the *temporal*happiness of those we love; but we shall retard, rather than advance, whatever could conduce to the good of his soul. How miserably defective then must such attachment be, when, instead of promoting, it obstructs the most valuable ends of life!

Nor is it possible, in the very nature of things, for such attachments to continue beyond the present state of existence. The righteous have a prospect beyond the grave. As a river gliding sweetly through its banks is separated at last by an intervening pier, and then flows in renewed union to the ocean to part no more, so do the godly pass their days together in sweet communion, until separated for a moment by death; they meet again in the future world, to spend an eternity together in unfading bliss.

But no such prospect opens to the worldly man; however happy he may be in his love or friendship, his views are bounded by the narrow limits of this present world.

We might add too, that even in this world its continuance is most uncertain; for where religion does not reign in the heart, and form the basis of our affection, the attachment is liable to be easily interrupted, and speedily dissolved; and it is but too often found, that when the object ceases, through illness or poverty, to administer the usual satisfaction, then attachment languishes, and gives way to indifference and neglect.

Intimately connected with this subject is,

***~~II. The hatred of the wicked.~~***

That men should hate those who injure them, will not create in us any surprise; but that they should hate those whom they have injured, and because they have injured them, may seem strange indeed; but this is really the common course of human events. The instance recorded in our text is worthy of particular notice. The injury which Amnon had done to Tamar was beyond measure great; and, if his love underwent any change at all, we might well suppose that it would give way to pity and compassion. But behold, instead of harboring any tender emotions towards her, he was instantly inflamed with the most inveterate resentment; insomuch that, as ardent as his love had been, his hatred now far exceeded it. But this change was founded in human nature, and was precisely such as injustice is calculated to produce.

***~~1. We hate those whom we have injured, because we have debased ourselves in their esteem.~~***

We all affect the esteem of our fellow-creatures; and it is well to do so, "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold, [Proverbs 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.1)." While we are unconscious of having done anything to forfeit a person's esteem, we conclude, as a matter of course, that we possess it; but when we are sensible that we have injured him in any respect, we feel that we have suffered loss in his esteem; and this loss we resent as an injury done to ourselves.

It is common for people so to expose themselves to censure by their follies, as to render the society in which they mix, and even the town or village in which they live, disgustful to them; and they hate all the people whose censure they have incurred, for no other reason than because they have seen and noticed the improprieties of their conduct. Their pride is wounded; and they impute that to the malignity of others, which they should ascribe rather to their own folly.

Thus it is with respect to injuries of every kind; we feel that the commission of them lessens our character in the eyes of him whom we have injured; and not having any suitable humiliation in our own souls, we impute that to malignity in him, which is the sole fruit of our injustice!

***~~2. We hate those whom we have injured, because we have enabled him to lower us in the estimation of others.~~***

We can easily go to sleep in sin, provided our iniquity is unknown; but a discovery of it fills us with the most pungent grief. Now if we have injured any person, we have put ourselves in the power of that person, so that he can inflict upon us the severest wounds, by exposing our conduct to public reprehension. Some indeed there are who care but little about their character, and who are therefore indifferent whether their conduct is exposed or not; but, where character is dear to a man, and he has done anything which would involve him in much disgrace, there his hatred will proportionably rise against the person that is privy to his shame.

We cannot find a more striking instance of this than in the history of David. He had injured his friend Uriah in the basest manner; and used all possible methods to conceal his shame. Having failed in these, he found that Uriah must of necessity before long discover the injury he had received; and therefore he longed for Uriah's death; yes, he actually laid a snare for his life, and was delighted to hear that he had successfully attained his murderous object.

We are far from saying that every man's resentment would carry him to this length, even where the same grounds for it existed; but we have no doubt, that there are some who, in similar circumstances, would not rejoice to hear that the person whom he had injured was dead; all concern about his life would be swallowed up in the hope of concealing his own shame, and retaining an unblemished character before men.

**3. We hate those whom we have injured, because we conceive him to be our enemy.**

It is natural to suppose that those whom we have injured are our enemies; and that consideration is quite sufficient to excite hatred in the bosom of an unjust man. Hence Solomon observes, "A lying tongue hates those that are afflicted by it, [Proverbs 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 26.28)." Indeed it is from this consideration that men hate the Scriptures, and even God himself; they know that the Scriptures are against them, and that God is displeased with them; and therefore "they hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." Yes, they say, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us;" or, as the fool in his heart, "I wish there were no God! [Isaiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.11); [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1)." In like manner they hate pious ministers also, as Ahab did, "I hate Micaiah, because he does not speak good concerning me, but evil."

While we suppose that men love us, there is no difficulty in loving them; the vilest of sinners will do this. But when we think that our persons or our characters are odious to others, it requires much grace to feel a loving spirit towards them; a grace which no ungodly man can exercise, nor any unjust man possess. Resentment is the only fruit which human nature, so circumstanced, will produce.

***~~Many valuable lessons may be learned from this subject; we may see in particular:~~***

***~~1. The importance of cultivating a pious principle.~~***

Had Amnon felt the power of religion in his soul, he would have withstood the first impulse of his desire, and said, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Or, if he had been overcome with the temptation, he would at least have sought to repair the injury he had done, and not have aggravated it by such cruel treatment. But, *being destitute of all pious principles, he was the sport of every lust, and was driven from one extreme to another, as a leaf before the wind.*

Just so, what can we expect, but to be equally unstable, though we should not commit exactly the same enormities as he? Yes; nothing but a pious principle will keep us firm. If we have the fear of God in our hearts, we shall "stand in awe, and not sin," even though we know that our iniquity will not be discovered by mortal eyes; and if we have the love of Christ in our hearts, that will constrain us to live to him, in a holy conformity to his will, and in a cheerful obedience to his commands.

***~~2. The importance of associating with pious friends.~~***

Had Jonadab been pious, he would have instantly endeavored to divert Amnon from his purpose; but, being himself an ungodly man, he offered himself as a panderer to Amnon's lusts, and suggested to him the plan whereby he might obtain the gratification he desired. Thus was he, in fact, the instrument whereby these horrid impieties were accomplished. Thus it is with ungodly companions at all times; instead of hindering evil, they will encourage it, and facilitate the execution of it to the uttermost.

Knowing then, as we do, *how apt we are to imbibe the spirit of our friends*, should we not be careful with whom we associate? Should we not select our friends from the wise and good, rather than from among the giddy and profane? "He who walks with wise men," says Solomon, "will be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed! [Proverbs 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.20)." Let us remember that Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character! [1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.33);" and let us choose those for our associates in this world, whom we shall wish to dwell with in the world to come.

***~~3. The importance of setting a pious example.~~***

We cannot but trace, in some degree at least, the wickedness of Amnon to the sad example which David had set for him. Amnon would be ready to excuse his own conduct towards Tamar, in comparison with David towards Bathsheba and Uriah. "At all events," he would say, "my father cannot be very severe in censuring me, when he recollects what he himself has done."

In like manner, if we give the world occasion to reproach us, we shall lose all weight and influence in reproving them. Yes, we shall harden them in their iniquities, and encourage them to vindicate themselves from our example.

Let parents, and masters, and all that are in authority, bear this in mind, that one bad act of theirs will do more to endorse sin, than ten good admonitions will do to repress it. Let religious professors in particular remember it; for if they cast a stumbling-block before men, they will be accountable to God for all the evil that ensues!

Methinks, in this, and in many subsequent events, David could not but see the sad fruit of his own iniquities; and that very consideration would add ten-fold poignancy to all his grief!

Just so, many parents may find in the conduct of their children the severest reprehension for their own neglects. Let us guard against all such occasion for self-reproach; and endeavor so to act, that we may be able to say to all around us, "Whatever you have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."

***~~#319~~***

***~~DAVID DRIVEN FROM HIS THRONE BY ABSALOM~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 15:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.25-26)~~***

Then the king said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."

Sin, though forgiven, rarely passes unpunished in this present world; on the contrary, God marks his indignation against it here, in order to embitter it the more to the offender who has committed it, and to endear to him the more, that mercy which has been exercised towards him.

At the very time that he forgave the sin of David, he declared to the pardoned penitent, that the *sword*should never pass from his house, even to the last hour. Accordingly we find, that David was afflicted in no common degree in his own family; and in such a way as strongly to bring his sins to his remembrance.

He had dishonored the wife of his friend Uriah; and his own son Amnon violates his daughter Tamar.

He had contrived and accomplished the death of Uriah; and his son Absalom contrived and accomplished the death of his own brother Amnon.

He had dishonored God in the face of the whole world; and he himself is driven with scorn and infamy from his throne.

Yet, though in this respect a monument of God's displeasure, he was now living near to God, in the exercise of all holy duties and heavenly affections. At no period of his life was grace more in exercise within him, as appears from the spirit which he manifested under his afflictions.

To exhibit this spirit in its true colors, and to make a suitable improvement of it for our own souls, is the scope and object of our present discourse.

**I. Mark his spirit and conduct under his afflictions.**

To two points in particular the text calls our attention:

***~~1. His reverence for God.~~***

David having suddenly fled from Jerusalem in order to escape from the sword of Absalom, Zadok and the Levites brought forth the ark to David, that he might be able in this emergency to consult it. But David ordered Zadok to carry it back; for, though nothing in the world was so desirable to him as the presence of God, he regarded this measure as highly unwise.

It was unauthorized; and therefore wrong. That sacred symbol of the Deity was not to be moved about according to the wishes or conceits of men. In the wilderness it had never moved, but as the pillar and the cloud, in which the Deity resided, led the way. And to dispose of it in this manner, without any direction from God, was such an act of impious presumption as he dared not to commit. He well remembered the rebuke which he himself had met with, when, with the best intentions, he had moved the ark without attending to the forms prescribed by God himself; allowing it to be drawn in a cart by oxen, instead of carrying it on the shoulders of the Levites; for the smiting of Uzzah was a testimony of God's displeasure against him for his inattention, no less than against Uzzah himself for his presumption, [1 Chronicles 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 15.13). He remembered too the judgments inflicted on above fifty thousand men of Bethshemesh for daring to look into the ark, [1 Samuel 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.19); and therefore he trembled at the thought of acting towards it with irreverence or indiscretion.

It was also unnecessary. He knew by experience that God's presence was not confined to the ark; but that he was accessible to his people at all times, and in all places. Often had he, when driven out from Jerusalem by Saul, made known his requests in prayer to God, and obtained from him the most gracious answers; and therefore he doubted not but that God would still continue to him, his gracious communications in the time of need, notwithstanding the absence of that symbol, through which, under other circumstances, he ought to have been approached.

It was moreover unavailing. What could the ark do, unless accompanied by God himself? What had it done for Israel when taken from Shiloh to protect them against the Philistines? Of itself it had no power; and therefore it was taken prisoner by the Philistines, while those who carried it were slain, [1 Samuel 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 4.11). And what if this unauthorized measure should lead to a similar result? How could he ever lift up his head again, after having brought such dishonor upon God?

It was impious. What was this, but to transfer to a creature the attributes of Deity, and to expect from, the ark the help which could proceed from God alone? This would have been to provoke God to jealousy, and to excite his displeasure at the very time that he most needed his favor.

On these grounds David sent back the ark; and humbly committed his cause into the hands of his invisible but almighty Protector.

***~~2. His submission to God.~~***

Exceedingly heavy were the afflictions of David at this time. He was driven from his throne; in hourly danger of being destroyed with all his faithful attendants; and this through the ambition and cruelty of his favorite son. Forsaken by some of his most endeared friends, and loaded with curses by his envenomed enemies—he fled in the most disconsolate state that can be imagined. Hear the pathetic account given of him in the following context, "David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot. And all the people that were with him covered every man his head; and they went up, weeping as they went up, verse 30."

But his afflictions were great, no less in a *spiritual*than in a temporal view. Indeed it is in this view that he chiefly complains of them throughout the Psalms. See [Psalm 42:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-5); [Psalm 42:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.10); [Psalm 43:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 43.3-4); [Psalm 84:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.1-4).

But in the midst of all, he submitted meekly to the painful dispensation, leaving it to God to order for him whatever in his wisdom he should see fit. He knew that, if God should interpose in his behalf, all should end in a good outcome, and he should yet again worship God in his sanctuary; but, if God had ordained otherwise, he was prepared to kiss the rod, and to bless the hand that chastised him with it. "If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am *not*pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."

In all this he was doubtless actuated by a sense of his own extreme unworthiness; he saw that the affliction which was laid upon him, was an accomplishment of the threatening long ago denounced against him by God himself, and "he received it as the punishment of his iniquity." At the same time, assured in his own mind that *all of the trials of believers are the chastening strokes were inflicted by a loving Father, and not by an avenging Judge*—he desired only that God should glorify himself in any way which he saw best, "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)."

Do not confine your views to David, but,

***~~II. Improve the subject for the benefit of your own souls.~~***

***~~1. See here the sufferings of that Savior whom he typified.~~***

David was a most remarkable type of Christ, no less in his sufferings, than in his exaltation to the throne of Israel. In all the Psalms where he speaks of his sufferings, David speaks quite as much in the person of the Messiah as in his own person. See Psalms 22, 69. Even where he seems most exclusively to refer to his own case, he is quoted by Paul as pre-eminently typifying the Lord Jesus, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; my iniquities have taken hold upon me, that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me." Doubtless these words, as far as they relate to Christ, speak of him only as bearing the sins of others, while David suffered only for his own sins; but the whole Psalm is in a very peculiar degree descriptive of the Lord Jesus. Compare [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8) with [Hebrews 10:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-9).

Behold Jesus then as cast out by his whole nation, who said, "We will not have this man to reign over us! verse 23 with [John 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.1)."

Behold Jesus forsaken by his own Disciples whom he loved, and betrayed by one who had eaten bread with him, even by Judas, who was actually typified by Ahithophel, [Psalm 41:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.9) with [John 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.18).

Behold Jesus going over that very brook Kedron, [John 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.1), pursued by armed bands, [John 18:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.3), who sought and labored to destroy him!

Behold more particularly Jesus' deportment under his afflictions. Here was David pre-eminently a type of Him. When the bitter cup was put into his hands, though he prayed for the removal of it, he said, "Not my will, but may your will be done."

When loaded with execrations, as David was by Shimei, he submitted meekly to the insults, as the Apostle says, "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to Him who judges righteously."

As David too was chiefly solicitous for the welfare of the very man who sought his life, (giving express charge to all to spare the life of Absalom,) so did our blessed Lord pray and plead for his murderers, "Father, forgive them! For they know not what they do."

Thus while you admire the spirit and conduct of David, you may well take occasion to admire the infinitely sublimer spirit of the Lord Jesus.

***~~2. Look to Jesus as an example under any sufferings which you yourselves may be called to bear.~~***

This is the improvement which an inspired Apostle teaches us to make of the subject, "Take, my brethren," says James, "the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." We ourselves are all exposed to sufferings, even as David was; for "we are born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward;" nor do we know how soon troubles may come upon us.

The possession of a crown was no exemption to suffering, to David; nor can any situation, in which we may be, prove an exemption to suffering to us. The more secure we are in our own apprehension, the more reason we have to expect that some calamity is near at hand. The saying, "My mountain stands strong; I shall not be moved;" will be a prelude to the hiding of God's face, and the incursion of some heavy trouble, [Psalm 30:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.6-7).

*The very things to which we looked for comfort, may become an occasion of the bitterest anguish!*Absalom was considered as the most handsome youth in all Israel, and no doubt had often been looked upon by David with inexpressible delight; yet this was the man who assassinated his brother and dethroned his father. And thus it is often found, at this day, that *the objects of our fondest delight, may become the sources of our bitterest afflictions!*

Are we oppressed with severe trials? Let us *commit our cause to God with meek submission and with humble trust. Let us see the hand of God in our trials, and view men only as his instruments, raised up by him to fulfill and execute his will,*[Psalm 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.13); [Isaiah 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5); [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.15). Let us view the actions of men and devils only as the *axe*or *saw*in the hand of God; and, under a sense of our own extreme unworthiness, let us "receive evil at the Lord's hands as well as good," and "bless him" equally for whatever God ordains for us in his wise and gracious providence! [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21).

***~~3. Seek a kingdom from which you can never be dispossessed.~~***

David was at that time the mightiest monarch upon earth; yet how soon, and how easily, was he dispossessed of his throne. To what then can we look as stable and permanent? Alas! like Shebna, we may in an instant be cast out from all that we possess, even as a stone is cast out from a sling, [Isaiah 22:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.15-19). But there is "a kingdom which cannot be moved," and "against which the gates of Hell shall not prevail." This is the inheritance which our Lord Jesus Christ will give to all who truly believe in him. Of this David was secure; and therefore he regarded not the loss of an earthly kingdom; but willingly submitted to it, if God had so ordained. You must likewise secure a portion that is out of the reach of any enemies. *Have God for your friend; and you need not care who is your enemy!*For "if God is for you, then none can effectually be against you." You may look with delight on the gathering storm, and defy all the powers of earth and Hell to hurt you. So did David in [Psalm 46:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-3). So did Paul in [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39). And so may the least and weakest of of believers."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)." Once possessed of that, "all tears shall be wiped away from your eyes forever! [Revelation 21:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.3-4)."

***~~#320~~***

***~~DAVID'S SUBMISSION TO HIS AFFLICTIONS~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.30)~~***

"But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up."

*A consciousness of ill-desert has a tendency to reconcile us to the afflictions with which our sins are visited.*In some respect indeed it embitters our trials, which the testimony of a good conscience would alleviate; but in other respects it has a good effect, in that it silences every murmur against the dispensations of a righteous Providence.

The troubles which David had experienced in his family as the punishment of his own sins, had already been great and manifold; but in the rebellion of Absalom they were risen to their height; they were borne however with a spirit of piety suited to his state, and worthy of his high character.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The circumstances in which David was placed.~~***

***~~David's circumstances were most afflictive.~~***

He was now driven from his throne, banished from the ordinances of religion, and in danger of immediate destruction.

Now considering him as a man, such adversity must be painful in the extreme; and still more when we recollect that he was a king, and therefore susceptible of pain in proportion to the degradation which he suffered.

But view him as a king, and then how distressing must it be to see his country involved in civil war, and to be himself on the eve of a bloody engagement with thousands of his own subjects!

View him also as a man of piety, driven from the ordinances of religion, and suffering under the rebukes of an offended God; what can be conceived more distressing than such a state as his?

***~~David's circumstances derived ten-fold poignancy from the source from whence they flowed.~~***

The people that inflicted these wounds were his own subjects. Had he been attacked by foreign enemies, he would have gone forth against them with alacrity; but to be constrained to fight with those over whom he had reigned so many years, in whose defense he had so often exposed his own life, and for whose benefit he had labored all his days—this filled him with the deepest grief! [Psalm 55:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.1-8) with [Zechariah 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.6).

But among the insurgents was his own peculiar friend Ahithophel, from whose counsel and assistance he might have derived the greatest benefit. How keenly he felt this disappointment, we learn from the lamentation he poured out on this memorable occasion, [Psalm 55:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.12-14); and who that has known the sweets of friendship must not sympathize with him?

But the bitterest ingredient in his cup was, that it was mixed for him by his own son; that son, whom he had so recently, and so undeservedly received to favor, and in whose professions of piety he had begun to rejoice, [2 Samuel 15:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.7-9). *As the most exalted joys, so also the acutest sorrows, flow from those who stand to us in the relation of children*; and in proportion as this worthless son was beloved by him, was the anguish occasioned by his rebellious conduct.

The insulting language of *Shimei*was of no account in the mind of David; that he was willing to bear, [2 Samuel 16:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 16.5-11); but to be so treated by his beloved Absalom, was a grief almost insupportable, verse 30. And we doubt not but that every tender parent will readily understand how greatly such a consideration must have overwhelmed his mind.

Let us next proceed to notice,

**II. David's conduct under those circumstances.**

Zadok and Abiathar had brought to him the ark, judging that it must be a comfort and a benefit to him to have access to God under his heavy trials. But David ordered them to carry back the ark, being himself prepared for every event, inasmuch as he enjoyed in his own soul,

***~~1. David showed a confidence in God's care.~~***

David well knew that God's presence was not confined to the ark, nor his agency necessarily connected with it. He knew that wherever his enemies might drive him, God's ear would be open to his prayer, and his arm be extended for his relief. Hence, though *he honored the ark as the symbol of God's presence*, he did not confide in it; but trusted in God, who was represented by it. He knew that, if God should be on his side, the efforts of his enemies would be all in vain; and that, however threatening their aspect at the present, he would in due time be brought back again in safety.

Such is the confidence which God's people should maintain under all the trials which they may be called to endure. "The name of God is a strong tower to which they may run!" and in which they may defy their bitterest enemies. "If God is for them—then none can be against them;" "nor can any weapon that is formed against them prosper." It is the privilege of every saint to know that his affairs are in God's hands; and that as nothing can be done but by divine permission, so nothing shall be done which shall not work for his spiritual and eternal good. The language of his soul therefore should at all times be, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man can do unto me".

**2. David showed a submission to God's will.**

What God might have ordained respecting him, David did not know; nor was he curious to inquire; but, whatever might be the outcome of his present afflictions, he was contented and satisfied. He well knew that he deserved all that God could lay upon him; and he was ready to say, "*I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him!*[Micah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.9)." This is one fruit of sin, if I may so speak; or rather, of that humiliation which accompanies true repentance. *We become reconciled to whatever affliction God may send, seeing that any chastisement in this world must be less than our iniquities have deserved*. O that in the prospect of the heaviest calamities, we might have such a view of our ill desert, as should dispose us humbly to commit ourselves into God's hands, and cordially to welcome every trial which his all-wise providence may appoint for us! Under every affliction, our acquiescence should be like that of Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him."

***~~#321~~***

***~~DAVID'S PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE~~***

**[2 Samuel 16:5-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 16.5-12)**

"As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!" Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head." But the king said, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'" David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."

*It is thought by many, that situations of rank and eminence are conducive to happiness. But the very reverse of this will be found true for the most part, because people in authority are beset with numberless trials and temptations, to which their inferiors are scarcely at all exposed.*

Behold David exalted to a throne; and see to what trials he was reduced, by those who sought his favor, or envied him his power! It is the unhappy lot of kings to be surrounded no less by lying friends, than by bitter enemies. When David fled from Absalom, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, met him with a present of needful provisions for himself and followers, under a feigned plea that Mephibosheth had joined the conspiracy of Absalom, in the hope of regaining his father's kingdom; and thus he obtained from David a hasty and inadvertent grant of all Mephibosheth's possessions; a grant, which David afterwards, when better informed, was constrained to rescind.

Scarcely had David been thus betrayed by Ziba, a *pretended friend*—before he was fiercely assaulted by Shimei, a *bitter enemy*, who now took advantage of his misfortunes to load him with all manner of reproaches. From this evil, however, David escaped with far greater honor to himself. In the former case he was imposed upon, and was led to act with unwise precipitation; but in this latter case, when urged to avenge himself on the delinquent, he forbore; and thus manifested a disposition of mind that is worthy of universal imitation.

To place David's conduct in its true light, I will set before you,

**I. David's heavy trial.**

***~~His condition, independent of Shimei's conduct, was exceedingly afflictive.~~***

He was now driven from his throne, and forced to flee for his life. To this he was forced by his own subjects, led on by his favorite son, Absalom. To be reduced to such an extremity by a foreign foe would have been an exceeding great calamity; but to be brought to it by his own beloved son, at the head of his rebellious subjects—was as afflictive a dispensation as could well be conceived.

But in this *cup of sorrow*there was an ingredient that was incomparably more bitter than even death itself; namely, *a consciousness that it proceeded from God, as a punishment of the sin he had committed in the matter of Uriah*. Nathan had long ago delivered to him this warning from the Lord, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your house, [2 Samuel 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.11)." And this judgment had already been executed in part, by Amnon's ravishing of his sister Tamar; and by Absalom's murder of his brother Amnon; (in both of which there was a solemn correspondence with his own sins in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah,) and now it came home more immediately to his own person, in the conduct of Absalom towards himself. This consciousness very deeply oppressed his mind, and added a ten-fold poignancy to all his other stings.

***~~But the conduct of Shimei greatly aggravated David's misfortunes at this time.~~***

It came upon him at a time when he was wounded and disconsolate under the rebukes of the Almighty! [Psalm 69:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.26). And the bitterness of this man's reproaches could scarcely be exceeded. Shimei, being a Benjamite, was zealous for his own tribe, from whence the sovereign authority had been transferred to the tribe of Judah. (Such jealousies, alas! pervade all ranks and classes of society throughout the world, from rival states to rival districts, communities, towns, families, and parties of every description; and often the feelings subsisting between the adverse parties, are scarcely less acrimonious than those of Shimei himself.) Besides, being of the family of Saul, perhaps Shimei's prospects in life were in a great measure blasted; and therefore, while he regarded David as the occasion of his ruin, he considered the Deity himself as vindicating his cause, in the punishment of the usurper.

But his accusation of David, as having imbrued his hands in the blood of Saul, was without the least foundation; for it was well known that he had not been in the least degree accessory to the death of Saul, or Jonathan, or of Abner, or Ishbosheth, or of any whose blood was now laid to his charge. But such an accusation, at such a time, was most distressing to the feelings of the royal sufferer; and also because it brought the more forcibly to his mind the evils which he had indeed committed, and for which God was indeed inflicting upon him this sore punishment.

We wonder not at the indignation of Abishai, or at the proposal which he made to avenge his master's cause on this insulting adversary. But we do wonder at David's forbearance under this heavy trial, and at,

***~~II. David's meek submission to his trial.~~***

David would not allow Abishai to execute his proposal, and to inflict on Shimie, this daring rebel, the deserved punishment. He chose rather to endure all the insults that were heaped upon him; and to this he was led by two considerations:

***~~1. David saw the hand of God in this trial.~~***

Repeatedly does he say, that "God had bidden this virulent adversary to curse him;" and from that consideration he puts the question to Abishai, "Who then shall say, Why have you done so? verse 10, 11." Of course, he did not imagine that God had enjoined this man to behave thus, or had actually infused into his mind a disposition to commit so great a transgression. When "God hardened the heart of *Pharaoh*, [Exodus 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.21)," he only left him to harden his own heart. When God "sent forth an evil and lying spirit into the prophets of *Ahab*," he only gave permission to the evil spirit to enter into them, [1 Kings 22:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.21-23).

In fact, the creature, even while he acts most freely, executes, even as the murderers of our blessed Lord did, "what God's mind and His counsel had determined before to be done! [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28)." The creature, whatever his own mind and purpose may be, is only "a rod, or staff, or sword in Jehovah's hand," to execute his holy will! [Isaiah 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-7).

And though this does not excuse the creature, who, in fact, thinks of doing his own will only, it must reconcile us to what is done, no less than if it had been done directly and immediately by God himself! Thus Job viewed the losses he sustained through the rapacity of the Chaldeans and Sabeans, who took away all his cattle, and slew his servants, "Shall I receive good at the Lord's hands, and shall I not receive evil? The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away! Blessed be the name of the Lord! [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21); [Job 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.10)."

From this consideration, David was enabled to submit with meekness to the invectives of Shimei, and to say, as Eli, "It is the Lord; may he do what seems good to him! [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)." This is the account he himself gives us, "I was silent, and opened not my mouth, because You are the one who has done this! [Psalm 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.9)."

***~~2. David looked to God to overrule this trial for his good.~~***

*It is God's privilege to bring good out of evil, for the benefit of his believing people.*David was no stranger to the history of Joseph, nor of the testimony which Joseph bore respecting the sufferings which had been inflicted on him by his brethren, "It was not you who sent me here; but God, to save your lives by a great deliverance." "You indeed thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save many people alive, [Genesis 45:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.7-8); [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20)."

David hoped that God would in some way sanctify to him this dispensation. He well knew, that God "chastens his people for their profit, to make them partakers of his holiness; and that affliction, though not joyous at the present, but grievous, will, through God's blessing upon it, work out the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby, [Hebrews 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10-11)." And he hoped that God would make this severe visitation "work for his good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28);" or, at all events, whatever might be the effect of it here, it would issue well at the last, by "working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the eternal world! [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17)."

This hope pacified and composed his mind, and enabled him to "possess his soul in patience;" while Abishai, yielding to the impulse of an irritated mind, would gladly have executed on the offender the judgment he deserved.

***~~Learn, then, brethren, from this subject,~~***

***~~1. What spirit you are to manifest under any injuries you sustain.~~***

In no respect are you to indulge an angry and vindictive spirit; but, rather, to follow the example of our blessed Lord, who, under the most injurious treatment that ever was endured in this world, opened not his mouth, but was silent, even as a "sheep before its shearers." Instead of rendering evil for evil, we are to return nothing but good; and to seek for victory in no other way; as God has said, "Do not be overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good." Doubtless this is a difficult path; but it will surely bring upon us the divine blessing, both in this world and in the world to come.

***~~2. How you are to obtain this submissive spirit to God's afflictive providences.~~***

You have seen what considerations influenced the mind of David; and the same will produce a similar effect on your minds.

1. The first thing to be sought by you is a deep sense of your own sinfulness. Let that abide upon your minds, and nothing that man can inflict will greatly wound you. However heavy your trial may be, you will say, "Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins? [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39)." Anything short of the miseries of Hell, especially if it tends to avert those miseries, will be accounted rather a mercy to be thankful for, than a judgment to be deplored! [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12); [1 Peter 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-13).

2. The next thing is, to realize in your souls the universal agency of Divine Providence; so as to see, that "no trouble whatever springs out of the dust! [Job 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.6)," but that everything, even to the falling of a sparrow, or of a hair from your head—is ordered by the Lord, [Matthew 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.29-30). Your nature may indeed recoil from suffering; and you may deprecate it, even as our Lord himself did, when he desired that *the cup*which had been put into his hands might pass away from him. But this you will do with submission, saying, "Not my will, but may your will be done!" And when you see what the Lord's will is, you will chide your reluctant spirit, saying, "The cup which my Father has given me—shall I not drink it? [John 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.11)."

Finally, look to the outcome of your trials, and then you will be moved by nothing that either men or devils can do, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24). "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11).

If God's furnace is to purge away your dross, you will not greatly regret that God allows you to be put into it. You will expect his presence with you in your troubles for your comfort and support, [Malachi 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.3); [Daniel 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.25); and a rich compensation for them in the world to come! [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12); [Revelation 7:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-15).

Get but these thoughts wrought into your hearts, and you will bear the heaviest calamities with resignation, and "commit your souls to God in well doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator! [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19)."

***~~#322~~***

***~~DAVID'S LAMENTATION OVER ABSALOM~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 18:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 18.33)~~***

"The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you--O Absalom, my son, my son!"

***~~This life is at best a chequered scene. The happiness of man is rarely of long continuance; nor is it ever altogether without mixture. The sweetest cup we taste has always in it, either in a greater or less degree, an infusion of gall. It is in Heaven alone that our blessedness is complete.~~***

David had attained a full possession of the throne of Israel; but troubles arose to him from various quarters, and especially from his own family; even his own son rose up in rebellion against him, to dethrone him. The rebellion was scarcely matured before it was quashed; but alas! his son, his favorite son, was slain; and how bitterly he laid to heart this calamity, may be seen from the words which we have now read.

We propose to notice,

***~~I. The grief of David for the loss of Absalom.~~***

***~~David's grief was in some respects right and commendable.~~***

He did well in mourning for the death of a son. God has put into the heart of parents a love for their offspring; and indeed such a love was necessary to counterbalance the cares and troubles which a family entails. That love, of necessity contains in it the seeds of sorrow—when evil befalls the offspring, or death snatches them away. Even the irrational creation are deeply penetrated with this feeling, and manifest it in a very high degree, whenever the loss of their offspring calls it into exercise. We wonder not, therefore, that a man of David's piety should greatly bewail the death of his favorite son. We do not disapprove of him when for seven successive days he wept, and fasted, and prayed for the life of his dying infant; much less can we blame his grief for a son of mature age and eminent accomplishments.

But still more was his grief justified, when we consider the circumstances under which his son was taken away. Absalom, alas! was very unfit to die—he was a man of an abandoned character. He was an *assassin*, and had murdered his own brother Amnon. He was a *rebel*against the king whom God himself had called to the throne, even against his own father. He was, in heart at least and design, a murderer of his own father; for when the proposal was made by Ahithophel so to contrive the attack as to destroy his father only, it was highly gratifying to this unnatural son.

Moreover, for the express purpose of making himself "abhorred by his father," and or precluding all possibility of reconciliation with him, "he went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel."

Such was the state of Absalom, when death arrested him. What a tremendous load of guilt was here, under the whole of which he expired, without any space given to him for repentance! Well then might David weep for him, even tears of blood. David well knew the misery of those who died in their sins, and had often wept for the inconsiderateness of those who overlooked their danger; well therefore might he weep as he did for the miserable end of Absalom.

***~~In other respects, David's grief certainly was wrong.~~***

The dispensation was indeed most afflictive; but still it called for different feelings in the mind of David. In it there was a mixture of mercy and of judgment; and, if he had viewed it aright, his sorrows would have been tempered with resignation and gratitude. The death of Absalom was in part a punishment of David's sin in the matter of Uriah; and therefore when the judgment was inflicted, he should, like Aaron, have "held his peace, [Leviticus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.3)," or have said, like Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him, [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18)."

The death of Absalom was also a mercy both to David and to all Israel, inasmuch as it put a speedy end to the calamities of civil war, and was the means of re-establishing David on the throne of Israel. Should not this then have called for thanksgiving on the part of David?

Yet behold, there was but too much justice in the remark of Joab, that David was insensible of all these mercies; and that he would have been better pleased with the loss of all his faithful adherents that had exposed their lives for him, than of this graceless wretch who had sought his destruction! [2 Samuel 19:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 19.3-6). Surely such grief could not be justified; after all the allowance that must be made for the affection of a parent, and the compassion of a saint, we are constrained to acknowledge, that the feelings of David on this occasion were inappropriate and selfish. He seems almost to have quarreled with God, when he should rather have said, like Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord! [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21)."

Much instruction however may be gathered from this expression of David's grief. Let us proceed to consider,

***~~II. The lessons it is calculated to teach us.~~***

Much instruction does it impart:

***~~1. To men in general.~~***

It loudly teaches us to *moderate our affections towards the creature. Whatever God bestows upon us, we are apt to fix our affections too strongly on it, and to forget that it is a loan rather than a gift. We forget that it still remains the Lord's, and that he has a right to call for it whenever he will*.

Hence if it he unexpectedly withdraws a loved one from us, we are ready to grieve and murmur, as if every source of happiness were cut off from us; because a *cistern*is broken, we lament, as if the *fountain*itself also were dried up! This is especially the case in reference to near and dear relations; but *such inordinate regard to the creature is idolatry*; and it will sooner or later bring its own punishment along with it.

It teaches us also to proportion our sorrows to the occasion. Sorrow is allowable, especially for the loss of our friends or relatives. So far was our Lord from condemning the grief of Martha and Mary for the death of their brother, that he himself joined in it, "Jesus wept."

Grief too on such occasions may sometimes be very deep. If, for instance, a minister is removed in the midst of all his usefulness, as Stephen was, there is good reason why "great lamentation should be made for him," because the loss of such a one to the Church of God is incalculable! [Acts 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.2).

If a man is not taken away in the midst of life—yet, if he has been eminently good and greatly distinguished, he may also be deeply lamented, [Genesis 50:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.7-11). Nor is this due to public characters only; private individuals also, who have rendered themselves useful in their day and generation, may well be thus deplored. *Dorcas*had laid herself out for the comfort and support of the poor; she had assisted them in the way that best suited her ability and their needs; and therefore when she was withdrawn by death, the loss of her was much bewailed, and a lively interest was excited to get her, if possible, restored to life, [Acts 9:36-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.36-39).

Thus a concern for the general good may fitly increase the tide of our sorrows on the removal of anyone by death; but there are occasions, as when any saint is released from a state of deep affliction and distress, when we may rather rejoice over them, as resting from their labors, and happy in the fruition of their God! [Revelation 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.13). But in any case *we must guard against that inordinate sorrow which renders us unmindful of God's mercies, or insensible of our own desert.*

***~~2. To parents and children in particular.~~***

Parents, surely you may learn from the history before us to cut off all occasion for self-reproach in the event of your children's death. No doubt David was too indulgent towards Absalom, and had forborne to chasten him as he deserved. And *what a bitter reflection it will be to you to think, that you had not exerted yourselves to the utmost of your power for the repressing of sin in your children, and the cultivating of heavenly principles in their minds!*You well know how God marked his indignation against Eli for this very thing, 1 Samuel 2:27-34; [1 Samuel 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.13-14). His fault was, not that he encouraged his sons to sin, but that he did not exert himself with sufficient energy to reclaim them.*O think what you will say if you neglect to warn, to reprove, and to instruct your children! How will you answer it at the tribunal of God?* Are ministers responsible for the souls committed to their charge? So are you responsible for the children whom God has entrusted unto you. He has said to you, as Pharaoh's daughter, "Take these and bring them up for me;" and, if they perish through your neglect, "their blood will be required at your hands!"

Endeavor then to impress them with a sense of their duty to God. You often try to convince them how much you have loved them; but you are apt to forget to show them the love of Christ for sinners. David's love to Absalom was nothing in comparison with Christ's to them; Christ did not merely under a momentary conflict of mind wish that he had died for them; but he actually did die for them, yes, and endured the curse due to their sins, and left the bosom of his Father on purpose that he might do so; and foreseeing from eternity all that he must suffer, he formed the purpose, and never receded from it, until he had accomplished all that was necessary for their salvation; and all this he did, when they were in open rebellion against him. You may convince them of your love, and yet produce no permanent effect upon them; they may continue hostile both to God and you. But convince them of the love of Christ to them, and that will constrain them to live in all dutiful obedience both to God and man.

Children! Learn from this history to regard the instructions of your parents. See, in Absalom, the effect and recompense of willful disobedience! And be careful not to grieve the souls of your parents, by constraining them to "sorrow for you as without hope." If you die before them, what distress will your state occasion! Or, if you survive them, how will they be pained in a dying hour to have no prospect of meeting you in Heaven! Remember, that however much they love you now, they will be swift witnesses against you in the day of judgment; and all the efforts which they made for your salvation, will only aggravate your eternal condemnation. Be wise then in time, and labor that whether you survive your parents or die before them, you may be their joy and crown of rejoicing to all eternity!

***~~#323~~***

***~~THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE A GROUND FOR INDIFFERENCE TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 19:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 19.34)~~***

Barzillai said to the king, "How long have I to live?"

*Great virtues rarely, if ever, exist alone.* The soul that gives them birth is actuated by a principle, which is generally, though perhaps not universally, operative.

We behold in the history before us an instance of great generosity towards David and his attendants, in their flight from Absalom. And we have a no less amiable instance of modesty in the same character, when David, after the defeat of Absalom, and the consequent restoration of peace, desired to reward the services of his benefactor. "Barzillai had provided David with sustenance while he stayed at Mahanaim;" and David now entreated him to come and spend the remainder of his days with him at Jerusalem, that he might repay all his kindness to the utmost of his power. But Barzillai declined the offer, and said, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?"

The question, "How long have I to live?" is proper for us all to put to ourselves at this time, and it will be profitable for us to consider it,

**I. In reference to the things of time.**

This is certainly its primary import in the passage before us. Barzillai "was a very aged man," and intimated to David, that, on account of his great age, he had no longer any relish for the gratifications of sense, nor could he hope to continue much longer in the world; and that therefore it would not befit him to be an attendant at court, when he ought rather to be thinking only of death, verse 35-37. In this view the question was most just and empathetic; and in this view it deserves universal attention.

***~~Our time on earth must of necessity be short.~~***

If we are advanced in life, this truth is obvious; but if we are in the bloom of youth, it is no less certain; for, what is the space of man's life? It is only seventy or eighty years at most; and though that appears long in the prospect, it appears as nothing in the retrospect; every aged man will tell you that his life has passed away as a dream.

Besides the shortnessof life, we must take into the account the uncertaintyof life also; for who can tell what a day, or even an hour, may bring forth? Truly, every man may justly say, "There is but a step between me and death!"

***~~From the consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of life, we may well rise superior to all the vanities of time and sense.~~***

Let us suppose a man condemned to death, and about to be executed in a few hours. What would be his feelings in reference to everything here below? Would he take much delight in anything he possessed, or be much affected with any news of either loss or gain? No, the things of time and sense would appear to him in their true colors, and be regarded by him as of little importance. The near prospect of that hour when he must bid an eternal farewell to all of them, would show him their emptiness and vanity.

Now this is the feeling which every man should nourish. We do not say that any man should neglect his worldly business, or be forgetful of any relative duty; but that he should have his affections withdrawn from everything here below, and set on things above. He should be divested of anxious care about the acquisition of earthly things; and, in his enjoyment of them, "his *moderation*should be known unto all men." This is the direction given by Paul; and it is founded on the very consideration that is suggested to us in the text, 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

Just as this sentiment is in reference to the things of time, it is still more so,

***~~II. In reference to the things of eternity.~~***

In the view of eternity, a thousand years may be represented but as "the twinkling of an eye."

***~~1. How long then have any of us to live, that we should neglect our eternal concerns?~~***

Have any of us made a covenant with death? Or has God said to any of us, as to Hezekiah, "I will add unto your life fifteen years?" Is it not, on the contrary, almost a certainty that God has said concerning many who are here present, "This year you shall die!" How then can we think of continuing any longer to neglect our souls? If repentance is necessary for every man; if there be no possibility of acceptance for us but by fleeing for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ; and, if those who die in an impenitent and unbelieving state must perish forever—then is it folly to defer the concerns of our souls to a more convenient season, which very probably may never arrive. The concerns of *time*are so utterly insignificant when compared with those of *eternity*, that to give them a preference in our minds is not folly only, but sheer madness!

**2.** **How long then have any of us to live, that we should be lukewarm in our attention to eternal realities?**

Most men will allow that some attention to the soul is proper; but with the generality, even of those who would be thought religious, the welfare of the soul is only a subordinate and secondary concern. Such lukewarmness however is no less displeasing to God, and injurious to the soul, than total indifference, [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16). We are apt to think that a little exertion will suffice for the securing of our eternal interests; but is there so little to be done, that it may be finished in a day? Or are we sure that so many days will be added to our life as shall make up the deficiency of our zeal and diligence? Do we find that people in a race have time to loiter? How much less then have we, whose life may terminate so soon?

What could we gain in life that shall compensate for the loss of our souls? Is there any earthly gratification, even if it could be enjoyed a thousand years—to be compared with the felicity of Heaven? "Whatever then our hand finds to do, let us do it with all our might."

***~~Address,~~***

**1. The young.**

You are looking for years to come; but may soon "be cut down as a flower." Youth is the time most fitted for holy exercises and heavenly employments. Begin then without delay, and "remember your Creator in the days of your youth!"

***~~2. Those in middle age.~~***

You are thinking that you have nearly attained the object of your wishes; but you have found your past attainments vain; and such will be the character of all that you may yet acquire. Temporal duties, we repeat it, are to be performed with diligence; but *nothing in this life is of any value, in comparison with the eternal realities.*

***~~3. Those who are far advanced in life.~~***

Say whether Barzillai's conduct does not well befit you? You feel infirmities; you know that in the course of nature you have but a short time to live. et earthly things then be regarded by you with indifference, and heavenly things increasingly occupy your minds. Familiarize yourselves with the thoughts of death and judgment; and "press forward" with ever-increasing alacrity to secure "the prize of your high calling."

At every period of life, but especially in old age, should we pray with David, "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life! [Psalm 39:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.4)." "So teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom, [Psalm 90:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.12)."

***~~#324~~***

***~~FAMINE, A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 21.1)~~***

"During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

[Preached during the "War of 1812".]

The reign of David was full of troubles occasioned by his own sin; but here we view him and his people afflicted for the sins of others. Saul, his predecessor in the government, had grievously oppressed the Gibeonites, whom Joshua, at his first entrance into Canaan, had pledged the nation, by covenant and by oath, to protect. This breach of covenant God overlooked, as it were, at the time, but now punished by three successive years of famine.

The history teaches us,

***~~I. In what light we should view public calamities.~~***

*The Scripture uniformly represents public calamities as punishments inflicted on account of sin.*Personal troubles may be sent for the purpose of calling into action the grace that has been bestowed, and for the advancing of God's glory in the exercise of that grace. This was the case with respect to Job.

But the troubles of a nation are judgments sent from God. In this light, "war, famine, pestilence, and the wild beasts," are frequently mentioned; and in this light they should be viewed.

We are indeed very averse to regard public calamities as coming from God; we are ready to ascribe them to second causes, and to overlook the first Great Cause of all; but in the Scriptures we behold them, as in the plagues of Egypt, so manifestly proceeding from a divine hand, that we cannot help referring them to God; and thus we ought to do, whatever be the more immediate occasion of them, [Isaiah 26:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.11).

David in the first and second years of famine did not behold any expression of the divine displeasure, or think of inquiring why the afflictive visitation was sent; *it was only when the pressure of the affliction was very heavy and of long continuance, that he thought of tracing the hand of God in it*; had he acted in the first year as he did in the third, we have no reason to think that the judgment would have been repeated; but his blindness constrained God to repeat the stroke, until it was noticed as proceeding from Him. In like manner *God will continue his chastisements to us, until we are made sensible that we have offended him, and provoked his just displeasure*.

Whatever are the calamities with which we are afflicted, we may learn from this history,

***~~II. The way in which we may get them removed.~~***

***~~1. We should inquire into the sinful causes of them.~~***

David inquired of the Lord; and was informed that the troubles now sent were visitations for sin committed by Saul long ago. The particular offence of Saul is not elsewhere noticed in the history; nor does it appear to have been much regarded by any of the people. His cruelty to the Gibeonites indeed had been notorious; but, as the Gibeonites were the lowest of the people, and not descended from Abraham, the oppression they endured excited no sympathy or compassion. God however resented it; and *he will resent the injuries that are done, however lowly the objects may be who suffer them, or however great the tyrants may be who inflict them*.

And, if we would inquire of the Lord, might not we find some cause for the long protracted war in which we have been engaged, and for the repeated failure in our crops of corn? Yes, many public causes may be assigned, such as the general contempt poured upon God's Word, and Sabbaths, and Name, and people, and, above all, upon his blessed Gospel; and every individual (for it is of individuals that the community is formed) may find in himself abundant reason for those judgments with which God has visited the land.

It is highly necessary also that those whose distresses are of a private and personal nature, should take occasion from them to inquire of God, as Job did, "Show me, O Lord, why you contend with me? [Job 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.2)."

***~~2. We should put away whatever is displeasing to God.~~***

The injuries which had been done to the Gibeonites could not be repaired; nor could Saul who had committed them be punished, because he was now dead. David therefore asked the Gibeonites what redress they required? They sought nothing for themselves, either in a way of financial compensation, or of freedom from the yoke which they had so long borne; but they required that seven of Saul's sons should be delivered into their hands, to be put to death. This was not a vindictive act, but an act of retributive justice; and it was approved by God, who after the execution of these people was pacified towards the land, verse 14.

Such a kind of retribution would not be justifiable among us; because the children are not to suffer for the parents' crimes; but, as ordered of God, it was right; and, if the whole truth were known, we would probably find that the sons of Saul had aided and abetted the wicked devices of their father; and that they therefore justly suffered as partners in his crime.

But though we cannot act precisely as David or the Gibeonites did, we may, both nationally and individually, put away the evils which have displeased our God; and indeed we all without exception are bound to "crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts." It is in this way only that we can hope to avert the divine judgments from us; for, though nothing but the blood of Christ can wash away sin, it never will or can avail for the pardon of any, who do not turn unto God in newness of life.

***~~From hence then we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The danger of sin.~~***

Sin, however forgotten by us, is remembered by God; yes, the whole of our sins, even from the earliest period of our existence, are as much in the immediate sight of God, as if they had been committed this very day; and there is a time when we must answer for them all. Let sin then be repented of, and put away; for it will surely bring the wrath of God on all who retain it unlamented, and unsubdued.

***~~2. The benefit of Christ's atonement.~~***

The blood of Saul's sons was poured forth as a sacrifice to national justice, and as a means of averting the divine displeasure; and it was considered by God as an atonement for the sin which Saul had committed.

How much more then will God accept in our behalf the blood of his own Son, who was sent into the world for the express purpose that he might expiate our guilt, and procure for us reconciliation with our offended God! Think of this, all you who are accused by Satan and your own consciences, and who are trembling for fear of the divine judgments; and know that his blood once shed on Calvary is now available for you, as much as it was the very instant it was shed. *It is a fountain, which, if you bathe in it, will effectually cleanse you from all sin.*

***~~3. The importance of searching our own hearts.~~***

The crime of Saul was probably thought a meritorious act both by himself and those whom he employed as his agents in the persecution; for we are told, he sought to extirpate the Gibeonites "from a zeal for the children of Israel and Judah." But God did not judge as Saul judged, nor will he form his estimate of our conduct from our opinion of it. *Self-love is apt to blind us, and to make us think well of many things which God abhors.*But he will judge our actions according to their quality in his sight. Let us then "search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord;" and, forasmuch as we are blinded through the influence of our own corruptions, let us beg of him to "search and try our hearts, and to lead us in the way everlasting"

***~~#325~~***

***~~THE EQUITY OF CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT~~***

**[2 Samuel 23:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.1-4)**

These are the last words of David: "The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs: "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: 'When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.'

These words are generally understood as descriptive of the duty of civil governors, and of the happiness of any people who live under a government that is thus administered.

But they have doubtless a further reference, even to Christ himself, whose character they designate in the most appropriate terms. The very energetic manner in which the prophecy before us is introduced, and the strong profession which the writer makes of his immediate inspiration from God, leave no doubt upon the mind, but that something more must be intended in this passage than a mere direction to earthly magistrates.

A very small alteration in the Translation will exhibit it in its true light. The passage might more properly be translated thus; David the son of Jesse says, and the man, etc. says, The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, and his Word is in my tongue; the God of Israel says, the Rock of Israel speaks to me, the Just One rules over men; he rules in the fear of God; as the light of the morning a sun shall rise, even a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, etc.

Christ is frequently spoken of in Scripture as the Just One, [Acts 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.14); [Acts 7:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.52); [Acts 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.14), in contradistinction to all others; and as the Sun that enlightens the whole spiritual world, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12). The Prophet Malachi, probably having an eye to the very passage before us, combines the two ideas, and foretells the advent of Christ, as "the Sun of Righteousness, [Malachi 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.2)." In this view of the words, we shall be led to consider,

***~~I. The nature of Christ's government.~~***

In the sacred oracles, a peculiar stress is laid on the equity of that dominion which Christ exercises over his chosen people, [Isaiah 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.7); [Isaiah 11:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-5), "in the fear of the Lord." And who that has submitted to his government, must not confirm the truth that is so much insisted on?

Behold his laws; is there one which does not tend to the happiness of his creatures? They are all comprehended in one word, Love—love to God, and love to man; and can anything be conceived more excellent in itself, or more beneficial to man, than such a law? Well does the Apostle say of it, that it is "holy and just and good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12)."

Behold his administration; is there anyone point in which a righteous governor can excel, that is not found, in its most perfect measure, in Jesus? He relieves the needy, supports the weak, protects the oppressed, and executes judgment without any respect of persons; and though none merit anything at his hands, he dispenses rewards and punishments in as exact proportion to the conduct of men, as if he weighed their merits in a balance. Who ever sought him diligently, without gaining admission to his presence? Who ever implored a blessing at his hands and was rejected? Who ever did much or suffered much for him, without ample testimonies of his approbation? On the other hand, who ever drew back from him, or violated his holy laws, without "receiving in himself that recompense which was fit?" Whatever inequalities may appear in his government (as when virtue is oppressed, and vice is triumphant) he removes them all, by vouchsafing to the sufferer the consolations of his Spirit, and the prospects of his glory. Thus truly may he be said to "rule in the fear of God!"

If prosperity and happiness result from a righteous administration of civil governments, then much more are they the portion of Christ's subjects. This is beautifully illustrated in the words before us; wherein his government is further delineated in,

***~~II. The blessed effects of it on all his faithful subjects.~~***

The sun rising in the unclouded hemisphere, cheers and exhilarates all who behold it; and, when it shines on the earth that has been refreshed with gentle showers, it causes the grass, and every herb, to spring forth almost visibly before our eyes. And is it not thus with all who submit themselves to Christ? Do not new prospects open to them, and, with their more enlarged views, are they not revived with proportionable consolations? Are they not gladdened with the light of his countenance? Are they not sometimes almost overwhelmed with the brightness of his glory, so as to be transported with joy unspeakable? Yes, to them there is an unclouded sky, except as far as sin prevails; if they were as perfectly obedient to the will of Christ as the saints in Heaven are, they would possess a very Heaven upon earth. *If they have any intermission of their joy*,*it is not owing to any strictness in his laws, or any defect in his administration, but to their own indwelling lusts and corruptions.*

What an astonishing effect too, does the light of his countenance produce with respect to fruitfulness in good works! Let the soul, watered with showers of divine grace, and softened with the tears of penitence and contrition, once feel the congenial influence of his rays, and there will be an instantaneous change in its whole state, "it will revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; and the scent thereof will be as the wine of Lebanon, [Hosea 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.7)." Every holy affection will be called forth into exercise; and every fruit of righteousness abound to the glory of God.

Such are the effects which the Psalmist elsewhere ascribes to Christ's government, [Psalm 72:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.2-7); and such, in all ages, have invariably resulted from it, [Acts 2:41-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41-47).

***~~INFERENCES.~~***

***~~1. How earnestly should we desire the universal establishment of Christ's kingdom!~~***

Little do men consider the import of that petition, "May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven." In uttering this prayer, we desire that our whole souls, and the souls of all mankind, may be subjected to Christ. And truly this event would restore the golden age of paradise. Ungodly men indeed would persuade us, that an unlimited submission to Christ would be an occasion of melancholy, and a source of misery. But if once they were to experience the effects of his government upon their own souls—they would learn that obedience to him is the truest happiness of man. Let us then take upon us his light and easy yoke, as the only, and the certain means of finding rest unto our souls.

***~~2. What madness is it to continue in rebellion against Christ!~~***

It is not at our option whether Christ shall be our ruler or not; for "God has set him upon his holy hill of Zion," and in due season, will "put all his enemies under his feet." *If we will not bow before the scepter of his grace, he will "break us in pieces with a rod of iron!"*Shall we then provoke him to wrath, when we have so much to dread from his displeasure? No! rather let the truth which is here with such awful solemnity announced, be with all holy reverence received; yes, let us "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish from the way! [Psalm 2:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-12)." Thus shall we now enjoy the felicity of his chosen people; and, in the day when all his enemies shall be slain before him, we shall be made partners of his throne for evermore!

***~~#326~~***

***~~THE COVENANT OF GRACE~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)~~***

"Although my house be not so with God; yet he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire."

In all the trials and troubles of life, true religion alone can afford us any effectual support. To this the saints in all ages have fled for refuge, and in this they have found all the consolation they could desire.

The latter days of David were a continual scene of domestic sorrows:  
the defilement of Tamar by her brother Amnon,  
the murder of Amnon by his brother Absalom,  
the rebellion and untimely death of Absalom, and  
the conspiracy and consequent destruction of Adonijah  
—all embittered his life. God had foretold that such afflictions would await him, as a punishment for the horrible sins he had committed in the matter of Uriah.

David however was not without his *consolations*. Though he could not have the happiness of seeing his house walking in the ways of God—yet he had good reason to believe that God had accepted him; and in the view of the covenant which God had made with him, he could not but rejoice.

We do not apprehend that this covenant related exclusively to the succession of David's posterity upon the throne of Israel, or even to the advent of the Messiah from his loins. It can be no other than that covenant which God made with his own Son, and with us in him; for no other covenant corresponds with the description here given of it, nor could David speak of any other as all his salvation and all his desire. *That covenant relates to the salvation of a ruined world by the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus.*

The representation which David here gives us of it will lead us to show,

***~~I. The excellence of this covenant.~~***

This is set forth in a striking view in the words before us. We notice,

***~~1. The duration of the Covenant of Grace.~~***

Long before man had fallen, God, who foresaw his fall, devised a plan for his recovery; and in this plan his co-equal, co-eternal Son concurred, "The council of peace was between them both," says the Prophet, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13). To this Paul alludes, when he says, that he was "in hope of eternal life, which God had promised before the world began, [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2)." To whom could that promise be made, but unto the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Representative of his Church and people?

Some divines have called this the Covenant of Redemption, as distinguished from the Covenant of Grace; the one being made with Christ only, and the other with man. But this appears not founded in Scripture. There is only one covenant; and that was made with Christ personally, and with him as the federal Head and Representative of his elect people; as made with him personally, it promised him a seed, if he would lay down his life for them, [Isaiah 53:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-11). And as made with him federally, it promised salvation to all who would *believe*in him, and become members of his mystical body, [Galatians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16-17).

Now this covenant is "everlasting;" it has existed from the beginning, and shall exist to all eternity. No human being ever has been saved but by virtue of it; nor shall any man ever be admitted into Heaven, but agreeably to its provisions. We do not say that no person ever has been, or shall be, saved without a distinct acquaintance with it; for many who never heard it taught, have been saved. Yet not a single soul has ever been accepted by God the Father, but as redeemed by the blood of his only-begotten Son. And perhaps we may say, that this circumstance gives to the glorified saints an advantage over angels themselves; for angels, though confirmed, we trust, in their happiness by the power of God—do not hold that happiness by so sure a tenure as the saints hold theirs; they cannot boast of holding it by the promise and oath of Jehovah; they cannot show a covenant securing to them, the everlasting possession of their inheritance, and that covenant confirmed and ratified with the blood of God's only dear Son. But we can refer to such a covenant, as the sure ground of all our expectations, and as the pledge that nothing shall ever separate us from the enjoyment of our God! [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20).

**2.** **The fullness of the Covenant of Grace.**

It may truly be said to be "ordered in all things." There is not anything that can conduce to our happiness either in this world or the next, that is not comprehended in it. Everything is prepared for us both in a way of providence and of grace. *All our comforts, and all our trials, are therein adjusted for our good.*All earthly things are secured to us, as far as they are necessary [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33); and even afflictions themselves are promised, as the appointed means of fitting us for the realms of bliss, [Jeremiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.11). Whatever grace we stand in need of, it shall be given at such times, and in such a measure, as shall most display the glory of God.

It is true that God requires of us many things—as repentance, faith, and holiness. But it is equally true that he promises all these things to us; he has "exalted his own Son to give us repentance, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31);" he also grants us faith to believe in Christ, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29); and *he promises that he will, by the influence of his Spirit, cause us to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments and do them*,[Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27). We cannot place ourselves in any situation wherein God has not given us promises, "exceeding great and precious promises," suited to our necessities, and commensurate with our needs; nor is so small a thing as the falling of a hair of our head left to chance;*it is all ordered by unerring wisdom!*And though there may be some events which, separately and distinctly considered, may be regarded as evil—yet, collectively taken in all their bearings, they shall "all work together for our eternal good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)."

**3.** **The certainty of the Covenant of Grace.**

It is "sure" to every one who trusts in it. In this it differs widely from the *covenant of works*which was made with man in innocence; for that depending on the fidelity of the creature, was violated, and annulled. Whereas the Covenant of Grace, depending altogether on the fidelity of God, who undertakes to work in us all that he requires of us, and who engages not only not to depart from us, but not to allow us to depart from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40), shall never fail in anyone particular, "The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but the covenant of my peace shall not be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on us, [Isaiah 54:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.9-10)."

It is true that, as *under the Jewish dispensation*many were not steadfast in that covenant, which was a mixed and national covenant—so many who *merely profess*religion do really "make shipwreck of the faith, [1 Timothy 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.19)." But they have never truly embraced the covenant of which we are speaking; they have embraced it only in a partial way, looking for its *blessings*without duly considering its *obligations*. *They have been more intent on salvation from the punishment of Hell, than salvation from sin.*"Had they been really of us," says the Apostle, "they would no doubt have continued with us, [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.19)." "The foundation of God stands sure; the Lord knows those who are his. But let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity, [2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19)." Compare [1 Corinthians 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.5); 1 Corinthians 16:12 and [2 Timothy 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.11).

This being our indispensable duty, God promises and engages "that sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14);" and we know that "He is faithful who has called us, who also will do it, [1 Thessalonians 5:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23-24). Mark the connection of these two verses;" and this very circumstance of its being an article in God's covenant, a blessing to be gratuitously conferred by him, and freely received by us, this, I say, it is, which makes "the promise sure to all the seed, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16)."

When once we view this covenant aright we shall see immediately,

***~~II. The regard which the Covenant of Grace deserves.~~***

We should not regard it merely as an object of curious research, or even of grateful admiration; but in this way:

**1. The Covenant of Grace is the ground of all our hopes.**

Every other method of acceptance with God should be renounced; and this Covenant of Grace should be deliberately and cordially embraced, [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). We should contemplate every offer of mercy, every communication of grace, every means of salvation—as originating in the eternal counsels of God. Everything should be traced up to the love of God the Father, and to the plans arranged by the sacred Three, for the magnifying of the divine perfections in the salvation of man! Even the atonement itself must be considered as deriving all its efficacy from this covenant; for, if God the Father had not consented to accept his Son as a surety for us, and to regard his death as an atonement for our sin, however honorable to Christ his mediation for us might be—it would not have been available for our salvation.

We should get such a distinct view of this covenant as David had; of its duration, (from everlasting to everlasting;) its fullness, its certainty; and then should say of it as he did, "This is all my salvation!" Except in this Covenant of Grace, I have no more hope than the fallen angels; but through the provision which this Covenant of Grace has made for me, I scarcely envy the angels who never fell; for "I know in whom I have believed, that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him, [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8);" and "I am confident that he who has begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ! [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

***~~2. The Covenant of Grace is the source of all our joys.~~***

Whatever comforts we may possess in this world, we should derive our chief happiness from the Covenant of Grace; this should be "all our desire," or, as the word imports, all our delight. To this also we should have recourse in every season of affliction.

David betook himself to it under all his domestic troubles, and in the near prospect of eternity. "His house, alas! was not so with God," as he could wish. And how many are there who have great trials in their families! some from their unkindness, and others from their removal by death. Let every one that is so circumstanced, learn from David where to flee for comfort; let him contemplate the riches of divine grace as exhibited in the Covenant of Grace, and the blessedness of having a saving interest in it, and he will soon forget his sorrows, and have a heart overflowing with the most exalted joy!

If, in addition to other troubles, we are lying upon the bed of death, we may well, like David, seek comfort in this covenant, and make "the last words of David, verse 1." our last words also. What can so effectually remove the sting of death, as to behold a covenant-God in Christ Jesus, engaged to "keep him unto the end," and to receive him to an everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory?

Study then the wonders of the Covenant of Grace, that they may be familiar to your minds in a time of health; and so shall they fill you with unutterable peace and joy, when every other refuge shall fail, and your soul be summoned into the presence of its God!

***~~#327~~***

***~~DAVID'S DESIRE FOR THE WATER OF THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM~~***

**[2 Samuel 23:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.15-17)**

"David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. "Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" And David would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the three mighty men."

***~~The best of men are liable to err; but in this they differ widely from the ungodly, that they are glad, as soon as they find out their error, to have it rectified.~~***

David inconsiderately expressed a wish for some water out of the well of Bethlehem; but when he saw what his inconsiderateness had occasioned, and especially what might have arisen from it, he was grieved at himself for what he had done, and rejected with abhorrence the gratification which he had before desired.

This anecdote respecting him may appear unworthy of a distinct consideration; but it is in reality very instructive. Let us consider,

***~~I. David's wish.~~***

To view it aright, we must notice:

***~~1. David's wish, as foolishly indulged.~~***

That water was not necessary to him; for his army was not at all reduced to straits for lack of water; and by the circumstance of its being in the possession of his enemies, it was unattainable, unless his enemies should be first subdued. To wish for it therefore merely to gratify his appetite, was foolish; and to express that wish to others was wrong.

In David we see a picture of human nature in general. All are wishing for something which they do not possess, though it is neither necessary to their welfare, nor easy to be attained. "You desire and have not," is the account given of men by the voice of inspiration, [James 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.2); and it characterizes all from early childhood, until age or infirmity has cured the disease. *This tendency of our minds is decidedly sinful, inasmuch as it argues discontent with the lot assigned to us by Providence, and too high an estimation of the things of time and sense*,[Numbers 11:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.4-5). *God, and heavenly things, may be desired with the utmost intenseness of our souls*, [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2); [Psalm 63:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1); *but earthly things, whatever they may be, are no further to be desired than as God may be enjoyed in them, or glorified by them*,[Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25); and, as David in this wish had respect to nothing but mere personal gratification, he so far acted in a way unworthy of his high character.

***~~2. David's wish, as rashly desired.~~***

Three of his most distinguished warriors determined, if possible, to gratify his desire; and, of their own accord, without any order from David, cut their way through the Philistine army, drew the water, and brought it to him. This was rash and presumptuous in the extreme. Had they been moved to it by God, as David was to go against Goliath with a sling and a stone, or as Jonathan was to climb up a rock, and, unsupported by anyone but his armor-bearer, to attack a Philistine garrison, they would have acted right; because in executing the divine will they might expect the divine protection; but to go on such an errand without any command either from God or man, was *to expose themselves unnecessarily to the utmost peril, and in reality to tempt God*.

Doubtless a contempt of danger is a great virtue in a soldier; but it may be unduly exercised; and we are persuaded that, before men put their lives in jeopardy, they should inquire whether the occasion is sufficiently important to demand it, or, at least, whether they are called to it in the way of duty.

***~~3. David's wish, as piously suppressed.~~***

When the water was brought to him, he refused to drink of it; and, with a mixture of shame and gratitude, poured it out as a drink-offering unto the Lord. To him it appeared, that the drinking of it would be like drinking the blood of his most faithful servants; and therefore, as much as he had desired it before, he would on no account gratify his appetite at such an expense. This argued true love to those who had served him at so great a risk, and genuine piety towards God—whose merciful kindness he thus gratefully acknowledged.

*But how little of such self-denial is there in the world!* How few, when a desired gratification is within their reach, will abstain from the indulgence of it, from the consideration of the evils which may accrue to the object that administers to their delight! If however we condemn David for cherishing such a wish, we cannot but applaud the forbearance he exercised in reference to it, when it was obtained.

Let us now contemplate,

***~~II. The lessons to be learned from it.~~***

***~~1. How strong a principle is love!~~***

Love dictated the measure which these soldiers took; while therefore we disapprove the act, we must admire the principle from which it proceeded. Love is a principle "strong as death;" nor can "many waters quench it." Love is a principle also by which, not soldiers only, but people in every situation and relation of life should be actuated; and how happy would it be for the world, if it operated universally in its full extent! How happy if, in our social and domestic circles, the only contest was, who should show most love, and exert himself in the most self-denying way for the good of others! This is the spirit which God himself approves, [Hebrews 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.24). May the Lord grant it may increase and abound among us more and more [1 Thessalonians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.12).

***~~2. How should we delight to exercise love towards our Lord Jesus Christ in particular!~~***

He is "the Captain of our salvation," and "of all the hosts of Israel;" and he has opened to us access to the waters of life, "of which whoever drinks shall never thirst! [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10); [John 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.13-14)." Moreover, to effect this, he has not merely jeopardized his life, but actually laid down his life! Knowing assuredly all the sufferings he must endure in order to procure these blessings for us, he voluntarily undertook our cause, and never drew back, until he could say, "It is finished!"

Is He not then worthy to be loved by us? Yes, should there be any bounds to our love to him? Should we not be "willing to be bound, or even to die, for his sake?" Surely, whatever dangers we may be encompassed with, we should say, "None of these things move me, neither do I count my life dear unto me," so that I may but fulfill his will, and promote his glory!

***~~3. With what grief and indignation should we mortify every sinful desire!~~***

When once we see what sin has done, we shall see what it merits at our hands. It was to counteract the effects of sin, that Jesus shed his blood. Shall we then indulge sin of any kind? However gratifying it may be to our feelings, should we not say, like David in our text, "Is not this the blood of God's only dear Son, even of my best Friend, who laid down his life for me? I will not drink it! I will sacrifice my every lust unto the Lord."

Ah, brethren! look at sin in this view; and if it is dear to you as a right eye, or apparently as necessary as a right hand, do not hesitate one moment to cast it from you with abhorrence; humbling yourselves for having ever conceived a desire after it, and adoring your God that it has not long ago involved you in everlasting death and misery!

***~~#328~~***

***~~DAVID NUMBERING THE PEOPLE~~***

***~~[2 Samuel 24:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.11-15)~~***

Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me." David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men." So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died."

Sins, punishments, humiliations, forgivenesses, follow each other in a melancholy train throughout the Bible—even as clouds after rain in the material world. *Even the most pious men have their faults, blemishes and sins*, which call forth the divine chastisements on themselves and others.

We have here an account of David numbering the people, and bringing a heavy judgment on the whole land. The history will lead us to notice,

***~~I. The severity of God in punishing sin.~~***

**The sin which David committed was exceedingly great.**

It had been enjoined by God, that the people never should be numbered without a half shekel being collected from every one of them as a tribute to the Lord, or, as it is called, "a ransom for his soul," "that there might be no plague among them when they were numbered, [Exodus 30:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.12-14)." Now as David never once mentioned this in the order that was given, and as this collection was not made in all the time that the census was taking, it seems that David greatly transgressed in this particular, and that the plague was sent among them on this account.

*It is manifest that David was actuated by pride, in wishing to know the extent of the population he governed*; and that he was *indulging confidence in an arm of flesh, instead of trusting in God alone.* That he was faulty in these particulars was visible even to so wicked a man as Joab, who expostulated with him on the subject, and warned him that he was bringing guilt and punishment upon the whole nation! [1 Chronicles 21:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.3). Now of all sins, these are the most hateful in the sight of God, [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-6); and to persist in them so long, in opposition to such plain warnings as were delivered to him, was a very grievous offence.

***~~The punishment inflicted for it was proportionably severe.~~***

God sent a prophet to him, to offer him a choice of three judgments:  
three years of famine,  
three months of defeat in warfare,  
three days of pestilence,  
a painful choice indeed!

But David wisely preferred the falling into the hands of God, and not into the hands of man. The choice being made, the judgment was immediately executed; and no less than seventy thousand men were slain by a destroying angel, before the expiration of the appointed time.

What now shall we think of sin? Is sin so light a matter as the generality of men imagine? And are not they justly called "fools" who "mock at it?" The sins of the heart are considered as altogether venial; pride and self-confidence are scarcely numbered in the catalogue of sins; but behold in what light they are viewed by a holy God! *O that we might learn, if not from God's declarations, at least from his judgments, what an awful thing sin is, and with what tremendous punishment it will be visited!*

Next let us view,

***~~II. The goodness of God in pardoning sin.~~***

***~~David and the elders of Israel humbled themselves before God.~~***

David had expressed, and that too in very energetic language, his shame and sorrow on account of his transgression; but God determined to punish his iniquity. On the execution of vengeance upon the land, the elders of Israel united with him in the deepest humiliation, [1 Chronicles 21:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.16); and David, when he saw the angel standing over Jerusalem with a drawn sword in his hand, pleaded most earnestly with God, that the punishment might fall on him who had been the author of the sin, and not on the people who were innocent! [1 Chronicles 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.17).

This was a mark of true contrition. When the soul is not really abased before God, it will rather extenuate its guilt, or cast the blame upon others, [1 Samuel 15:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.20-21). But when the soul has a just sense of its guilt, it will be willing to take shame to itself to the utmost extent of its deserts; and such a spirit will never be exercised in vain.

***~~Therefore God removed the punishment, and pardoned the iniquity.~~***

Instantly did God command the angel to "withdraw his hand." At the same time a command was given to build an altar there, and to offer sacrifices to the offended Majesty of Heaven. God from, the beginning had honored his own institutions, and had taken all fit occasions of directing penitents to that great Sacrifice whereby alone the sins of men could be forgiven; and now he stopped the angel on the very spot where he had, many centuries before, arrested Abraham's hand when sacrificing his son; and where, but a short time after, the temple itself was built; that temple in which all the sacrifices were offered, and in the services of which the death of Christ was so abundantly prefigured, 2 Chronicles 3:1.

Nay, on this occasion God was pleased to put peculiar honor on the sacrifice, in that he sent fire from Heaven to consume it! [1 Chronicles 21:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.26). Thus did he point out to David and to all Israel; thus also has he shown to the whole world, that though penitence and prayer are indispensable requisites in those that are pardoned, *it is the sacrifice of Christ alone that avails for our acceptance with God*.

The history very particularly leads us to notice, in the next place,

***~~III. The effect which the sins of individuals produce on the community.~~***

**It was in reality for Israel's sin, that this punishment was inflicted.**

"The anger of God, we are told, was kindled *against Israel*;" and on this account "he moved David against them, to say, Go, number Israel and Judah, verse 1." In the parallel place we are told, that "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel, [1 Chronicles 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.1)." We are not to suppose that God himself actually tempted David; for we are expressly told, that "God does not tempt any man [James 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.13);" but he permitted Satan to tempt him; and we well know, that if God's restraining hand be removed, Satan will prevail against the strongest of men, and "sift them as wheat!"

But when David had thus voluntarily sinned, both he and his people were punished for their iniquity. In a word, for Israel's sin he was left, and for his sin they were punished. In this dispensation there was nothing unworthy of the divine character; for both David and Israel justly deserved punishment, and might have been visited with God's judgments independently of this sin; but by this dispensation God would show us, that, in this world, communities should be dealt with as one body; the head being afflicted for the members, and the members for the head; so that all may be led to the utmost of their power to consult the welfare of the whole.

***~~Let us therefore be on our guard, lest we be instrumental to the destruction, rather than to the welfare, of each other.~~***

What evil may not a head of a family bring on the members; a ruler on his subjects; a minister on his people! Or what may not they suffer through the misconduct of those over whom they are placed! Let this connection be duly considered; and, whatever station we are called to fill, let us determine, through grace, that we will perform the duties of it, every joint supplying its utmost aid for the edification of the whole body, [Ephesians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.16).

Let us be more ready to take blame to ourselves, than to cast it on others.

More particularly, let us watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation; and that Satan may not be permitted to get advantage against us.

Thus shall we be blessings to the community, and to the Church of God; and shall through the great Sacrifice be accepted of God in the eternal world.

**1 KINGS**

**#329**

***~~SOLOMON PUTS SHIMEI TO DEATH~~***

***~~[1 Kings 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 2.44)~~***

The king also said to Shimei, "You know in your heart all the wrong you did to my father David. Now the LORD will repay you for your wrongdoing."

Few parts of Scripture have given more occasion for the cavils of infidels, than that which relates the close of David's life, and the commencement of Solomon's reign. Those who delight in disparaging the characters of all the most exalted saints, represent David as dying under the influence of a vindictive spirit; and Solomon as beginning his reign with most flagrant acts of cruelty. But both the one and the other of these saints may be vindicated in what they did; yes rather their conduct must be highly approved, if only we view it in a proper light.

Some indeed have vindicated David's advice, by saying, that though he had sworn to Shimei that he should not be put to death for his offence, Solomon was not bound by his oath. But I answer, that David was as much bound by his oath not to procure the death of Shimei through the instrumentality of another, as he was not to put him to death with his own hand. The true way of vindicating both David and Solomon in reference to all the seeming acts of severity which were recommended by the one and executed by the other—is by *viewing them as acts of retributive justice*. It is in that light that Solomon himself speaks of the execution of Shimei; and he even represents the punishment as inflicted not by himself only, but by God also.

In considering the subject of retributive justice, we shall show,

***~~I. How retributive justice should be exercised by men.~~***

***~~By men in their individual capacity, retributive justice should never be exercised at all.~~***

We are forbidden to think of retaliating an injury, or of avenging ourselves at all, [Proverbs 24:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.29). Yes rather we are taught patiently to bear injuries, [Matthew 5:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.38); [Matthew 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.41); and tenderly to requite them with acts of kindness, [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44); and to persist in this conduct until we have melted our adversaries into shame, and overcome them with love, [Romans 12:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.19-21). Our blessed Lord, who died for his very murderers, has "left us an example that we should follow his steps, 1 Peter 2:21-24."

***~~But, as magistrates we may, and must execute retributive justice on those who transgress the laws.~~***

Magistrates are invested with authority by God himself for this very end; and they are "not to bear the sword in vain;" they are to be a terror to evil-doers, as well as a protection to those who do well.

Now this throws the true light on the advice which David gave to Solomon at the close of his life, and on the conduct which Solomon maintained. David was not actuated by revenge when he advised Solomon to put Joab to death, and to take the first opportunity of visiting on the head of Shimei the sins of which he had been guilty. David knew the characters of both; he knew that Joab would not fail to advance Adonijah to the throne, if ever it should be in his power; and that Shimei still cleaved to the house of Saul as much as ever, and would use all his influence in concert with Joab to dethrone Solomon. David therefore advised him to *remove as soon as possible those who would destroy the peace and prosperity of his kingdom*. As for Joab, he ought to have been put to death long ago, for the murders he had committed; and David had brought guilt on himself and the whole nation by allowing him to live; and therefore, now that there was no prospect of the people rising in favor of Joab, he recommended that justice should be executed upon him.

That David was actuated by no bad spirit in this advice, appears from the charge he gave Solomon at the same time to walk in the strictest observance of God's commands. We may justly say therefore that the advice was precisely such as a dying monarch ought to have given to a young man, who was just ready to ascend the throne. In like manner Solomon was justified in all the steps he took to establish his kingdom. He had pardoned Adonijah for his conspiracy against him, on the express condition that he should act the part of a good and loyal subject; but seeing speedily his restless ambition, and that the request to have Abishag for his wife was but a device to increase his influence in the state, and to pave the way for his attainment of the throne, he very properly recalled the promise he had made to Bathsheba respecting him (which by no construction whatever could be supposed to extend to such a case as that); and *inflicted on him that punishment which his treasonable intentions deserved*.

In Adonijah's late conspiracy Abiathar and Joab had joined, though they all knew that the appointment of Solomon to the throne was not from any partiality in David, but from God himself. Solomon therefore now thrust out Abiathar from the priesthood, and banished him to his native town. This was a mild sentence, in consideration of the services he had rendered unto David in his afflictions.

Joab now saw that justice was coming home to him also; and he fled to the altar, hoping to find the same protection there that Adonijah had found before him; but he was a murderer; and God had expressly ordered that his altar should be no sanctuary for such people, [Exodus 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.14); accordingly Solomon ordered that, if he would not come from thence, he should be slain there; so that he might the more manifestly appear to be sacrificed to the justice of his God.

The person spoken of in our text is Shimei, who cursed David in the day of his calamity; but had received from David a free pardon for his offence. This was a very powerful man; for no less than a thousand men attended him when he came to ask pardon; and he retained all his former enmity to David, though he had not been able to manifest it with effect. Him therefore Solomon also pardoned, on condition that he should never go out of the city of Jerusalem, where he might be constantly under the eye of the government. This condition he thankfully accepted; but after three years he violated it, and thus forfeited his life, which Solomon therefore, agreeably to the advice given him by David, required at his hands.

Now, while we acknowledge that these acts of retributive justice would have been bad, if they had proceeded from a vindictive spirit—we must affirm that they were both just and necessary, in order to prevent disturbances in the state, and to secure the welfare of the whole nation.

Such is the way in which retributive justice should be exercised by man. Let us now consider,

***~~II. How retributive justice will be exercised by God.~~***

God is the Sovereign of the universe; and though he bears long with his rebellious subjects, he often executes vengeance upon them in this world, as preparatory to the judgments he will inflict upon them in the world to come. In a peculiar manner, as our text expresses it, "he returns their wickedness upon their own head:"

***~~1. God's justice and punishment here in the present world.~~***

Sometimes indeed sinners are left, as it were, wholly to themselves in this world; but even this is a mark of God's displeasure against them, "Ephraim," says he, "is joined to idols; let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)." *They harden themselves against him, and he gives them up to judicial hardness*, as he did Pharaoh of old, [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10). "They will not believe his Word, that they may be saved; and he gives them up to believe their own lie, that they may be damned, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12." "They will not hear him when he speaks to them; and he turns a deaf ear to them, when in the day of their calamity they cry to him;" thus leaving them to be "filled with their own devices! [Proverbs 1:24-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-31)."

But in temporal judgments he often marks his indignation against them, and shows them their sin in their punishment. How strikingly was this shown in the judgments inflicted on Adoni-bezek, [Judges 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 1.6-7). How awfully was David made to behold his crimes in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah:  
in the ravishment of Tamar by his son Amnon,  
in the defilement of all his concubines by his son Absalom,  
and in the murder of Amnon by Absalom!

Thus we see now that multitudes are punished in a way so suited to their crimes, that they may even read their crimes in their punishment; their wicked examples are imitated by their children; and they are made to feel the bitterness of their own sins from the sins and calamities of their dearest relatives.

In all such instances we may behold the retributive justice of God. And though it would not be right for us to be hasty in putting this construction on the judgments inflicted upon others, we shall do well to examine how far our own trials may be so interpreted; and to take occasion from our afflictions to put away the sins which they are intended to chastise.

***~~2. God's justice and punishment there in the eternal world.~~***

Whether God overlooks or punishes our sins in this world, he will proceed according to strict equity against us in the world to come. The day of judgment is emphatically called, "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Then shall everything be taken into consideration, either to extenuate or aggravate our crimes, "The servant who knew his lord's will and did it not, shall he beaten with many stripes; while the more ignorant transgressor shall be beaten with few." Every one's "end will be according to his works;" he will be weighed in a perfect balance, and will "receive according to that he has done in the body, whether it be good or evil." His *views*, his *motives*, his *principles—*will all be judged, "God will make manifest the counsels of his heart;" and every one shall be constrained to confess that his doom is just.

***~~Let us then learn from this subject,~~***

***~~1. To be lenient in judging others.~~***

A person looking only superficially at this history would be ready to condemn both David and Solomon for their conduct; but when we view their situation, and enter properly into their motives, we are constrained to approve it.

Thus it must often happen. We see an action, but we do not exactly enter into all the circumstances that gave it birth; and therefore we judge erroneously respecting it. But *we should leave all judgment to the Lord, who alone is able to decide on the motives and principles from which an action springs*. We must indeed of necessity pass judgment in many cases, where the crimes are so glaring that they cannot possibly be mistaken; but where there is the least ground for favorable interpretation, we should exercise that "charity which hopes all things and believes all things." That rule cannot be too strictly attended to, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

***~~2. To be severe in judging ourselves.~~***

Here we are in little danger of excess. A person of a gloomy disposition may indeed write bitter things against himself without occasion; but, *in general, self-love will lead us rather to extenuate everything that is amiss, and to justify many things which God will condemn*. Let us remember, therefore, that God will not accommodate his judgment to ours, "he will judge *righteous*judgment;" "to him all things are naked and open;" "his eyes are as a flame of fire," that will search the inmost recesses of the heart, and try every disposition of the mind!

Let us endeavor to bear in mind, that his eye is over us; and let us strive to walk as in his immediate presence. And let our every act and word and thought be regulated by the consideration that *the hour is quickly coming, when every minute circumstance of our lives will be brought to light, and our eternal state be fixed by a righteous and unerring God!*

***~~#330~~***

***~~SOLOMON'S CHOICE~~***

***~~[1 Kings 3:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 3.10-13)~~***

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings."

Such is the condescension of Almighty God, that he not only conversed familiarly with man in a state of innocence, but even in his fallen state has talked with him as a man talks with his friend. So free was the fellowship which he maintained with *Abraham*, that that patriarch was "called the friend of God." With *Solomon*too his communications were most familiar, as the instance recorded in our text will evince.

Solomon, after he was seated on the throne of David his father, offered a thousand burnt-offerings at Gibeon, where God's principal altar was, previous to the building of the temple. After that pious work was performed, God visited him, and revealed himself to him in a dream or vision, and bade him ask any blessing that he chose; assuring him that it would certainly be granted. Solomon accepted the offer, and made known to God the request contained in our text.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The choice of Solomon.~~***

***~~His request was for a more abundant measure of wisdom.~~***

In this request, he desired intellectual wisdom, whereby he might be fitted for all the duties and services of his high station. He was conscious, that, without this, he could but ill discharge the office to which God in his providence had called him. He felt the awful responsibility attached to the office of a monarch; and he longed to approve himself both able and faithful in the execution of his trust.

But it is evident that he desired spiritual wisdom also; for he wanted "to discern in all things between good and bad," which he could not do without a clear discovery of the Law, which is the only true test of good and evil.

Now this was a wise choice. He might, as God tells him, have asked for riches, or honor, or power over his enemies; but he felt that none of those things could make him happy, or render those happy who were committed to his care. Indeed we need only look at those who have been most famed for their conquests, and we shall find, that*no acquisitions of wealth or territory could satisfy them*; and that they have been no less a curse to the people they governed, than to those whom they endeavored to subdue; since they sought only to gratify their own ambition at the expense of those, whose welfare they should have solely regarded.

But without extending our views to them, we need only look within the narrow circle of our own acquaintance, and we shall see that *wisdom conduces more to the happiness of men, than all other things whatever*. See the man that is enabled to conduct himself well in the most arduous affairs of life, how happy does he make all who are connected with him; especially, if he is endued with spiritual wisdom also, so as to have a spiritual discernment in everything relating to God and man! What a light then shines around him; and what blessings does he communicate wherever he comes! Compare such a one with the great, the rich, the mighty—and he will be found far happier than them all.

This choice moreover was approved of God himself, who not only commended it as wise, but honored it with a rich reward; giving him in a very abundant measure the blessing he desired, [1 Kings 4:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.29-31), and bestowing on him also those minor blessings which he had forborne to ask.

From this brief view of Solomon's choice we may easily collect,

***~~II. The instruction to be gathered from it.~~***

It clearly shows,

***~~1. That an ability to discharge our duty aright, is the most desirable of all temporal blessings.~~***

In whatever line of life we be, this will be found a truth. Persons in higher life may, if truly gracious, do extensive good; but wealth and power are abused, so as rather to diminish than augment the happiness of those who are within the sphere of their influence. Besides, in many cases, wealth and power can do no good at all; whereas wisdom is serviceable in every situation in which we can be placed; nor is there a man existing who may not be benefitted by the possessor of it. "Wisdom," we are told, "is profitable to direct;" and while it regulates the motions of others, it will enable a man to "guide his own affairs with discretion," and to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way! [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)."

Need I say from how many difficulties and evils, wisdom will keep a man; or what peace and joy it will bring into the soul? Truly, as in the lack of this not all the world can give any permanent satisfaction, so, in the absence of all other things, this will afford the richest comfort and support. We may well therefore say, that nothing in the universe is to be compared to it! [Proverbs 3:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.13-18). Would to God that the rich and great in every place made wisdom, in the days of youth too, the one object of their pursuit!

***~~2. That true wisdom is the gift of God alone.~~***

Education will improve our talents; but it will never confer solid wisdom—that "comes from above, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)." We may go to every creature in the universe, and they will all give us the same answer, "It is not in me; it is not in me. See that eloquent passage, [Job 28:12-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.12-23)." The man famed for wisdom almost as much as Solomon himself, [Ezekiel 28:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 28.3), has directed us to God as the only true source of all wisdom, [Daniel 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.20-21). We must seek it therefore, not by study only, but by prayer; for "it is God that gives wisdom; and out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6)." If any man could have derived it from any other source, surely Solomon might; seeing that he was naturally possessed of strong mental powers, and had the advantage of being instructed by the most pious and experienced of kings. But he felt that *none but God could open the eyes of his understanding, or enrich him with that spiritual wisdom which alone could qualify him for the discharge of his high office*.

***~~3. That where a desire after wisdom is supreme in the soul, God will signally honor and bless us.~~***

The desire after wisdom ought to be so predominant in the soul as to have no rival there; if it is not supremely coveted, the desire after wisdom is not sincere. But where it is really sought as the supreme good, there God promises that he will grant it, yes and liberally too, if we come to him in faith, and ask it at his hands, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5); [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20). To desire wisdom is the best way of obtaining other blessings in the measure that is good for us; for God promises, that, if we "seek spiritual blessings first, all other things shall be added unto us, [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33)."

We are far from saying, that other things are not to be sought at all; we only say, that they must be regarded as altogether subordinate to spiritual blessings, and be valued only as they may be subservient to the advancing of God's honor and the good of mankind. In this view, *riches, honor, and power may be desired; but in comparison with true wisdom, they must be regarded only as the small dust upon the balance*.

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who are ambitious of earthly honors.~~***

Think but how speedily they will vanish, and you will raise your ambition to that which shall endure forever! [Psalm 90:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.12).

***~~2. Those who desire the approbation of their God.~~***

God makes the same offer to you that he did to Solomon, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14); [John 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.23-24). Let your choice then be the same as his; and seek it with all the ardor and earnestness it deserves! [Proverbs 4:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.5-7).

***~~#331~~***

***~~THE QUIETNESS WITH WHICH THE TEMPLE WAS BUILT~~***

**[1 Kings 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 6.7)**

"In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built."

Never was there upon the face of the globe a building, that in point of elegance or grandeur could be compared with the temple of Solomon. It had been the desire of David to erect it; but he was forbidden by God to do so, because he had been engaged in many wars, and had shed much blood. God however approved of his desire, and told him that his son would have the honor which was denied to him. Nevertheless David began immediately to make preparations for the building; and Solomon in three years after he came to the throne was ready to begin the work; which in somewhat more than seven years he was enabled to complete.

There is, in the structure of this edifice, one circumstance so remarkable as to deserve very particular attention; the wood and stones were all prepared at a distance, and brought to the place perfectly fitted for the situation in which they were to stand; and with such unerring skill were they all framed, that, during the whole time of building the temple, there was no occasion for an axe or hammer to be used; and the whole structure was completed without the smallest noise.

Now whoever considers the figurative nature of the Jewish dispensation must see, that such an extraordinary circumstance as this could not have happened from mere chance, or have occurred at all without some very important meaning. We doubt not but that it was intended by God to shadow forth some truths for the instruction of his Church in all ages. What these truths were, we cannot declare with certainty, because no inspired writer has specified them; but we apprehend that, whatever else this circumstance might intimate, it was particularly calculated to represent,

**I. The perfection of God's designs.**

Every part of the edifice, and every vessel in it, was formed, as it were, in the mind of the Divine Architect, long before Solomon or David ever entertained the thought of executing such a work. Before Moses constructed the tabernacle, there was a model set before him by God, and he was ordered to make everything according to the pattern shown to him in the mount, [Exodus 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.40). A similar model was given by God to David, and shown by him to Solomon, for the constructing of the temple, [1 Chronicles 28:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.11-13); [1 Chronicles 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.19); so that, *as existing in the divine mind, the work was perfect before it was begun*.

Now this shows us what is really the case with respect to everything in the whole creation. As the creation itself was all formed in the divine purpose, though it occupied six successive days to complete it—so *all things to the very end of time are present in the mind of God, having been ordained by him before the foundation of the world*.

We are aware that to many this appears "a hard saying;" but it is "a true saying;" for how could so many things have been foretold by prophets in different and distant ages, if they had not been previously fixed in the purposes of God? Had there been anything left to chance, some of these prophecies must have failed; but not even the minutest circumstance that has been predicted has ever failed; and this proves that God ordained everything that should ever come to pass; and that he foresaw it, not as probable, but as certain, and therefore certain, because he had ordained it. This is true respecting the vilest iniquities of men, no less than their greatest virtues. The whole treatment which our blessed Lord should meet with, was ordained, though the agents were perfectly free in their actions, and were as much accountable to God as if nothing had been fore-ordained, [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23).

Nor is it only unwittingly that men have accomplished the divine purposes, but against their will; for Joseph's brethren were bent upon defeating the divine purposes, and yet actually accomplished them by the very means which they used to defeat them! [Genesis 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.5); [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20). *There does indeed appear on some occasions a change of the divine purpose, as in the sparing of Nineveh, and in the prolonging of Hezekiah's life; but these were not changes in the divine purpose, but changes in the divine dispensations, agreeably to the purpose which had been previously formed in the mind of God.*

*If this doctrine were not true, God would not be a perfect Being. If anything were left unfixed in the divine counsels, God could not be omniscient, but would become wiser by the events of every successive day.* But can anyone doubt whether God is omniscient or not? Surely, as James declares, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world! [Acts 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.18)." To deny that God possesses the attribute of foreknowledge would be downright atheism; and to separate this attribute from his pre-ordination appears to me inconsistent and impractical; nor do they who take refuge in this distinction find themselves at all better able to reconcile their doctrine with the freedom of man's will, and his responsibility for his conduct, than those who consider everything as fore-ordained. And if they get rid of some difficulties, they involve themselves in more and greater than they avoid.

In truth the language of Scripture is so strong respecting the divine decrees, that it is not possible to explain away many passages which relate to them: [Isaiah 46:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.9-11); [Ephesians 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-5); [Ephesians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.9); [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11); [Ephesians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.9); [Ephesians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.11). We acknowledge that the subject is deep, and far beyond the comprehension of man; we would therefore never speak of it but with the deepest reverence; nor ever without reminding our hearers, that it is with the divine commands, and not the divine decrees, that they have to do; it is God's commands, and not to God's decrees, that they must look as the rule of their actions.

Still however we dare not deny that God is the Sovereign of the universe, who acts in all things "according to the counsel of his own will, and for the praise of the glory of his own grace! [Ephesians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.9); [Ephesians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.11)." Though we would by no means make this a prominent subject of our ministrations—yet we cannot but think that the occasional contemplation of this truth is, as our Article expresses it, "full of pleasant, sweet, and unspeakable comfort."

Besides the perfection of God's designs, we see prefigured in this account,

***~~II. The mode in which God's designs are accomplished.~~***

The quietness with which the work of the temple proceeded intimated the still and silent way in which God carries on all his works:  
in the world,  
in the Church,  
and in the souls of men.

In the world we behold men carrying on their designs with great noise and tumult; but God is secretly and silently effecting his own purposes in the midst of all. Each of the four great empires, the Chaldean, Persian, Grecian, and Roman, successively rose on the ruins of that which preceded it; but none of the conquerors imagined Whose counsels they were fulfilling, or Whose instruments they were. Sennacherib boasted what victories he had gained; but he was only a saw in the hand of Omnipotence! [Isaiah 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-7); [Isaiah 10:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.13-15); [Isaiah 37:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.24-27).

We shall have a perfect insight into this matter, if we look at the transactions which took place at the death of Christ. *All parties followed the bent of their own hearts; but all accomplished with the utmost possible exactness the counsels of the Most High.*God spoke not to them by any audible voice to direct them; nor did he interpose in any visible way to guide their motions; but he presided in the storm, and overruled every disposition of their hearts for the accomplishment of his own eternal purpose! [Acts 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27-28). *It is a most consolatory thought, that, in all the great events which are now taking place in the world, "the counsel of God shall stand, and he will do all his will."*

In the Church more especially does God carry on his work in this way. It was said of our Lord, that he should "not lift up his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street, [Isaiah 42:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.2)." *He was to found his kingdom upon earth by a secret and invisible influence on the minds and hearts of men.*His Apostles also were to go forth in dependence on that power, and, by their simple testimony, to convert people unto Christ. In their attempts to subdue men to the obedience of faith, they were to use "no carnal weapons," but only such as should derive their efficacy from the grace of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5); agreeably to that prophetic declaration, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty! [Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6)." Accordingly it was in this way that they prevailed over all the power and policy of earth and Hell; and in this way will Christ continue to extend his conquests, "until all his enemies are put under his feet!"

In the same way also does God accomplish his purposes in the souls of men. It is "not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, that God manifests himself to them, but in the still small voice, [1 Kings 19:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.11-12)." The gospel "seed sown in their hearts, grows up, they know not how;" changes occur, which threaten to destroy it; but still it survives, and springs up, and brings forth fruit in its season. This operation is compared by our Lord to leaven, which continues to spread, until it has diffused itself through the whole mass. Thus does*the grace of God silently, but progressively, renew the whole man, until we are changed into the very image of our God!*

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. What ought to be the character of our religion.~~***

*Nothing is more common, and nothing more delusive, than a noisy, talkative religion!*True religion is a humble, silent, retired thing, not affecting public notice, but rather wishing to approve itself to God, [Psalm 131:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 131.2) with [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26). It is "not in saying, *Lord, Lord,*but in doing the will of our heavenly Father," that we shall find acceptance in the last day. Happy would it be, if many, who place all their religion in running about, and hearing sermons, and talking of ministers, and disputing about religious opinions, would attend to this hint, and endeavor to acquire more of that wisdom which evinces its divine origin by the excellence of its fruits! [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17).

***~~2. How we should judge of growth in grace.~~***

We would not undervalue the inward feelings of the heart; but, if not accompanied with more substantial evidences of piety, they are very deceitful. We should examine whether we are fitted for the duties of our respective stations. Of all the stones in the temple, there was not one which did not exactly suit its place; so will it be with us, if we have really been wrought upon by the Spirit of God. Whether we are parents or children, masters or servants, magistrates or subjects, true grace will lead us to discharge our own duties aright. This is properly to act as members of a body, all fitly framed together, all performing their proper functions, and all contributing to the good of the whole, [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16).

That this idea is just, as arising from the present subject, is certain; for both Peter and Paul have placed the subject in this very point of view, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5); [Ephesians 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20-22). Let us therefore particularly attend to it; and while we all profess to stand on the same foundation, and to be connected together by one Cornerstone, let us approve ourselves as "living stones," by contributing as much as possible to the union, the beauty, the stability, and advancement of the whole building.

***~~3. How the dispensations of God will appear in the last day.~~***

A person who has seen the materials of the temple in their rough state, would have formed no conception of their appearance after they were all fashioned by the workmen, and placed in the order appointed by the Divine Architect. But when the whole building was completed, it was the wonder of the world.

Just so, at present we have a very imperfect conception of the beauty of God's Church, or of his wisdom in all his various dispensations. But when his temple shall be complete in Heaven, what a glorious edifice will it appear! *How will each admire the way in which he was taken out of the quarry, and formed for the particular place that has been allotted to him!*

*Here*men are apt to wonder, why they must have so many and so severe blows; but *there*none will think that he has had one stroke too much, or more than was absolutely necessary to fit him for his place. If by the most painful experiences he may have been formed for a more conspicuous station in the temple above, he will feel no regret at anything he suffered in the body, but will adore the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Workman, who condescended to use such means for his advancement. Let us then, if anything perplexes us now, remember that we see only in part; and be contented to wait until that day, when "God shall be glorified in all his saints, and be admired in all those who believe."

***~~#332~~***

***~~GOOD INTENTIONS APPROVED~~***

***~~[1 Kings 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.18)~~***

"You did well that it was in your heart!"

The sovereignty of God is a subject from which the minds of men in general revolt. But this arises from their considering it almost exclusively in relation to things which have an arbitrary and painful aspect. For instance, when "God says to Pharaoh: Even for this 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;" Paul represents the proud heart of man as rising against it, "You will say then unto me, Why does he yet find fault? for who has resisted his will? [Romans 9:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17-19)."

But, if we behold the same divine attribute as displayed in the appointment of Saul to the Apostleship, and the making of him "a chosen vessel to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, [Acts 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1); [Acts 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.15) with [Galatians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.15)," we must surely acquiesce in the exercise of God's sovereignty, and adore our God as doing all things well.

Now, in the passage before us we have a remarkable instance of divine sovereignty, in the refusal given to the wishes and desires of David, relative to the building of a temple for the Lord, and the transfer of that honor to David's son. On David's expression of his wish, the prophet Nathan had encouraged him to carry it into effect. But God forbade it; and devolved the office of constructing the temple on David's son and successor; at the same time, however, commending David's purpose, and telling him, "You did well that it was in your heart, verse 17-19 with [2 Samuel 7:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.1-3); [2 Samuel 7:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.12-13)."

Now, from this commendation, we may observe,

***~~I. That there is in the hearts of God's faithful servants more good than they are able to carry into effect.~~***

***~~In the hearts of the ungodly, there is more evil than they can execute. If the restraints of Divine Providence and of human laws were withdrawn, so that men could perpetrate all that is in their hearts, this world would be little better than Hell itself!~~***

Of the godly, on the contrary, it may be said, that there is more good in them than they can execute; not because Divine Providence or human laws impose restraints on them, (though, in some cases, that may be found true,) but because there is in the regenerate man a principle of evil as well as of good, "he has the flesh warring against the spirit, as well as the spirit warring against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that he cannot do the things that he would, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)."

***~~There is in a regenerate man's heart much that he would gladly do for himself.~~***

Gladly would he extirpate from his soul all the remains of sin, and practice universal holiness, but he finds himself utterly unable to do these things. The experience of Paul is common to every true believer, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? [Romans 7:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18-24)."

The saint, if he could accomplish his own wishes, would be as "*holy*as God is holy," and as "*perfect*even as his Father who is in Heaven is perfect." But he feels imperfection cleaving to him in everything, so that *his very best actions need to be cleansed in the Redeemer's blood. Yes, his very tears need to be washed, and his repentances to be repented of.*

Moreover, could the regenerate man have his heart's desire, he would walk continually in the light of God's countenance, and bask incessantly, as it were, in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. But *clouds*frequently arise, to intercept his views of God, and to abate the joy with which, for a season, he has been favored.

The disciples would gladly have built tabernacles on Mount Tabor, to protract their vision of the divine glory. But they must descend again into the plain, to renew their conflicts with sin and Satan, and to finish the work which had been given them to do, [Luke 9:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.33-34). *Similar alternations of light and darkness, ease and conflict, joy and sorrow, are the portion of every saint, while in this valley of tears.*

**There is much, also, that the regenerate man would gladly do for the world around him.**

Where is there a servant of God who would not, if it were possible, extend the blessings he enjoys to every man? Where is there a real saint that does not attempt this, so far as his influence extends? It is the very first petition which our Lord has commanded us to offer at the throne of grace, that "God's name may be hallowed;" and does not the real saint endeavor to carry this into effect, both in his own soul, and in the souls of those around him? Does he further pray, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven;" and does he not long to see these things effected?

He says from his heart, "O that the wickedness of the wicked might come to an end!" Yes, he prays with David, "Let the whole earth be filled with the Redeemer's glory. Amen, and Amen! [Psalm 72:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.19)." But how little of this is he able to accomplish!

Even *ministers*, who "labor most assiduously, and for many years, in the blessed work of bringing souls to God, how universally are they constrained to adopt the prophet's complaint, and to say, "Who has believed our report? and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

The *parent*for his children, and the children for their parents, have but too much reason to acknowledge, that "whoever may plant or water, it is God alone who can give the increase!"

It is a comfort to them, however, to know,

**II. That not the smallest good that is in them shall pass unnoticed, or unrewarded, by their God.**

***~~God inspects the inmost recesses of the heart.~~***

So he himself declares, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them! [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.5)." To the same effect, also, it is said by an inspired Apostle, "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13)."

***~~God inspects the inmost recesses of every heart, in view of the future judgment.~~***

"He will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, [Romans 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.16);" and "will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it is good or evil, [Ecclesiastes 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 12.14)." It is in this way that the ungodly shall be judged; for the motions of anger or impurity, though not operating to the extent of the outward act of murder or adultery, will be construed as violations of the commandments which prohibit those particular sins, and be visited with the penalties due to such transgressions, [Matthew 5:22-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.22-28).

So, also, the good desires of believers shall be rewarded, though, from circumstances, they were never carried into full effect. Young Abijah had "in his heart some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel," and it was not overlooked, [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13).

"Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and *thought*on his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him, [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17)."

The look, the sigh, the groan, the tear, shall all be recorded by God in the book of his remembrance, or be treasured up in his bottle! All "the counsels of men's hearts," though never realized in act, shall be made manifest, to their honor; and every man, according as his inward dispositions have been, shall in that day "receive praise from God! [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5)."

***~~Improvement.~~***

***~~1. In a way of caution.~~***

Certainly this subject should be entertained with great jealousy; for there is "a desire which kills;" because it is not productive of suitable exertions, [Proverbs 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.25).*If a mere wish or desire would save us, who would ever perish?*Even Balaam could say, "Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his [Numbers 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.10)." But David, though not permitted to build the temple, contributed a massive amount of money towards it. In like manner must our desires operate to the extent of our ability; and, if we cannot do what we *would*, we must do what we *can*.

**2.** In a way of encouragement.

Christian men are often cast down because of their short-comings and defects. But they would do well to consider, that the more ardent their desire is to honor God, the more will they discern and lament their incapacity to fulfill the dictates of their hearts. Suppose, for a moment, that a man were to express himself satisfied with his attainments; what judgment would you form of him? You would surely set him down as a self-deceiving hypocrite. See [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14). Distinguish between humiliation and despondency; the former is called for in our best estate; but to no sinner in the universe is the latter suitable; for "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

***~~#333~~***

***~~FOR THE OPENING OF TRINITY CHURCH AT CHELTENHAM~~***

***~~[1 Kings 8:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.28-30)~~***

"Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive."

[Though we find Simeon's Anglicanism expressed in this section to be unbiblical, there is plenty of superb material on the topic of prayer.]

The *consecration of buildings*erected for public worship prevailed very early in the Church of Christ. We have the most authentic testimony that it was practiced, to a very great extent, in the days of Constantine. Eusebius mentions it with peculiar satisfaction. Whether it existed in the first three centuries, we have no certain information; but when we consider for what a holy purpose they are set apart, we can have no doubt but that it is a service highly reasonable in itself, and truly acceptable unto God. We are not to suppose that the giving of the names of saints to churches was any mark of their being consecrated to them; it was to God alone that they were dedicated; and the names given to them were merely tokens of respect to the particular saint whose name they bore.

The idea of consecrating such edifices seems evidently to have been suggested by the dedication of Solomon's Temple, which exhibited altogether as glorious a scene as ever was beheld on earth. On that occasion, the king himself, a paragon of wisdom, and the greatest monarch of his day, bowed his knees before God in the sight of all the congregation of Israel, and, with uplifted eyes and out-stretched hands, implored the favor of his God. To this prayer was given an answer which filled all the spectators with the deepest awe; for fire came down from Heaven, in the sight of all, to consume the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord so filled the temple, that the priests could no longer continue their ministrations there, [2 Chronicles 7:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 7.1-2).

But that to which I would more particularly call your attention at this time is, the prayer which Solomon offered, and which brought down so signal a blessing upon them all. It affords a noble specimen of man's fellowship with his Maker; and shows us:

What we may hope for in God's house of prayer.

How we may secure every blessing which our souls can desire.

***~~I. Let me state what we may confidently hope for in God's house of prayer.~~***

Whatever there may be in this history that should be limited to that particular occasion, I think we may at least gather this instruction from it, that, whenever we draw near to God in the public services of his Church, we may expect these two things, namely:

1. God's gracious presence to receive our prayers.

2. God's merciful acceptance to forgive our sins.

That there is great caution to be used in deducing general conclusions from particular premises, I readily acknowledge. But such conclusions are drawn by the inspired writers; for, from a particular promise made to Joshua, it is inferred, that all true believers, of whatever age or nation, may assure themselves of effectual aid from God; and, in the confident expectation of it, may hurl defiance at all the enemies of their salvation.

The same general inference, I think, may well be drawn from God's gracious answer to this prayer of Solomon. Doubtless, a suppliant, in his secret chamber, shall find favor with God; for "God never says to any: Seek my face in vain." But, in public, when presenting his petitions in concert with others, the suppliant has a double assurance that he shall be heard; for God has especially promised, that "where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them," and that "whatever such people, so associated, have agreed to ask, it shall be granted unto them."

I well know, that people may very easily and very materially err in relation to the subject of answers to prayer; and that to expect fire to descend from Heaven, as on that occasion, or a visible manifestation of God's glory before our eyes, would be the height of enthusiasm. But still there are ways in which God may manifest his acceptance of our prayers, and in which he will manifest it; what else can be meant by that promise, "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear! [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24)." And again, "You shall call, and the Lord shall answer; you shall cry, and he shall say, Here I am! [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9)."

The whole Scriptures attest, that, "if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us;" and that "he will manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world;" yes, that "he will come unto us, and make his abode with us;" and, I think there is not in the universe a person who has sought after God with humble, fervent, and believing prayer—but will acknowledge that God does fulfill his promises, "satisfying the hungry soul, and replenishing the sorrowful" with the richest consolations of his Spirit.

This, then, we may expect, and this we should expect, in God's house of prayer; nor should we ever be satisfied, if we have not a sensible access to God in prayer, and a well-founded hope that he has heard the petitions which we have presented before him.

But I have also observed, that we may hope for the actual forgiveness of our sins in answer to our prayer. And, in truth, if we do not obtain, we pray to little purpose. In drawing near to God, this must be chiefly kept in view.*We go as sinners, to obtain mercy at the hands of God.*And in this respect, the Liturgy of our Church is admirably fitted for our use. The extemporaneous effusions that are used in other places bear no comparison with the formularies of our Church. In truth, our churches themselves are, not houses for preaching only, but, in a pre-eminent degree, what our Reformers designed them to be, and what God ordained his Temple of old to be—"houses of prayer." And those who make light of the prayers, and regard them only as a kind of decent prelude to the sermon, show that "they know not what spirit they are of;" since *all the preaching in the universe will be of no use without prayer*; whereas the souls of men will prosper if they abound in prayer, though they are less favored as to the ministrations of sinful men.

Let anyone consult our Liturgy in this particular view. The Introductory Sentences all bear on this point, to show us what sinners we are, and how much we stand in need of mercy, and how ready God is to receive returning penitents. But, as I shall have occasion to enter somewhat more fully into this point under my next head, I will wave all further mention of it now; observing only, that a congregation uniting fervently in the prayers of our Liturgy would afford as complete a picture of Heaven as ever yet was beheld on earth. In spirit, there would be the most perfect accordance that can be imagined; the only difference would be, that the one are uniting prayer with praise, because of their still-continued necessities; whereas the other engage in praise alone, having all their necessities forever supplied.

Here I would particularly call your attention to the prayer of Solomon, that you may see how much the subject of forgiveness is dwelt upon throughout the whole of it. He requests God's attention to all who, under any calamity, shall, in the future, direct their supplications towards that house; and, in every distinct case, he takes it for granted that *sin has been the true and proper source of their calamity*; and he implores in their behalf, not merely the removal of the judgment, but especially, and above all, the forgiveness of their sin. See verses 21, 22, 24, 26, 30, 36, 50.

Nor must we overlook this, in God's answer to his prayer; on the contrary, we must regard it as a pledge that he will receive returning prodigals, and that all who approach him with deep contrition shall find that "there is mercy with him, yes, with him is plenteous redemption." I say, then, that this is a blessing which we are to look for, whenever we approach God in the house of prayer. Every promise in God's blessed Word authorizes this hope; and no one should be satisfied with having offered up his petitions, if he does not carry away with him a comfortable hope, that "his iniquities are forgiven, and his sins are covered."

If it is asked: How shall we secure these blessings? I answer: Use the means which Solomon employed, and by them we may,

***~~II. Secure to ourselves every blessing that our souls can desire.~~***

We have seen that Solomon diversified his petitions according to the supposed conditions to which, at any future period, the people might be reduced. Whatever, therefore, our condition is, we must apply to God in prayer:  
with humility of mind,  
with fervor of spirit,  
with confidence of heart,  
and with consistency of life and conduct.

We must apply to God in prayer with humility of mind. Solomon particularly prays for those who "know every man the plague of his own heart. See verse 38." *Nor can we ever come before God with acceptance, unless we approach him weary and heavy laden with the burden of our sins. To "draw near to him with our lips, while our heart is far from him," is vile hypocrisy*; and "all such worship is vain," yes, worse than vain, because it serves to lull our consciences asleep, and supersedes in our own minds the necessity of any better service. It is not possible for any man to have better direction, or more suitable help, than that provided for him in our Liturgy. The whole Service, from beginning to end, is the service of a sinner imploring mercy at the hands of God. What can express deeper humility than our General Confession? "Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts; we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us." He can know little of "the plague of his own heart," who does not find those acknowledgments exactly suited to his state. At the beginning of the Litany, what can express the desires and feelings of a contrite spirit more justly than that reiterated cry to every person of the Holy Trinity to "have mercy upon us, as miserable sinners?" In the Communion Service, after the recital of every distinct command, we cry, "Lord, have mercy upon us for our past breaches of it, and incline our hearts to keep it in the future." Now this is the very frame in which we should draw near to God.

*There must be nothing in us of a self-righteous and self-applauding spirit. Blasphemy itself is not more hateful to God than that pride of heart, and formal self-delight—with which the generality approach God*. The self-applauding Pharisee, with all his pretended thankfulness, was to God an object of abhorrence; while the poor self-condemning publican was liberated from the guilt of all his sins. And wherever there is a prayer like his, there shall also be the same success; for "the broken and contrite spirit, God never did, nor ever will, despise."

But we must seek God, also, with fervor of spirit. *Prayer is not a service merely of the lip and knee, but of the heart*; and the whole heart should go forth to God in the performance of it. This was well understood by the compilers of our Liturgy; and ought to be understood, and felt, by every worshiper in the Established Church. The whole of the Liturgy breathes an ardor suited to the feelings and necessities of a contrite soul, "Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord, have mercy upon us." Oh! what would not be obtained by a congregation pouring out those prayers with corresponding emotions? I will not say that the house would be shaken, as it was when the Apostles prayed, [Acts 4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.31); but I will say, that the worshipers would all "be filled with the Holy Spirit," not indeed in his miraculous powers, but*in His enlivening, comforting, and transforming energies*.

We may form some idea of the frame which is proper for us, from the very attitude in which Solomon addressed his prayer to God, "He fell down on his knees, and spread forth his hands to Heaven." How different this from the irreverent and careless attitude of many among us, who, instead of prostrating themselves before God with befitting reverence, sit during the prayers; showing, thereby, how little they feel the elevation of a devout worshiper, or the humiliation of a contrite one!

Be it known unto you, that God must be importuned in prayer, and that "the kingdom of Heaven must be taken by violence," if ever it is taken at all; and, if you find that common efforts will not suffice to bring you to your Savior's presence, you must resemble those who went up to the top of the house and let down the paralytic through the roof; you must "cry unto God," and "give him no rest," and not cease from your importunity, until you have obtained an answer to your prayer. It was in this way that the widow in the parable prevailed over the unjust judge; and in this way shall every man prevail, if only he will "pray, and not faint."

The confidence of the heart is yet further necessary; for our hands must be lifted up "without doubting;" "nor can we hope to receive anything from God, if we supplicate him with a wavering mind." It must be remembered, that the Temple was called, "A house of sacrifice, [2 Chronicles 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 7.12)." On this occasion sacrifices were offered without number; and on every morning and evening throughout the year they were regularly presented to the Lord. Now this showed, that every prayer which was there offered was to find acceptance by virtue of those sacrifices; and that no blessing whatever could be obtained from God, but through faith in the atonement which those sacrifices prefigured.

The same is strikingly illustrated in the Liturgy of the Church of England—*not a prayer of which is offered, but in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ*. To him must we look in all our addresses at the throne of grace, and to the Father through him. Indeed, this is very particularly marked in the whole of Solomon's prayer. In the greater part of that prayer he intercedes in behalf of those who should direct their supplications "toward that house."

Now the Temple itself was a very eminent type of Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The body of the Lord Jesus is, on this very account, represented as "a temple, not made with hands;" and towards him, as our incarnate God, must we direct our supplications, if we would obtain answers of peace unto our souls.

If we come to God in this way, we then have an express assurance from God himself, that "we shall never be cast out;" but that, on the contrary, "the Lord Jesus Christ himself will confer upon us whatever we ask, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." So indispensable is it that we look towards that Temple; and so certain is the success of prayers when so directed.

One thing more is necessary, and that is, consistency of life and conduct.*"The prayer of the wicked," so far from finding acceptance with the Lord, is altogether "an abomination to him!"*How can it be expected, that people coming to the house of God with all the professions of real piety, and going from thence into all the dissipation and vanity of the world, shall obtain mercy from the Lord? Behold them on their knees, crying, "From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord, deliver us!" And then, perhaps, spending the remainder of the day, not in reading the Bible, not in instructing their families, not in fervent prayer to God, but in any light conversation and specious amusement, that may enable them to relieve the weariness of a Sabbath evening.

Say, Is this consistent? Nay, would these people themselves, if they saw people who were truly pious, and who had entered fully into the spirit of the prayers, so spending the Sabbath, account them upright and consistent characters? No! they would see at once the glaring inconsistency between such professions and such practice. But perhaps they will say, "We do not make any such profession of religion." Then, I answer, you have gone to God with a lie in your mouths.

What do you mean when you pray, "that you may lead a righteous, sober, and a godly life, to the glory of God's holy name?" Is dissipation, or carelessness to his praise and glory? Has he not required that "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, [Isaiah 58:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.13-14)." Yes, this is what you will do if you are consistent Christians; nor can you in any other way expect to obtain any blessing from the Lord.

This, also, is very particularly noticed by Solomon in his prayer; he does not venture to hope for mercy on behalf of any, unless "they return unto God with all their heart and with all their soul, verse 47, 48." He prays, "Mat the Lord our God be with us, that he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers, verse 57, 58." And then, to impress this the more deeply on the people's minds, he addresses them also, saying, "Let your heart be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day, verse 61." Solomon would have the solemnities of that day carried, as it were, into their daily converse; and the engagements then entered into, remembered throughout their whole lives.

Thus it should be with us; and thus it must be with us, if we would prosper in our souls.*Our prayers are to be the pattern of our whole lives.*What we have sought for, and obtained in the house of God, must be exhibited and exemplified in our daily walk; and, if there is not a correspondence between the two, we only proclaim ourselves hypocrites before the whole world! We "cannot serve God and Mammon too;" nor must we pretend to "fear the Lord, while we are serving other gods." But, if we will indeed devote ourselves to the Lord, then shall our prayers descend in blessings on our souls, and the services of time be a prelude to the enjoyments of eternity.

Hear the answer which God made to Solomon on this very occasion, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there!

Permit me now, in conclusion, to take yet further the example of Solomon for my guide; and, as Solomon in his prayer addressed himself to God in behalf of his own people, and of the strangers who sojourned among them—so now to address myself, first, to the regular inhabitants of this place, and then to those, who, as strangers, are sojourning here only for a season.

The regular inhabitants have the benefits of the further accommodation which they will now receive for the worship of Almighty God. For though the provision now made is very inadequate to the needs of this daily augmenting population, it will doubtless be of important service, and serve as a prelude, I trust, to somewhat which shall be still more effectual.

The necessity of waiting upon God in public is here obviously proclaimed. But there is an *improvement*of the occasion, which, though less obvious, is not a whit less necessary, and which I would take the liberty earnestly to recommend; and that is, the establishment of prayer in your own families. Who that sees the zeal of Solomon on this occasion, does not perceive the duty of every head of a family? We cannot all raise public edifices to the Lord; but *we may all set up altars in our own houses, and promote the worship of God among those who are within the sphere of our own influence*. God has said, that "where two or three are met together in his name, there will he be in the midst of them;" and that, "when two or three agree respecting what they shall ask," he will confer it upon them. If any say that they feel unequal to the task of conducting family worship, they need not be discouraged on that account, because there are abundant aids afforded them, both in the formularies of our Church, and in other books that are written for that express purpose.

And let me not omit this occasion of inculcating the duty of private prayer. This is absolutely indispensable to every man. Without this, no soul can prosper; without this, no sinner in the universe can find acceptance with God. In the public services of the church, your petitions must be, for the most part, general, and such as all the congregation can join in. But in your private chambers you may, every one of you, spread before the Lord your own personal transgressions, and implore at his hands those blessings which you more especially stand in need of.

*Remember, I beg you, that on your own personal application to God in prayer is suspended all your hope of mercy and forgiveness.* "God will be inquired of by us" for those gifts which he has most freely promised and covenanted to bestow. "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." These are the terms with which we must comply; and, if we will not ask, it is in vain to hope that we shall obtain anything of the Lord.

Let the duty of prayer generally, of public, social, and private prayer—be this day impressed upon your minds; and you will have reason to bless God to all eternity for the occasion that has suggested to you so important and necessary a reflection.

To the occasional visitors who are here present, I would beg permission, also, to offer a seasonable suggestion. You will observe that Solomon, in the benevolence of his heart, was especially mindful of strangers. "Concerning a stranger, that is not of your people Israel, but comes out of a far country for your name's sake, when he shall come and pray toward this house, hear in Heaven your dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calls to you for, verse 41, 43."

So would I now be mindful of you, and affectionately entreat you to improve the occasion which may have brought you here. The improvement of your *bodily health*may be supposed to have had some influence in directing you to this place; in truth, many are brought here, even from a great distance, for the promoting of this end. [Editor's note: The Cheltenham hot springs still flow with warm water, and what were thought to be healing salts.]

And shall not the *soul*also, have a just measure of your regard? Shall nothing be deemed too expensive or self-denying for the obtaining of bodily health, and no attention whatever be paid to the soul? Consider, I beg you, of what infinitely greater importance the interests of eternity are than the concerns of time; and how far more certain in its efficacy the fountain of salvation is, which is opened for us in the Gospel—than any which this place, or any other in the universe, can boast. I thank God that this *fountain of salvation*is here opened to you, and is accessible to all. Here you may be cleansed from sin and impurity, so as to be made altogether pure, without spot or blemish.

O! how rich a mercy will it be, if, when coming here only for the restoration of your bodily health, you should find health also to your souls! Then, when you have left this place, you will look towards it with affectionate remembrance, from the very ends of the earth; and, above all, you will look to Him whom the Temple of old typified—the Lord Jesus Christ, and bless him for the dispensation which led you to the knowledge of him, and to the acquisition of his favor!

***~~#334~~***

***~~THE REQUISITES FOR ACCEPTABLE PRAYER~~***

***~~[1 Kings 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.38-39)~~***

"When a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel—each one aware of the afflictions of his own heart, and spreading out his hands toward this temple—then hear from Heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart—for you alone know the hearts of all men."

Religion is often thought to be an employment fit only for weak minds, or for those who have nothing else to engage their attention; but it is worthy of the pursuit of the wisest and greatest of men. Never did Solomon appear more glorious than when uttering these words. At the head of all his subjects he dedicated his temple to God. He set a bright example for them, of piety and devotion; and interceded, not for them only, but for all succeeding generations.

In this portion of his instructive prayer we may see:

***~~I. The requisites for acceptable prayer.~~***

*A humble, upright, fervent, believing, submissive, obediential frame of mind is necessary when we approach the throne of grace.*But the most essential requisites for acceptable worship are comprised in:

**1. A deep sense of our own depravity.**

The "plague of one's own heart" is one's indwelling corruption. Some understand "plague" as expressing some loathsome disorder; and the rather because it is translated "sore" in the parallel passage, [2 Chronicles 6:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.29). This is the true sense of it when it relates to the body. But here the heart is represented as the seat of this disorder, and therefore it must be understood of sin. This is confirmed by what is said in the text, of God's knowing the heart.

"Every one" has some "sin that more easily besets him;" and this sin he ought to know. Not that a mere acquaintance with this plague is sufficient; *we must know the depth and inveteracy of our disorder. Our knowledge too must produce a sincere self-abhorrence, and a full conviction of our utter helplessness; nor without this knowledge can we offer up one acceptable prayer. We cannot lament what we neither feel nor know; or seek for mercy, when we perceive not our need of it.*

While ignorant of our depravity, we are not in a state to receive mercy; we should not even be willing to accept of mercy on God's terms. The very offers of salvation would rather excite our displeasure than our gratitude. A man, not sensible that he had subjected himself to capital punishment by breaking the laws of his country, would reject with indignation an offer of deliverance from an ignominious death. But a self-condemned criminal on the eve of his execution would receive such an offer gladly.

***~~2. A believing view of Christ.~~***

The temple of Solomon was the more immediate residence of God; all were on this account directed to look towards it when they prayed. That temple was typical of the Lord Jesus Christ. See [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); [John 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.21) and compare [Exodus 23:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.21) with the expression, "My name shall be there," [1 Kings 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.29). In him "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;" to him our eyes are therefore to be directed, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22). We are to offer all our petitions in his name, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14). This regard to him is necessary to the acceptance of our prayers; it is through him alone that we gain access to God, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18). We cannot approach the Father in any other way, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6); nor is there any other channel whereby the divine blessings can flow down to us, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). On these accounts we must "stretch out our hands towards" him; we must view him as our only source of spiritual blessings.

They who truly seek after God will soon experience,

***~~II. The efficacy of prayer when attended with those requisites.~~***

Cold or unbelieving petitions will receive no answer! [James 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.3); [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8-9); [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7). But humble and believing prayer will obtain the richest blessings:

***~~1. National blessings.~~***

The passage before us relates to the whole Jewish nation; it supposes them to have incurred the heavy displeasure of God, and teaches them how they are to avert his wrath. Nor did God leave them in suspense about the outcome of such humiliation; he declared in a vision to Solomon that his petitions were accepted, 2 Chronicles 7:12-14.

The Jewish history affords many striking instances of deliverance given to a repenting people. Jehoshaphat praying according to the direction in the text, [2 Chronicles 20:5-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.5-13), expressly reminded God of his promise, verse 9. And the success of his prayer far exceeded all reasonable expectation; see verse 22-25. Nor can we doubt but that the same means will still be crowned with the like success.

***~~2. Personal blessings.~~***

He who "knows our heart" will grant all that we can desire, [1 John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.14-15)."

Forgiveness of sin.

Who was more infamous and abandoned than that woman? [Luke 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.37); [Luke 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.39). Yet she, in humility and faith, applied to Jesus, [Luke 7:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.38), and received an assurance that her iniquities were forgiven, [Luke 7:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47-48); [Luke 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.50). And shall not we obtain mercy if we apply to him in the same humble and believing way?

Peace of conscience.

How troubled, almost to distraction, were the murderers of our Lord, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37). But, according to Peter's direction, they looked to Jesus, [Acts 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38), and were immediately filled with "peace and joy in believing, [Acts 2:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.46)."

Deliverance from temporal troubles.

We cannot conceive greater temporal affliction than that endured by Jonah, [Jonah 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.1-3). Tet, when to appearance irrecoverably lost, he prayed in this manner, [Jonah 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.4); [Jonah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.7), and experienced a most unparalleled deliverance, [Jonah 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.10).

Victory over our spiritual enemies.

With what vehemence did Satan assault the Apostle Paul, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7). The afflicted saint cried with earnestness to the Lord Jesus, [2 Corinthians 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8); his troubles were immediately turned into triumphant exultations, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

Renewal after the divine image.

Nothing on earth does a believer desire so much as this; yet this shall be attained in the same way. An humble and believing view of Christ shall effect it, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

A peaceful death.

Stephen died by the hands of cruel and blood-thirsty enemies, [Acts 7:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.54); but he offered a humble and believing prayer to Christ, [Acts 7:59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.59), and his death was to him as a serene and peaceful sleep, [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60).

A glorious immortality.

He who died justly by the hands of the public executioner must have merited in a high degree the wrath of God, [Luke 23:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.41); nevertheless in his last hour he directed his eyes to Christ, [Luke 23:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.42); and that very day was he admitted with Christ to Paradise! [Luke 23:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.43).

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

Let none despair on account of the greatness of their sins, or of the judgments of God which are already inflicted on them. God will allow none to "seek his face in vain." Let every one then bewail "the plague of his own heart," and offer up believing prayers!

***~~#335~~***

***~~SOLOMON'S THANKSGIVING PRAYER~~***

***~~[1 Kings 8:54-61](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.54-61)~~***

"When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying: "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers. And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time."

To men, Solomon might appear most glorious when seated on his throne, and surrounded by all his courtiers; but in the eyes of God he never was so glorious, as when he was leading the devotions of all his people, and imploring blessings on them from above. Neither actuated by ostentation, nor restrained by shame, he erected a stage or pulpit in the court of the temple near the altar, and there in the midst of all the congregation kneeled down upon his knees, and with his hands stretched out to Heaven poured forth his soul in the devoutest supplications.

The prayer he uttered was of considerable length, and, as it should seem, the extemporaneous effusion of his own heart. How happy would it be, if all our kings were so disposed, or even if all the ministers of the sanctuary were alike earnest in their acknowledgment of God, and qualified to conduct from the abundance of their own hearts, the service of his sanctuary!

After having offered to God his prayer and supplication, he rose from his knees to bless the people. By "blessing them," we are not to suppose that he pretended to have any fullness in himself, whereby to make them blessed; it is not in man, however great, to make others blessed; he can only ministerially declare what God has promised, or implore in their behalf the blessing of God upon them. This is what was done by the priests of old, [Numbers 6:23-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 6.23-26), and this is what he did on this occasion.

The words in which he blessed them contain,

***~~I. An address to God.~~***

This consisted of two parts:

***~~1. A thanksgiving for mercies received.~~***

God had now fulfilled in its utmost extent the promises which he had given to Israel. "The whole land, from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, [Genesis 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.18) with [Deuteronomy 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.24)," was under Solomon's dominion. The most perfect rest and peace prevailed throughout the whole empire, [1 Kings 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 5.4); and a place was now erected, on a spot chosen by God himself, for his worship and service, [Deuteronomy 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.11). Of "all the promises which God had given by Moses, not one word had failed;" all was come to pass; and the whole nation enjoyed a state of unprecedented prosperity. For these things Solomon now "blessed the Lord," both in his own name, and in the name of all the people.

Have we received such blessings from the Lord? Let us then bless him too. Have we a peaceable enjoyment of God's ordinances, and freedom from the assaults of open enemies? Have we union also and harmony among ourselves? Let us be thankful for these mercies; it is not every Church that enjoys them; nor can anything but the peculiar favor of Heaven continue them to us.

But what if we have experienced an accomplishment of that promise of our Lord, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest?" What if we have obtained a victory over all our spiritual enemies, and are living in a sweet sense of God's love, and the habitual enjoyment of his presence? Shall not we bless the name of our God, yes, bless him too with all our faculties and all our powers?

***~~2. A prayer for the continuance of God's mercies.~~***

The presence of God with them comprehended every blessing that Solomon could desire; and therefore Solomon entreated God "never to leave them nor forsake them, verse 57." This alone could "incline their hearts" to *serve*the Lord, verse 58; this alone could secure to them a complete *enjoyment*of their happiness, verse 59; this alone could enable them to *glorify*their God in the world, verse 60.

And what can anyone desire more in your behalf? If "God is with you," and operates in you effectually for these ends and purposes, you are blessed, you must be blessed forever. On the contrary, "Woe be to them," says God, "when I depart from them! [Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 9.12)." Yes, if God departs, we shall have no more "inclination to walk in his ways," but shall surely "walk after the imagination of our own evil hearts;" we shall no more be able to "maintain our own cause" against our spiritual adversaries, but shall fall a prey to every lust; we shall no more constrain the world to admire "the exceeding grace of God in us," but shall rather cause them "to blaspheme his holy name.

May God therefore bless you with his continued presence and his effectual grace!

This address to God he concluded with,

***~~II. An exhortation to the people.~~***

Solomon would not dismiss the people without exhorting them to perform their duties to God, who had so loaded them with his richest benefits; he therefore besought them,

***~~1. To be committed to the Lord.~~***

Absolute perfection is not to be attained in this world, [Ecclesiastes 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.20); [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2). But there is a commitment which every Christian must attain: a commitment of desire, of purpose, and of endeavor. We should desire such a beauty in holiness as to long for the utmost possible attainment of it. We should desire to "be holy as God is holy," and "perfect as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect." At this too we should aim at: the great object of our lives should be to mortify everything that is contrary to God's will, and to get his law perfectly engraved upon our hearts. To be "cast into the very mold of the Gospel," and to be "renewed after the perfect image of our God in righteousness and true holiness," should be the ambition of our souls. After this also should we labor—never thinking that we have attained anything, while anything remains to be attained. This was the state of the Apostle Paul in [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14), and must be the state of every one that would be approved by his God, [Philippians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.15).

Is it thought by any, that, in requiring this, we require too much? I ask, For what has "God given us such exceeding great and precious promises," but that "by them we may be partakers of the divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)."

I ask again, What is the use which God teaches us to make of his promises? Is it not to "cleanse ourselves by their means 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)."

I ask yet further, What is the desire which every pious minister will feel in behalf of his people; and to what will he endeavor, both in his private prayers and his public labors, to bring them? Is it not, "that they may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God? [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)."

Away then with all apprehensions that we require too much; we require only what God requires, and what every soul that shall ever be saved, must desire. In actual attainments there will, in spite of our utmost exertions, be much lacking; but in desire, purpose, and endeavor—we must be perfect, not willingly harboring the smallest imperfection, [1 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9), but striving to "grow up into Christ in all things, as our living Head."

***~~2. To preserve continually the frame they now possessed.~~***

The people now, as well as their king, were in a very devout and heavenly frame; there was nothing they would not now have done, or sacrificed, for the honor of their God. Solomon therefore says to them, "Be committed to the Lord, as at this day."

Now there are times when every godly person has felt himself more especially alive to the concerns of eternity; he has been humbled in the dust under a sense of his own guilt and helplessness; he has been filled with admiration at the divine goodness to him; he has longed to have God ever with him, and to find all his happiness in the presence of his God.

If such, then, has ever been our state, is there not the same reason that it should be so now? Does God deserve less at our hands, than he did at the period referred to? Why then do we not feel the same towards him? Perhaps we may be disposed to look back upon such seasons with delight; but we should rather look upon all other seasons with shame and sorrow. O labor, brethren, to preserve upon your minds those better feelings which you have at any time experienced; and, instead of declining from them, to get them revived and strengthened from day to day!

Such is the blessing, which, were it at our disposal, we would bestow upon you; and such is the blessing which we entreat of God to confer on every one among you.

***~~#336~~***

***~~THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S VISIT TO SOLOMON~~***

***~~[1 Kings 10:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.6-9)~~***

She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness."

It frequently happens that when the mind has been raised in any extraordinary degree by the representations of others, its expectations are disappointed; either the excellencies which appeared so fascinating to others, have been over-rated; or they are found blended with such defects, as greatly lessen their value. This is particularly the case with respect to the characters of men; in estimating which, it is easy to conceive that our admiration may be too great, and our applause be too unqualified.

But, in the passage before us, we have an instance where report, though heightened to the utmost, fell short of the reality. The wisdom of Solomon had attracted the attention of all the nations around him; insomuch that people were sent from all the surrounding potentates, to ascertain whether the reports concerning him were true, [1 Kings 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.34). In the chapter before us, we are informed, that a queen of great power and authority came herself, in order to see with her own eyes, and hear with her own ears, the wonderful things which had been reported to her. Her testimony, after the fullest investigation, was, not only that all was true which had been told to her, but that the *half*had not been told to her; so greatly did the truth exceed her most optimistic expectations.

This circumstance deserves particular consideration, not merely for the honor of Solomon, but chiefly for the honor of Him whom Solomon prefigured, even of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us notice then,

***~~I. The surprise occasioned by an acquaintance with Solomon.~~***

We do not know the precise reports which the Queen of Sheba had heard; but they related principally, we apprehend, to the *wisdom*of Solomon. His splendor and magnificence indeed were unparalleled; but his wisdom was that which most of all induced her to come so far; for "she came to test him with hard questions," and "to commune with him of all that was in her heart." Now "his wisdom excelled that of all mankind, [1 Kings 4:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.30-31);" it was not confined to anyone branch of science, but embraced the whole extent of philosophy, natural and political, moral and religious:

***~~1. Solomon's wisdom extended to things natural.~~***

Universal nature seemed, as it were, to be open to his view, "He spoke of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals and of birds, and of creeping things, and of fish, [1 Kings 4:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.33)." The distinctive properties of each in their several classes were comprehended by him; but whether from study or from revelation, we do not know. Such knowledge however, though curious and entertaining, was probably in point of utility what he possessed. Still it could not fail to interest an inquisitive mind, and to excite a high admiration of him in the bosom of this intelligent queen.

***~~2. Solomon's wisdom extended to things political.~~***

The perfection of his laws,  
the equity of his administration,  
the penetration exercised by him in his judicial capacity,  
the order in which everything, whether in his civil or domestic concerns was arranged,  
the grandeur of his edifices,  
the splendor of his court,  
the peacefulness of his reign,  
the prosperity of his people,  
and the whole extent of his political economy  
—bespoke him almost more than human; and made the admiring queen envy the lowest of his servants who were honored with access to his presence, verse 4, 5, 8.

***~~3. Solomon's wisdom extended to things moral.~~***

He had spoken three thousand proverbs, and composed above a thousand songs, [1 Kings 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.32). What depths of wisdom were contained in these proverbs, we may judge from those which have come down to us. The whole subject of ethics was familiar to his mind, so that he needed not to draw conclusions in a way of rational argumentation, but was enabled to declare with unerring certainty the duty of man in every relation, and in every circumstance of life. The most difficult cases were easy to his comprehensive mind; and the clouds with which they were enveloped were dispelled by him as before the rising sun. We wonder not that, when she heard his discourses, she was lost in utter amazement.

***~~4. Solomon's wisdom extended to things religious.~~***

This, after all, was the wisdom by which the Queen of Sheba sought most to profit, "When she heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions, verse 1." Earnestly did she desire to be informed concerning the nature and perfections of God; and the way in which he was to be worshiped; and how a sinner might find acceptance with him. These and numberless other points Solomon no doubt opened to her with such clearness and perspicuity, as carried the fullest conviction to her mind.

Nor can we doubt but that as she would inquire respecting the sacrifices and offerings, he would point out to her the figurative nature, and typical intent, of everything that she beheld—the temple, its furniture, its ordinances, its ministers, its service altogether. Glorious would be the opportunity afforded him of commending to her the God of Israel, and of pointing out to her that Messiah in whom all these types should receive their accomplishment; and no doubt he availed himself of it.

Well therefore might such transcendent wisdom overwhelm her with astonishment, so that "she was overwhelmed, verse 5;" and well might she say, that "the half had not been told to her!"

Let us now turn from Solomon, to contemplate,

***~~II. The surprise which an experimental acquaintance with Jesus Christ will occasion.~~***

Our views must not be confined to Solomon; for beyond all doubt "a greater than Solomon is here!" Solomon was an eminent type of Christ; as is clear from many passages of Scripture, and especially the 72nd Psalm, which is not more applicable to Solomon in the letter of it, than it is to Christ in the spirit. Solomon was the first who could be called "a king, and a king's son;" and therefore a fit type of that Son of David who is "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

Now of Jesus are great things spoken in the Holy Scriptures; and as the Queen of Sheba "believed not the reports concerning Solomon, until she came to see him with her own eyes," so respecting Jesus it must be said, "Who has believed our report! [Romans 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.16)." But *if once we behold him with the eye of faith, we shall then indeed say that the half had not been told to us.*

***~~1. We are amazed at the glory of his person.~~***

Let us behold him in his whole office and character, and so behold him as to have any just conception of his excellency, and we shall be altogether lost in wonder, so that we will be "overwhelmed."

Even in his human nature, wherein the glory of his majesty is veiled, we are utterly astonished at all his spotless perfections. His wisdom, his goodness, his love, and all his other virtues, surpass our utmost conceptions.

In the view of him many hundreds of years before he came into the world, the Church exclaimed, "He is chief among ten thousand!" "he is altogether lovely! [Song of Solomon 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.10); [Song of Solomon 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16)."

In his divine nature, "he 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)."

In his mediatorial character, he is "the power of God and the wisdom of God! [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24)." He has within himself all fullness treasured up [Colossians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.24); nothing is lacking that can secure the happiness and salvation of his redeemed people. His meritorious sacrifice is a sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. His unspotted righteousness affords a robe, whereby all the fallen race of Adam may "cover their nakedness," and stand spotless in the presence of a holy God. In him is a fountain of all grace, from which every believer may receive an inexhaustible supply! [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16).

Let us only "behold, I say, his glory, as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)," and we shall immediately exclaim with the prophet, "How great is his goodness, how great is his beauty! [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.9); [Zechariah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.17)."

***~~2. We are amazed at the felicity of his people.~~***

This in particular was contemplated by the Queen of Sheba in reference to Solomon. After saying to him, "Your wisdom and your prosperity exceed the fame which I heard," she added, "How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! verse 7, 8."

But with how much greater propriety may this be said respecting the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ! Much is said of it indeed in the Scriptures, [Psalm 89:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.15-17); but little of it is believed, until it is known by actual experience. But let it once be felt, and truly we shall say, "The half had not been told to us!"

Indeed the Scriptures speak of it in this very view; their "peace passes all understanding;" and their "joy is unspeakable and full of glory." To this, as well as to the mysteries of faith, may we apply those words of the Apostle, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love him; but God has revealed them to us by his Spirit! [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10)."

It is to what is experienced in this world that those words are to be applied; but if we look forward to the eternal world, with what emphasis may we pronounce them then! *If the glory of Christ is so bright when beheld only through the dark medium of faith, how will it appear when we shall behold him face to face!*And if our happiness is so great now that we carry about with us a body of sin and death, what shall it be, when our corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and we shall possess without alloy the full fruition of our God! Happy, happy beyond conception shall we be, when we are enabled to say, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you!"

***~~This subject furnishes us with abundant matter,~~***

***~~1. For reproof.~~***

It was in this view that our Lord himself improved it in his day, [Matthew 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.42); and may not we take up the same complaint against you and say, "The Queen of Sheba shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here!"

*How little is Christ sought after and admired among us!*The Queen of Sheba counted no expense or trouble too great to obtain an acquaintance with Solomon; but we grudge any labor that may be necessary to bring us to an acquaintance with Christ. Almost anything is a sufficient excuse to keep us from the public ordinances, and especially to make us neglect the private duties of piety. Oh, let us blush and be ashamed, that when our means of access to Christ are so easy, we are so indifferent about him; that we rest contentedly without the knowledge of him, when, if we judged aright, "we should count all things but dung in comparison with it! [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8)."

The Queen of Sheba did not consider even the affairs of a large empire of sufficient importance to keep her from seeking an interview with Solomon. Just so, let nothing detain us from visiting the Lord Jesus. To sit at his feet and hear his gracious instructions should be regarded by us as "the one thing needful! [Luke 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.42)."

***~~2. For encouragement.~~***

That the Queen of Sheba derived much spiritual benefit from her visit to Solomon is manifest, from the manner in which she adored Jehovah for his mercy and grace in raising Solomon to the throne of Israel, verse 9. And will the Lord Jesus Christ allow anyone to "seek his face in vain?" Are we not told, "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord?" and, "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way."

Let us take encouragement and go unto him; for we have advantages which the Queen of Sheba had not. Solomon could impart knowledge to her, but could not enable her to comprehend it; but Jesus can both "open to us the Scriptures," and "open our understandings also to understand them." Yes, and if we go humbly unto him, he will return with us to our respective homes, and be our instructor even unto death.

Let us then "buy the truth," whatever it may cost us, and "not sell it" for the whole world!

Methinks the Queen of Sheba never afterwards regretted the labor she had bestowed on that great object; and I am sure that none who seek the Lord, shall ever have to complain that "they have labored in vain, or spent their strength for nothing! [Isaiah 49:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.4)."

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***~~SOLOMON'S FALL~~***

***~~[1 Kings 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.9)~~***

"The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice."

If we had beheld the temple of Solomon, with all its exquisite workmanship, destroyed, as soon as it was finished—methinks we should have wept over it as a calamity never to be forgotten. But we are now called to survey a far more grievous desolation, even the destruction of the fairest edifice that ever was raised—the soul of Solomon! Most eminently had the grace of God wrought in him, as all his preceding history informs us. Since the foundation of the world there was not a grander spectacle than that of Solomon elevated on a bronze platform in the midst of the temple, and crying unto God with bended knees and out-stretched hands in the behalf of himself and people to their latest posterity. But "how is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!"

We behold in nature some clouds occasionally obscuring the brightest sky, and sometimes even the meridian sun eclipsed; but here was such an eclipse as never had been seen, since Adam fell in paradise; here was the brightest day turned suddenly into the darkest night; the most eminent of saints relapsing into a state of most aggravated and abiding transgression!

Let us turn, like Abraham surveying the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah the morning after they were destroyed, [Genesis 19:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.27-28), and contemplate,

***~~I. The fall of Solomon.~~***

In order to get a just view of it, let us distinctly notice,

***~~1. How Solomon's fall began.~~***

It began the very instant he was raised to the throne, though in a way that was not perceived by him at the time. We do not condemn him for marrying Pharaoh's daughter, because we take for granted that she was a proselyte to the Jewish faith. That she was so, may be presumed from the very circumstance of his connection with her; for we cannot conceive that he would have so grossly violated the divine law as to marry a heathen woman, at the very time that his piety was so transcendently conspicuous. This presumption is confirmed by the circumstance, that among all the idolatrous temples that he built for his other wives, he never erected any for the idols of Egypt.

The evil of which he was guilty in the commencement of his reign was, the offering of sacrifice in high places, instead of confining himself to the altar which was in the tabernacle. We are decidedly of opinion that he should not have done this himself, nor should he have allowed his people to do it. Compare [1 Kings 3:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 3.1-3) with [Deuteronomy 12:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.2-6). We are persuaded that this error, continued as it was for eleven years at least, rendered him less averse than he would otherwise have been, to the erection of temples afterwards to heathen gods.

Other evils of his which gradually crept in were:  
the multiplying of gold and silver for himself;  
the multiplying of horses also, and that from Egypt;  
and above all, the multiplying of wives.

All of these things were forbidden in as plain and express a manner as could be conceived, [Deuteronomy 17:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.16-17). Yet as if he had never read any such prohibition in the Word of God, did he go on violating it from day to day:

In amassing *gold*, not, as David, for the Lord, but for his own aggrandizement; see [1 Kings 10:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.21).

In increasing *horses*; see [1 Kings 4:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.26); [1 Kings 10:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.26) and especially from Egypt; see [1 Kings 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.28).

In multiplying *wives*; see verse 3.

***~~2. To what an extent Solomon's fall proceeded.~~***

There was not anything more strongly prohibited in the Law than the forming of connections with heathen women, [Deuteronomy 7:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.3-4); yet it was not from among the women of his own nation that he took his wives and concubines, but from among the "Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites." What an astonishing infatuation was here! Perhaps in the first two or three instances he might hope to convert them, as Pharaoh's daughter had been converted; but after having broken down the fence of the divine law, he roved afterwards at pleasure throughout the world. Soon the consequences which might have been expected, ensued; his heart was drawn away from God; and he not only allowed them to commit idolatry in the land, but he even favored their idolatry, and actually built temples for their gods, and that too even in Jerusalem itself, where Jehovah's temple was; nor did he do this only for one or two whom he peculiarly favored, but "for all his strange wives;" yes, incredible as it may appear, he actually united with them in the worship of their idols, and alienated to them the affections due only to the God of Israel! verse 4-8. His wives turned away his heart after other gods …he went after Ashtoreth, etc.

Who that had seen Solomon at the dedication of the temple, would ever have conceived that he should fall at last to such a degraded state as this!

***~~3. With what aggravations Solomon's fall was attended.~~***

Solomon had from a child been eminently beloved of the Lord; God had even given him the name *Jedidiah*in token of that love, [2 Samuel 12:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.24-25). He had been especially appointed to build the temple of the Lord, [1 Chronicles 22:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 22.9-10); and both before and after he had built the temple, was honored with peculiar visits from God himself! Compare [1 Kings 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 3.5); [1 Kings 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 9.2). In the latter of these visits God had strongly warned him against the very evils which he afterwards committed, [1 Kings 9:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 9.3-7); and yet did Solomon very speedily rush into the commission of them. He had reigned at least twenty years before the second visit, [1 Kings 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 9.1); [1 Kings 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 9.10). Now these things God himself notices as aggravations of his guilt; he complains that Solomon did these things "after God had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not do it." *Surely such ingratitude and impiety were scarcely ever combined in any other man!*

***~~4. With what consequences Solomon's fall was followed.~~***

"God was angry with him," as well he might be; and he declared to Solomon that the kingdom of which he had rendered himself so unworthy, should be taken from him, and given to a servant of his, verse 11. This judgment however should be both deferred and mitigated; yet not for his sake, but for his father David's sake.

As great as David's crimes had been in the matter of Uriah, he had never for a moment countenanced idolatry; and therefore for his sake should two of the tribes be reserved for his descendants, while the other ten should be rent away from them; and for his sake should the evil be deferred, until Solomon himself should be removed into the eternal world, verse 12, 13. Thus was the very mitigation of the punishment as humiliating, as the denunciation of it was painful.

Immediately did God stir up adversaries to Solomon, to disquiet his peaceful reign, and to embitter the remainder of his days, verse 14, 23, 26-33. What the outcome of his transgression was in the eternal world, we cannot certainly declare. We hope and believe that Solomon repented, and was forgiven; (the Book of Ecclesiastes seems to have been written alter this period, and to contain the evidence of his repentance,) but there is no express mention of any such thing; so that it must remain uncertain until the day of judgment, whether he was not left to suffer the everlasting displeasure of an offended God. What a fearful thought! that so bright a sun should set at last under so dark a cloud!

Inexpressibly awful is the account here given us. Let us now proceed to consider,

***~~II. The instruction to be gathered from Solomon's fall.~~***

Never was a history more replete with instruction than this. We may learn from it the following lessons:

***~~1. Temporal prosperity is very unfavorable for spiritual advancement.~~***

Doubtless the facility with which Solomon could gratify all his natural appetites, rendered him the more easy prey to his own corruptions; and*as his carnal gratifications increased, his spiritual affections would decay*. And do we not find it thus in all ages?

Adversity has been a source of benefit to thousands; but few have ever been permanently quickened by prosperity. If we look into the Church of God, we shall find innumerable instances of people who have suffered loss in their souls, in proportion as their wealth or honors have been increased, "The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things have choked the word, and rendered it unfruitful!" The account given of Jeshurun in [Deuteronomy 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.15), contains the history of many; over whose tombs it might be inscribed, "The prosperity of fools destroys them! [Proverbs 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.32)."

Let us not then covet earthly gains or honors; they are but as "thick clay" around the feet of one who runs in a race, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6), or as a garment that obstructs the motion of his, legs [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1).

***~~2. However advanced any man may be in age or piety, he is still in danger of falling!~~***

It is said of Solomon, that, "when he was old, his wives turned away his heart, verse 4." Had it been in the days of his youth, we would have the less wondered at his folly; because versatility of mind is incident to that time of life. But after years of wisdom and piety, to turn in old age to such extreme folly and wickedness, what shall we say? Well may we exclaim, "Lord, what is man?" Can anything speak more loudly to us than this? Can anything more strongly enforce that warning of the Apostle, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls?" O "let us not be high-minded, but fear." "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."

This is certain, that, as our wickedness shall not be remembered if we truly turn from it, so "neither shall our righteousness be remembered if we turn from that." It is not he who "runs well for a season," but "he who *endures*unto the end, who shall be saved." If we turn back, at whatever period of our life it be, "we turn back unto perdition." Let all of us then cry to God, "to hold up our goings in his paths, that our footsteps slip not." Our motto to the last must be, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" To all then, whatever eminence they may have attained, I would say, as our Lord did to his disciples, not only "Remember Lot's wife!" but, Remember the fall of Solomon!

***~~3. Smaller sins, if not guarded against in time, will issue in the greatest sins!~~***

Solomon might frame some excuse to himself for the sins in which his fall commenced:

He worshiped on high places, because the temple was not yet built.

He multiplied wives and concubines, because his father had had several before him.

He procured much gold, and a multitude of horses, because they would add to the splendor of his court, and perhaps also to his security.

But he found at last what a dangerous thing it is to tamper with sin, or to deviate knowingly even a hair's breadth from the divine commandments.

***~~Sin will soon blind the eyes, and harden the heart, and sear the conscience!~~***

***~~Sin is a slippery slope, whereon, if we fall, our descent may soon be accelerated beyond a possibility of recovery!~~***

A leak may appear but a small thing; yet it will sink a ship, if left without timely repair.

The voice of inspiration suggests to us, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles!"

Let us not then account any sin small; let us watch and pray against every deviation from the divine commands; and, from a sense of our own blindness, let us pray to God, "Search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

***~~4. Every sin we commit is aggravated by the mercies we have received.~~***

This, as has been observed, was intimated by God in the case of Solomon; and the universal voice of Scripture attests the same. "If our Lord had not come and spoken to the Jews, they would have been comparatively without sin;" but his discourses and his miracles rendered them altogether without excuse; insomuch, that "it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that generation."

In like manner we are told that the superior information of a servant who knows his Lord's will and does it not, will cause him to be beaten with more stripes, than he whose ignorance forms some kind of plea for his neglect.

What then will be the state of us who have had such ample instruction, and such repeated warnings? If our minds have never been awakened, then our misimprovement of the means of grace has involved us in the deeper guilt. But if the Lord has ever "manifested himself to us as he does not unto the world," and we have turned back from following him, our guilt is proportionably increased; so that "it would have been better for us never to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to turn from it."

***~~#338~~***

***~~REVOLT OF THE TEN TRIBES~~***

***~~[1 Kings 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.24)~~***

"This thing is from Me."

In histories written by men, outcomes are always traced to human efforts and sagacity; but in the inspired history everything is traced to God. *We always find, even in things apparently most contingent, a secret over-ruling Agent, accomplishing his own purposes of mercy or of judgment, and operating with unerring wisdom to the production of his own ends.*As "every good and perfect gift" is represented as "coming from above," so the prophet asks respecting things most calamitous, "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it? [Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.6)." In the account given us of the revolt of the ten tribes, and their establishment as a separate kingdom under Jeroboam, the proceedings of all the different parties appeared to spring wholly from themselves; but God says of the whole together, "This thing is from Me." We will,

***~~I. Confirm the assertion of the text.~~***

We will begin with stating what was "the thing" here referred to.

After the death of Solomon, the different tribes assembled at Shechem, to acknowledge Rehoboam as his successor to the throne. But previous to their investing him with regal authority, they sought from him a promise that he would lighten their burdens, and redress their grievances. That they had been aggrieved and burdened in some degree, we may easily conceive; because the keeping of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, together with the building of temples for them all, and maintaining of worship for so many idols, in addition to all the expenses of his own government—must have necessitated Solomon to lay heavy taxes upon his subjects! But still the taxes were not such an intolerable grievance, when it is considered how much wealth Solomon had brought into the kingdom, and what peace and prosperity they had enjoyed during the whole of his reign.

Had they complained of the licentiousness and idolatry which Solomon had introduced, and sought the removal of those great abuses, they would have acted well; but it was not about God's honor that they were concerned; they regarded nothing but their own interests; and, like the generality of discontented patriots, they overlooked all the blessings they had enjoyed under his government, and were unreasonably clamorous about the taxes levied for its support.

Rehoboam took three days to consider of the proposal; and by this delay he at once discovered his unwillingness to comply with their wishes, and gave them time to form and mature a conspiracy against him. He first consulted the old men who had been his father's counselors; but, not relishing their sage advice, he consulted his own young companions; who recommended rather a system of intimidation. This was more congenial with his own pride, but it exasperated to the utmost those whom by conciliatory measures he might easily have won, verse 5-14.

The outcome was such as might have been foreseen; the ten tribes would no longer acknowledge any allegiance to the house of David, but appointed a king of their own, even Jeroboam, whom they had sent for out of Egypt, to be a head, or center of union to them, on the present emergency, verse 2, 3. The contemptuous way in which they spoke of David was most ungrateful, seeing that his whole life had been spent in their service, verse 16; but *past obligations weigh but little with men irritated by a sense of present injuries*.

The mode adopted to appease their minds, was no less absurd than the measure by which they had been incensed. Rehoboam sent Adoniram to confer with them; but him they immediately stoned to death, verse 18.

Rehoboam then fled to Jerusalem, and raised a large army of a hundred and eighty thousand men from among the two remaining tribes, to reduce the rebels by force. But God sent a prophet to him, and to the whole army, forbidding them to proceed, and declaring that the whole matter had been ordered by God himself, "Thus says the Lord, You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren, the children of Israel; return every man to his own house; for this thing is from Me."

That this thing was from God, we now proceed to show.

Hitherto nothing had appeared to be from God, except the sending of a prophet to declare his will respecting the prosecution of the war; but the whole was really from God:  
in its rise,  
in its progress,  
and in its termination.

**1. This thing was from God, in its rise.**On account of Solomon's transgressions, God declared to Solomon himself that he would rend the ten tribes out of the hand of his son, and give them to his servant, [1 Kings 11:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.11-13). He sent also a prophet to Jeroboam, to announce to him, by a very expressive emblem, that ten of the tribes would be taken from Solomon on account of his iniquities, and be given to him, [1 Kings 11:26-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.26-35). These matters were well known to all Israel; for Solomon had on this account sought to kill Jeroboam, [1 Kings 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.40); and constrained him to flee to Egypt for protection; and from thence had the ten tribes sent for him as soon as Solomon was dead.

Jeroboam was indeed of an ambitious turn of mind, particularly after he had been raised by Solomon from a low station to a place of great honor and authority, [1 Kings 11:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.37); but it was the declaration of God's purpose that called it forth into activity, and directed all the ten tribes to look to him as their future head.

**2. This thing was from God, in its progress**. The complaints of the tribes, and the infatuation of the young monarch, might be supposed to originate wholly with themselves, and to spring entirely from the discontent of the one, and from the other's pride. It is true that God did not infuse these evil dispositions into their minds; but it is also true that he allowed these dispositions to rage, and the collusion to arise, on purpose that he might accomplish his own purposes by them. This is expressly asserted in the history before us, "So the king did not listen to the people; for it was a turn of events from the LORD, that He might establish His word, which the LORD spoke through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat, [1 Kings 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.15)."

**3. This thing was from God, in its termination**. "This thing (from first to last) is from Me;" and, that it was from him, he showed, by constraining Rehoboam, and the whole army that he had raised, to acquiesce immediately in the loss they had sustained, and to rest satisfied with having all the other tribes for rivals and enemies, whom hitherto they had had for friends and brethren.

Now this kind of statement is by no means uncommon in the Holy Scriptures. *God is often represented as overruling both men and devils for the accomplishment of his own purposes*. God had determined to deliver the Amorites into the hand of Israel, though he would not deliver into their hand either Moab or Edom. Hence he influenced the minds of both the Moabites and Edomites to supply his people with food for money, that they might be spared; and equally influenced the minds of the Amorites to refuse that support, that they might be destroyed, [Deuteronomy 2:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 2.28-30). In like manner he left king Amaziah to disregard the warnings of the prophet, whom he had sent to remonstrate with him about his idolatries, "because God had determined to destroy him! [2 Chronicles 25:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.14-16)."

The *agency of evil spirits*is also sometimes called in for the same end. In the case of Ahab, a whole host of them were permitted of God to stimulate the false prophets to give such counsel to Ahab as should infallibly terminate in his ruin! 1 Kings 22:22-23.

In a word, the whole conspiracy of Jews and Gentiles against our blessed Lord, under the same infallible direction, accomplished in every particular, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur! [Acts 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27-28)."

The doctrine of our text therefore, though strange at first sight, is no other than what the Scriptures plainly and universally assert.

Let us then proceed to,

***~~II. Make some reflections upon the assertion of the text.~~***

In contemplating Jehovah as he is represented in this place, we must of necessity observe:

***~~1. The sovereignty of God!~~***

God gave the kingdom to Saul; then tore it from him, and gave it to David and Solomon; then reduced it to two tribes only, in the hands of Rehoboam, giving the other ten tribes to Jeroboam. In all this he acted sovereignly, disposing of it according to the counsel of his own will. And thus he does in all the kingdoms upon earth! [Daniel 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.21), "He does according to his will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What are you doing! [Daniel 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.17); [Daniel 4:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.35)." Nor is this true in reference to kingdoms only; he disposes equally of families and individuals, "He is the judge; he puts down one—and sets up another! [Psalm 75:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 75.7)."

How effectually does this consideration cut off all occasion for pride in those who are elevated, and for complaint in those who are debased! For as, on the one hand, "What do you have, that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)." So, on the other hand, every sufferer must say, "I was still and opened not my mouth, because God is the one who has done this!" Seeing then of what practical use this reflection is, let us recur to it on all occasions, *for the humbling of our minds in prosperity, and the quieting of them in adversity.*

***~~2. The mysteriousness of God's influence!~~***

In all the circumstances before mentioned, the different people acted freely; and yet, as we have seen, were overruled by God in every step they took. How incomprehensible is this to our finite understandings! We know not how spirit acts upon matter; how then can we expect to know in what manner the Spirit of God acts upon our spirits! Yet if we know from experience that our own spirit does assuredly act upon our material body, we may be equally assured, upon the testimony of God, that there is a spiritual influence exercised by him upon the minds of his people.

There is indeed a considerable difference between the mode in which that is exercised towards the godly, and the ungodly. In influencing the *ungodly*, he merely gives scope for the exercise of dispositions which already exist in their own minds. But, in influencing the *godly*, he first infuses holy dispositions into their minds, and then calls forth those dispositions into exercise by the operation of his own grace, exciting and strengthening the soul for the duties to which it is called.

Do we not then see, that God alone is to be feared? that, if we secure his favor, not all the universe can hurt us? Let a Laban, or an Esau, come forth against us—God can restrain his rage! [Genesis 31:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 31.29); [Genesis 33:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 33.1); [Genesis 33:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 33.4), and make "the wrath of man to praise him!" Or let an enraged army determine to destroy us, he can by a single word assuage their malice, and avert the storm. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases! [Proverbs 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.1).

"If therefore God is for us—then we may be sure that none can be against us."

***~~3. The infallibility of God's Word!~~***

In the instance before us God's Word was fulfilled, notwithstanding that all the parties strove to counteract it. The ten tribes would have submitted to Rehoboam's yoke, if only he had spoken kindly to them at first; they had no design in the first instance to separate from him. The advice of the young men was given with a view to keep the people in subjection by fear; and the determination of the army was to reduce them by force. Thus all endeavored to preserve the kingdom entire—yet all were accessory to the division of it.

Thus shall every Word of God be fulfilled in its season. If that did not fail which depended, so to speak, on the voluntary actions of men, much less shall that which shall be executed by God alone. He has told us that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of Heaven;" but that "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, with all the people that forget God!" Shall either of those declarations fall to the ground? No; not a jot or tittle of them shall ever fail. O that we may be wise, and learn to "tremble at the Word of God," while yet we may escape his threatenings, and secure the possession of his promised inheritance!

***~~#339~~***

***~~JEROBOAM'S IDOLATRY REPROVED~~***

***~~[1 Kings 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 13.4)~~***

"When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, "Seize him!" But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back."

To be raised to a situation of eminence and authority is generally thought a subject of blessing; but if preferment is not accompanied with a proportionable increase of grace to fit us for it, it is rather to be dreaded than desired. *Distinctions of every kind open a wider sphere for the exercise of our own corruptions, and too frequently become to the possessors of them an occasion of deeper condemnation.*

This is strongly illustrated in the case of *Pharaoh*, who was raised up to the throne of Egypt on purpose that he might have an opportunity of showing all that was in his heart, and that God's power might be displayed and magnified in his destruction! [Romans 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17).

In like manner *Jeroboam*was raised to the throne of Israel, not, alas! for any benefit either to himself or others, but for the ultimate augmentation of his own guilt and misery. While in a humble situation, he was industrious, and trustworthy, 1 Kings 11:28; but when he was preferred to a higher post, he became ambitious, [1 Kings 10:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.3-7), turbulent, rebellious, [2 Chronicles 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 13.6). And when he was placed on the throne of Israel, he drew away that whole people to idolatry; and has from that hour been never mentioned but with abhorrence, as the man "that caused Israel to sin." In considering the account here given of him, we shall notice,

***~~I. Jeroboam's unbelieving expedient.~~***

***~~Scarcely was Jeroboam raised to the throne, before he established idolatry throughout his dominions.~~***

Wishing to make the breach between Israel and Judah irreparable, he determined to cut off all fellowship between them; and to establish a worship of his own devising, that the people might not go up any longer to worship at Jerusalem. He knew that it would be in vain to prohibit religion altogether; but that to establish a false religion would be comparatively easy; since, *if men have something with which to satisfy their own minds, they are not very scrupulous about inquiring what is agreeable to the mind of God*.

Having recently come out of Egypt, he introduced the idols that were there worshiped, even golden calves; and set them up in Dan, and Bethel. One would have supposed that such an innovation would have shaken his throne to its foundation; but it seems to have created no uneasiness at all, nor to have produced one single remonstrance throughout the land.

Do we not in this behold a true picture of human nature in every age and place? *The worst of men must have some forms of religion, by the observance of which they may satisfy their own consciences; and the easier and cheaper their religion is, the more suited it will be to their taste!*To be told they need not comply with the self-denying commands of God, [1 Kings 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.28), will be agreeable to their corrupt hearts, "Spare yourself!" is to them a gratifying advice; and, wherever the Gospel is faithfully administered, the effect of this advice is clearly seen; the express commands of God oppose, in many instances, but a feeble barrier to the solicitations of carnal ease.

***~~To this idolatry, Jeroboam was instigated by unbelief.~~***

He was afraid lest his subjects, by going up to Jerusalem at the stated feasts, should be drawn away from him, and be induced to return to their former prince. Nor were these fears altogether groundless. The very exercises of religion would tend to convince them that they had sinned in casting off the yoke of Rehoboam; and the familiar fellowship which they would have with the other two tribes, would tend to reconcile their minds to the idea of being again united with them under one head.

But Jeroboam was bound not to listen to any such considerations as these, because he had the express promise of God, that "his house should be built up, like the house of David, [1 Kings 11:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.38)," provided he would walk in the path of duty. This was a sufficient security to him, that the evil which he dreaded would never happen, while he remained faithful to his God. In God therefore he should have put his trust. But he gave way to unbelief, and sought for that in the violation of God's commands, which was only to be obtained in the observance of them. Yes, he madly sought the establishment of his throne by the commission of those very crimes which had subverted the throne of Solomon!

This is a weakness to which even the best of men have yielded on some occasions; the great father of the faithful himself repeatedly denied his wife through fear, as Isaac also did; and Jacob gained by deceit and falsehood the blessing, which he could not wait to receive in God's own time and way. Butsuch *unbelief, even in the smallest instances, is most sinful*; and, in the instance before us, it brought the curse of God upon that whole people. Let us *therefore guard against the influence of unbelief on our hearts; for its suggestions are always evil, and its effects are uniformly destructive!*

His conduct, when reproved for this device, leads us to consider,

***~~II. Jeroboam's vindictive wrath.~~***

***~~A man of God was sent from Judah to reprove Jeroboam.~~***

God had decreed that the utmost indignity should be offered to the altar at Bethel, where Jeroboam was now officiating in his own person. He had appointed the priests and sacrifices, together with the sacred feasts, without any reference to the divine commands, having "devised them out of his own heart;" and now he was warned before all the people, that the very priests who offered their sacrifices upon it, should have their own bones burnt upon it by a prince of the house of David, whose name was Josiah.

Now it is remarkable that no king of the house of David had a son named Josiah, for the space of three hundred years; and that then it was a wicked king, [1 Kings 11:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.38)—who so named his son; so far was man from making any attempt to fulfill this prophecy. But God had ordained that such a one should m due time arise; and that he should execute what was now foretold; and, as a certain pledge of its ultimate accomplishment, the altar was miraculously split apart in the very presence of Jeroboam, and "the ashes that were upon it were poured out! verse 3, 5." This was humiliating to Jeroboam, not only on account of the indignity that would be offered to his altar, but because its being offered by one of the house of David was a pledge, that Judah should regain the ascendant, and thereby be enabled to execute the threatened judgments.

***~~This, instead of humbling Jeroboam, incensed him in the highest degree.~~***

Instantly "he stretched out his hand to lay hold" on the man of god, determining probably to put him to death. Thus it is that the carnal heart is ever ready to rise against God. Men will insult God by every means in their power; yet, if reproved for it by a servant of the Most High, they account it an indignity, to be expiated only by the death of the offender. This was strongly exemplified in Jeremiah, and John the Baptist, [Jeremiah 26:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.7-8); [Jeremiah 26:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.11); [Matthew 14:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.3-5); [Matthew 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.10). Indeed in every company we go into, we see the hand stretched out by wicked men against everyone who dares to advocate the cause of God; Not that the servants of God are on this account to refrain from bearing their testimony against iniquity; they must do so wherever they are, without fearing the face of man, or regarding any consequences that may come upon them.

This rage of his brought on him, what we are next to consider,

***~~III. Jeroboam's exemplary punishment.~~***

***~~God instantly smote his arm, so that he could not pull it in again to him.~~***

On many occasions has God vindicated the cause of his afflicted people, and shown himself the avenger of their wrongs. Ahab threatened Micaiah; but God cut him off, according to Micaiah's word. Pashur smote Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks; but God "soon made him a terror to himself, [Jeremiah 20:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 20.2-4)."

In truth, *God regards everything that is done against his people as done to himself*. When Paul was persecuting the saints, the language of Jesus to him was, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

We do not indeed expect that God will often interpose in the visible manner that he did in the instance before us; but he will record everything in the book of his remembrance, and requite every man according to his works. Then shall it be seen, that, however contemptible the saints may now appear, "It would have been better for a man to have a millstone hanged about his neck and be cast into the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of those little ones who believe in Christ." "He who touches you," says God, "touches the apple of my eye!"

***~~This proud persecutor now was constrained to ask for the prayers of the man of God, whom he had just before endeavored to destroy.~~***

Thus was Pharaoh reduced to seek the intercession of Moses; and thus are many among ourselves compelled in a season of adversity to desire the prayers of those very ministers, whom in time of prosperity they have reviled and persecuted. And happy will it be for those who find their error now, and have grace given them to repent of it; for assuredly *those who will not humble themselves before God in this world, will be made monuments of God's wrath to all eternity!*

***~~Improvement.~~***

***~~1. Let nothing ever induce us to sin against God.~~***

The hope of preserving his temporal interests led Jeroboam into all his sins; and similar hopes are apt to produce the like baneful influence on us. But supposing we should succeed, what can repay us for the loss of the divine favor? To adhere with steadfastness to the path of duty is our truest wisdom. *While faithfully serving God, we may safely leave all events in his hands*. If we suffer for well doing, we may console ourselves with this reflection, that to lose by virtue is infinitely better than to gain by sin. The losses of believers will be soon made up in the eternal world; but the gains of unbelievers will terminate in everlasting woe!

***~~2. If we have sinned at any time, let us be thankful for reproof.~~***

How thankful should Jeroboam have been to the man of god, who at the peril of his life declared the unalterable purpose of his God! So should all be who are reproved for sin. It is no pleasing task to denounce the judgments of God against sin or sinners; but it is necessary; and it is at the peril of his own soul, if the watchman fails to warn the citizens of their approaching danger. A necessity is laid upon God's ministers; and woe be to them, if they neglect their duty! Let reproof then be ever welcome to you; and let all watch over each other with tender love, and inflexible fidelity.

***~~#340~~***

***~~THE DISOBEDIENT MAN OF GOD SLAIN~~***

**[1 Kings 13:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 13.26)**

"When the prophet who had brought him back from his journey heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who defied the word of the LORD. The LORD has given him over to the lion, which has mauled him and killed him, as the word of the LORD had warned him."

*It frequently happens, that those who are enabled to maintain their steadfastness in more arduous circumstances, are surprised and overcome in situations of less difficulty.*Noah and Lot, while living in the midst of ungodly men, were circumspect and exemplary in the highest degree; but when freed from those restraints, and enjoying repose in the bosom of their families, they fell, and greatly dishonored their profession.

The case of the disobedient man of God was not indeed to be compared with theirs in point of enormity; but, in withstanding greater temptations, and failing when his victory appeared complete, he exhibits another instance of human instability. Much indeed is to be said for him, because he was deceived; but his *history affords a solemn warning unto all*. In illustration of it we shall consider:

***~~I. The character of the seducing old prophet.~~***

Many have thought him to be a pious man; and certainly there are many features in his character which have a favorable aspect. He is called "an old prophet," which intimates that God had made use of him in revealing his will to men. He expressed a very high regard for the man of God who came out of Egypt, and, with considerable trouble to himself, sought to enjoy communion with him. Beyond a doubt he was at that time inspired by God, because he confirmed with divine authority the prediction that had been delivered, respecting the burning of men's bones on Jeroboam’s altar; an event that did not take place till after the expiration of three hundred years. When he heard that the man of God whom he had deceived was dead, he went boldly, and as it were in faith, up to the very face of the lion, and took away from him the corpse, and returned with it to his own house. For the loss of so good a man he greatly mourned; and he determined to honor him to the utmost of his power. He interred his body in his own tomb; he wrote an inscription over it to commemorate his fidelity, and to record the prophecy he had delivered; (which, considering the offence it might give to Jeroboam, was no small instance of holy zeal.) And finally, he desired that his bones might be laid by the side of that pious man of God, to intimate, that he desired to have his portion with him at the resurrection of the just.

As to the *deceit*practiced by him to obtain the society of that godly man, it may be said, that, though wrong in itself, it proceeded from love, and was a kind of pious fraud, for the obtaining of a privilege he could not otherwise enjoy.

But after all, if we candidly consider the other parts of his character, we cannot but pronounce him a wicked man. For,

***~~1. He forbore to testify against the sin of others.~~***

That he was a prophet, there is no doubt, even as Balaam had been before him. But to what purpose was he endued with a spirit of prophecy, if not to exert himself in reproving sin, and in maintaining the cause of God in the world? Was that a time to be silent, when idolatry was being established throughout the land, and God himself was set aside as no longer worthy of men's regard? When God had set him there as a light, was he to put his light under a bushel? Should he not rather have "raised his voice on high, and shown the house of Israel their transgressions?" Yet, behold, no testimony did he bear against the reigning abominations; he was "a dumb dog that could not bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber! [Isaiah 56:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.10-11)."

Methinks, if God had ever enjoined him to be silent, (as on some occasions he has done, [Ezekiel 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 3.26),) his experience should have accorded with that of Jeremiah, who tells us, that "God's Word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot! [Jeremiah 20:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 20.9)."

But no such feelings had this old prophet; he was content to let all go on their own way, provided he might but enjoy his ease; and therefore he was no better than an idol shepherd, against whom are denounced the heaviest woes! [Zechariah 11:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.17). The *watchman*who omits to give warning of the approaching enemy, and the *shepherd*who cares not for his flock, are among the most faulty of characters, and the most injurious of mankind, [Ezekiel 33:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.1-9); [Ezekiel 34:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.1-10).

***~~2. He countenanced sin in his own children.~~***

Every parent is bound to "bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" and every godly man can have that testimony from God which Abraham had, "I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, [Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19)." But how did this prophet act? Did he restrain his sons? Did he insist that they should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them? [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11)." No; when they had attended the idolatrous service, they came home and told everything to their father, assured that they would meet with no rebuke from him, nor receive at his hands any testimony of his displeasure. What pretensions then could he have to piety?

*Eli*had reproved the impieties of his sons; yet, because he had not authoritatively interposed to prevent or punish their abominations, God visited him with a very signal judgment. How reprehensible then must this prophet have been, who both connived at, and consented to, a crime, for which he was bound by the law to put even his own children to death, [Deuteronomy 13:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.6-9).

Let parents know, that if, by neglecting to "provide for their own household they deny the faith and become worse than infidels," much more must they incur the heaviest guilt by neglecting to provide for their eternal interests.

***~~3. He even tempted another to the commission of sin.~~***

Here his conduct was most reckless and cruel. He knew how steadfastly the man of God had resisted every temptation, and had withstood every inducement either of hope or fear; and behold, he calls falsehood to his aid, and pretends to a divine commission, in order that he may prevail to divert the holy man from his purpose, and to involve him in sin. Nor do we find that, when he was inspired to denounce the judgments of God against him for his transgression, he ever humbled himself, or implored pardon for his offence; methinks, the least he could have done would have been to intercede with God, as David did for his suffering people, "Let your hand, I beg you, be against me, and against my father's house, and not against this poor man whom I have deceived! [2 Samuel 24:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.17)." But he felt no such compunction, notwithstanding the enormity of his offence.

Unhappy he, who was thus led to cause the man of God to sin! But unhappier far that wicked man, who cast the stumbling-block before him, [Matthew 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.7). He probably thought it but a light matter to deceive a person in so small a point as this; but, if to tempt a Nazarite with wine was no light sin, [Amos 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 2.12), neither could this be light, "where the guilt of falsehood and blasphemy was superadded to that of causing his brother to offend."

The success of the seducer leads us next to contemplate,

***~~II. The fate of the seduced man of God.~~***

There our proud hearts are almost ready to sit in judgment upon God. But "his ways are in the deep;" "neither does he give account of any of his matters;" and whether we discern the equity of his dispensations or not, it befits us to silence every murmuring thought with this, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right!" Certainly we cannot but compassionate the fate of the unhappy man of God, when we see him falling a victim to the divine displeasure; nevertheless we derive from it much important instruction.

The judgment inflicted on him shows us:

***~~1. That no command of God is to be trifled with.~~***

The command not to eat bread or drink water in that place might appear small; but, however small in itself, it was sanctioned by the same authority as the greatest command. That there are degrees of importance in a moral view between one command and another, is certain; but as bearing the stamp of divine authority, all are alike, and to be regarded by us with equal reverence, [James 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.11). Our Lord informs us, that "whoever shall break one of the *least*of his commandments, and teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven, [Matthew 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.19)," or, as that expression seems to import, be the furthest from the kingdom of Heaven.

Accordingly we find in Scripture very heavy judgments inflicted for, what might be considered, very small offences.

The man who gathered sticks upon the Sabbath-day was stoned to death by God's express command.

Uzzah, who stretched forth his hand to support the tottering ark, was "struck dead for his error."

Let us therefore not presume to violate any commandment under the idea of its being but a small command, or a venial offence; for we behold in the instance before us, that God is "a jealous God," and will vindicate the honor of his insulted law.

***~~2. That the more nearly we are related to God, the more aggravated is every sin that we commit against him.~~***

It might have been hoped, that so small a sin, committed so inadvertently, by one who was actively engaged in God's service, might have passed unnoticed; but, on the contrary, he was punished, while the idolatry of Jeroboam, and the impiety of the old prophet, were overlooked! But God has taught us that "judgment shall begin at the house of God! [Ezekiel 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.6);" and that the more distinguished we have been by his unmerited favors, the more certainly shall our transgressions be visited upon us, [Amos 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.2).

Of this we have a most remarkable instance in the case of *Moses*, who for one inadvertent word was excluded from the land of Canaan; nor could any entreaties of Moses get the sentence reversed. *Let us not then presume upon our relation to God, or upon the mercies we have received from him, but rather be the more fearful of offending him, in proportion to the kindness he has exercised towards us.*

***~~3. That there is a time coming when the present inequalities of the divine dispensations shall be rectified.~~***

The sight of such lenity exercised towards the two great offenders, and such apparent severity towards this holy man of God, naturally leads our minds forward to a day of future retribution, when rewards and punishments shall be dispensed with impartial justice and unerring wisdom!

At present, the saints are "chastened; but it is that they may not be condemned with the world;" whereas the ungodly are in many instances unpunished; but "are reserved unto the day of judgment to be punished;" being left in the meantime to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath!"

Whatever therefore may now appear inexplicable to us, let us wait to have it cleared up at that day, when the whole assembled universe shall confess, "True and righteous are your judgments, Lord God Almighty! [Revelation 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.7)."

***~~From this subject we will take occasion to suggest some useful advice.~~***

***~~1. Guard against conforming to the world.~~***

This holy man of God was forbidden to eat bread or drink water in that idolatrous land, or even to return by the way that he came into it; and this was to show the people that he would not have the smallest communion with them, or any acquaintance with their ways.

The same precise conduct is not enjoined to us, nor indeed would it be practical; for then, as the Apostle says, "we must need go out of the world." But the spirit of that conduct must be found in us; we must "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds." We are commanded to "come out of the world, and be separate, and not to touch the unclean thing;" and the reason of this injunction is assigned to us, namely, that "the believer can no more have communion with the unbeliever than light with darkness, or Christ with Belial."

Our Lord constantly characterizes his followers in this way, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Let us remember then that we are merely sent here for a little time to fulfill the particular duties assigned us, and that our home and our rest are in a better world!

***~~2. Be careful whom you select for your acquaintances.~~***

As we are not to select our friends from among the openly profane, so must we be careful whom we confide in even among the religious world. It is not every person who makes a profession of religion who will make a profitable companion. There are many who "have a name to live, and yet are dead;" and many "profess that they know God, but in works deny him." John cautions us well on this head, "Brethren, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; for many false prophets are gone out into the world, [1 John 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.1)."

Had the man of God inquired into the character of the old prophet, instead of giving implicit credit to his professions, he would not have fallen. It is a melancholy fact, that multitudes of simple-hearted and godly Christians are essentially injured by their hypocritical associates, [Romans 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.18). We would earnestly advise, therefore, all young Christians to be on their guard, and to take those only for their confidential friends, whose lives they have found to correspond with their professions.

***~~3. Let the Word of God be the only rule of your conduct.~~***

The man of God had not the same evidence for the reversal of the command, that he had for the command itself. He was wrong therefore in giving such implicit credit to a stranger, whatever his character or professions might be.

Just so, is it not wrong in us to allow the assertions of men, whatever their general character may be, to supersede the express declarations of God himself? Who among us has not heard a thousand times from human authority, that God does not command this or that; and that such strictness is not required of us? But we have an infallible standard by which we should try every sentiment that is proposed to us, "To the law, and to the testimony; if men speak not according to this Word, there is no light in them." Having "the sure testimony of God, we shall do well to take heed to it," with jealous vigilance, undeviating constancy, and unabated firmness.

***~~#341~~***

***~~ABIJAH'S PIETY REWARDED~~***

**[1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13)**

"All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the LORD, the God of Israel, has found anything good."

Men most addicted to wickedness, or most confident in their avowal of infidelity, no sooner come into circumstances of great affliction, than they feel the weakness of their principles, and their need of other supports than any they have yet experienced. In such seasons they secretly begin to see the value of that faith and piety, which they have been accustomed to deride.

No man ever appeared more confident in his iniquities than Jeroboam; yet, when he was in deep affliction on account of the dangerous illness of his son Abijah, to whom did he go? To his idols? No! he knew that "an idol was nothing in the world." Did he send for those whom he had constituted his priests? No! he expected no good whatever from them. But there was in the land a prophet of the Lord, even that very prophet, who, many years before, had been sent to declare to him his destined elevation to the throne of Israel. To this prophet, Jeroboam sends in his affliction, even to him whom hitherto he had neglected and despised. But, ashamed to have his opinions known, he will not go himself; nor will he send a servant, lest he should be betrayed; he therefore sends his wife, who, on the one hand, was as deeply concerned as himself about the outcome of his son's illness; and, on the other hand, was equally concerned to preserve an appearance of consistency in his conduct. He therefore sends his wife in disguise, that he may at once obtain the information he desires, and prevent the discovery which he fears.

Unhappy and foolish man! What favor could he expect from God, when he was seeking him in such a way; when he did not even ask for any spiritual blessing, or desire to be instructed how to obtain one, but sought merely relief from a state of painful suspense? The answer was such as he might well expect; namely, that his unparalleled iniquities should be visited on him, and on his whole family. Respecting the son about whom he was so anxious, there was some exception; all the rest should die unlamented, and be devoured by birds and beasts; but his son should come to the grave, because there was in him "some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel."

We propose, in considering what is here said of young Abijah, to notice,

***~~I. Abijah's commendation.~~***

This appears at first sight exceeding low; and so indeed it is, if compared with a more advanced state of religion, even as an infant appears scarcely worthy of consideration, when compared with a person of mature age. But if compared, as it ought to be, with a state of spiritual death—it is really great, and worthy, if we may so speak, of the notice taken of it. Consider it,

***~~1. As it was in itself.~~***

The state of a natural man is that of "enmity against God! [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7)." Now though the state of Abijah was the lowest that could consist with real piety—yet was it worthy of commendation when compared with that. There was certainly in Abijah, a disapprobation of the reigning idolatry; there was also a sincere desire after God's favor, and a secret purpose, if ever it should be in his power, to check the prevailing abominations. Less than this could not consist with sincerity of heart; and more than this does not appear to have manifested itself in him. But this involved in it a change of heart; this was a fruit of divine grace, and formed the first lineaments of the divine image on the soul; and hence it was that God so noticed and approved it.

***~~2. As existing under his peculiar circumstances.~~***

Abijah was a young man, and at a time of life when contrary dispositions most generally prevail. This therefore rendered it the more pleasing to God, who, as the Father of his whole family, loves "the new-born babes" as truly, if not as ardently, as those who have attained to riper years. Besides, Abijah was a youth of high distinction, the son of a king. Now, though "God is no respecter of persons," but loves the poor as well as the rich—yet, inasmuch as the maintenance of holy principles is far more difficult in high life than it is in a humbler sphere, he approves most eminently that, which exerts itself under circumstances of greatest difficulty.

Above all, Abijah cultivated holy principles in a family and a nation sunk in all manner of iniquity. Now to withstand such a torrent, and to exhibit even the feeblest light in a place of such gross darkness, was a most honorable distinction; and it rendered him, who in another situation would have been undeserving of notice, a proper object of God's approbation.

In this view Abijah's character is peculiarly deserving the attention of the young, and especially of those in the higher circles of life, and in places where impiety abounds; and happy will they be who have grace to seek such a distinction as his, and courage to maintain it.

Small as his stature was in grace, he, even in this world, met with,

***~~II. Abijah's reward.~~***

The reward bestowed on him seems, like his attainments, of little value; for, as the body is insensible after death, and the soul is unconscious either of the honors that may be paid to the mortal frame, or the indignities it may suffer, it seems to signify very little, whether our body is committed to the grave, or be devoured by beasts. But there is in all of us a desire to have the customary respect paid to our body, after the departure of the soul from it; and, if we knew beforehand that after death it would be treated with all manner of indignities, we should feel life itself considerably embittered to us; we may therefore regard the distinction conferred on young Abijah, as of great value; more especially as it was intended to express the divine approbation of him, in opposition to the displeasure exercised towards his offending family. In this, at all events, it was of great use, in that it served to show:

***~~1. That God loves piety wherever he beholds it.~~***

God himself is not only holy, but "The Holy One;" and wherever he beholds his own image, he delights in it. *There is not a grace without some appropriate expression of God's high regard for it.*The poor, the meek, the contrite have all their peculiar promises, and are represented as possessing "virtues, which in the sight of God are of great price"; and such is the estimation in which he beholds these dispositions, that he looks with peculiar delight upon every person in whom they are found; nor can all the glorious angels around his throne divert his attention from them; yes rather, the angels themselves participate in the pleasure, and derive new joys, even in the very presence of their God, from such a sight, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2); [Luke 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.10).

***~~2. That God will reward piety, wherever it is found in the lowest degree.~~***

When God himself asks, "Who has despised the day of small things? [Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.10)," we may be sure that he himself does not. The smallest gift to a person for his sake, even "a cup of cold water, shall not lose its reward." In like manner *the silent thoughts of the heart are noticed by him with a view to their ultimate reward*. The prophet tells us that not only they who spoke one to another, but they also "who *thought*upon his name," had their thoughts recorded in the "book of his remembrance, and were to be his, in the day that he should count up his jewels! [Malachi 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16-17)." Nor can we doubt but that David's *desire*to build the temple was as much accepted of God, and as liberally rewarded also, as was the actual raising of the edifice by Solomon.

**ADDRESS.**

***~~1. Those in whom there is no good thing towards the Lord God of Israel.~~***

Jeroboam's family bore the *name*of Israelites, as we do of Christians; yet was there only one among them that had any good thing in him. And is not this the state of many individuals at least, if not of families, among us? How many are there who feel no concern about the iniquities of the land, no desire after God in their own souls, and no purpose ever to exert themselves in his sacred cause! What then can such people expect at the hands of God? What, but to be made monuments of his eternal wrath? O that we would consider what his Prophets and Apostles have spoken respecting such characters, and that we would seek for mercy before it be too late!

***~~2. Those in whom it is doubtful whether there are any good things or not.~~***

There frequently are found some transient motions in the heart, like those in the stony-ground hearers, which yet are not regarded by God as good, because they have no solid principle of piety as their foundation. And from hence arises a considerable difficulty in judging of our real state; our self-love is apt to flatter and deceive us. But let us remember that God "searches the heart and tries the thoughts;" he "discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart;" yes, he "weighs the spirits," and that too with such exactness as enables him to ascertain with infallible certainty whether there is in them the smallest measure of solid good. Let us fear lest we deceive our own souls, and lest, after all our favorable appearances, "our religion at last be found vain! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)." It is "by the *fruits*alone that the tree can be known," and that we can ascertain with comfort to ourselves, that "the root of the matter is found in us, [Job 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.28)."

***~~3. Those in whom there is evidently some good thing.~~***

Rejoice, and give glory to "God, who has begun a good work in you." But do not rest satisfied with any attainments. Have you reason to hope that you are "as new-born babes?" Then "desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." Wherever you have hitherto done well, seek to "abound more and more;" and let it be your daily endeavor so to "grow up into Christ in all things as your living Head," that you may "come to a perfect man," even to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!"

***~~#342~~***

***~~ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH~~***

***~~[1 Kings 17:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.15-16)~~***

"She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah."

As much as temporal calamities are to be dreaded and deprecated, there are occasions whereon a pious man may desire, and even pray for, the infliction of them upon his fellow-creatures. Paul "delivered an offender unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Just so, we may wish for some divine interposition to arrest sinners in their course, and to bring them to a sense of their guilt and danger.

It was in this view that Elijah prayed for a famine that should correct and reclaim the whole nation of Israel; and, when he had obtained from God an assurance that the judgment would be inflicted upon them, and never be reversed but in answer to his prayers, he boldly warned Ahab of the impending calamity, telling him for what end it would be sent, and how it was to be improved for the nation's good. Compare verse 1 with [James 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17-18).

As for himself, in obedience to the divine direction, he retired to the brook Cherith, and was for a long time supported there by ravens, which brought him bread and meat regularly twice a day. When that brook was dried up, he went to Zarephath, which belonged to Sidon, and was there nourished by a widow woman, whom God had appointed to sustain him. Thus, while the iniquities of the nation were severely punished, the care which God takes of his obedient servants was the more signally manifested.

The account given us of his abode with the widow of Zarephath is very interesting, inasmuch as it displays the unbounded goodness of God to her in return for her kindness towards his faithful servant. Let us consider,

***~~I. The widow's work.~~***

Elijah going, as he was commanded, to the city of Zarephath, found the widow gathering a few sticks for the purpose of dressing the last remnant of provision that remained to her for herself and her son; and after soliciting a draught of water, he requested her to give him a morsel of bread. This led to a disclosure of the dire circumstances in which she was; but he assured her, that she need not fear; for that God would so multiply her little store, that it should never be exhausted until after the famine would have ceased. On this occasion we behold,

***~~1. The extent of the widow's liberality.~~***

Having but a sufficiency for a single meal for herself and her son, and having no prospect whatever of obtaining from man any further supply, she imparted to this stranger a portion of her provision, and prepared it with her own hands on purpose for him.

Perhaps since the foundation of the world there never was so striking an illustration of the character given many centuries afterwards to the Macedonian churches; of whom it is said, that, "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity, [2 Corinthians 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.2)."

We admire, and justly too, the astonishing liberality of the widow in the Gospel, who, possessing only two mites, cast them both into the treasury. But as great as that was, it by no means equaled that which is recorded in our text; for the widow who gave her two mites, had herself only to support; whereas the other widow had a son also; and, though the widow with her two mites knew not where to obtain more—yet there was no general pressure at that time and place; so that her neighbors, if willing, were able to supply her wants. Whereas the other widow was surrounded by those only who were involved in the same calamity with herself; and consequently could hope for no relief whatever; since, however her neighbors might have the inclination, they had not the ability, to relieve her.

Well therefore may this act of the widow of Zarephath be "published, (as that of the Jewish widow is,) through the whole world, as a memorial of her."

***~~2. The strength of the widow's faith.~~***

Though a Gentile woman, she may well be called a daughter of Abraham; for she very closely walked in the steps of Abraham, [Romans 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.12). The declaration made to her as from God was made by a perfect stranger, and was unsupported by any miracle; yet was it made the ground of action by her without a moment's hesitation. We may say of her therefore, as of Abraham, She "staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded, that what He had promised, he was able to perform, [Romans 4:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20-21)."

Let us now contemplate,

***~~II. The widow's reward.~~***

***~~Richly was she repaid for this act of faith and love.~~***

"For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah" for the space of two years, during which time the prophet and herself and family were supported by them.

We behold in the common course of providence, seed producing "thirty, sixty, and even a hundred-fold;" but never was there seen, either before or since, such a harvest as this. But truly, if "God is known by the judgments that he executes," so is he also known by the gifts that he bestows. He has said, that "what we give to the poor, we lend unto the Lord; and that whatever we give out, he will repay us again;" but, in the instance before us, "the handful of corn sprang up as the woods of Lebanon."

***~~This fitly represents what shall be done in the eternal world.~~***

There will be a proportion between the works of men and their reward, so far, that the more we have done for the Lord the more we shall receive from him, reaping sparingly or bountifully according as we have sown, [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6). But what proportion exists between any work of ours, and the lowest reward that can be conferred in Heaven? Surely none.*A whole life spent in the service of God is nothing when compared with an eternity of bliss!*We need not however doubt on this account the certainty of God's promises; but rather may enlarge our expectations to the utmost extent of them, assured, that in the accomplishment of them our most optimistic hopes shall be more than realized.

But let us never forget what it is that God has promised to reward—it is the obedience of faith. Had the widow bargained, as it were, to receive a recompense for her provisions, she never could have hoped for such a return as she received. But when she gave freely for the Lord's sake, and cast herself wholly upon him—then God esteemed nothing too great to confer upon her.

So, if we would *purchase*Heaven by our works, we shall in vain look for such blessedness. But if in a way of holy self-denial we will consecrate all that we are and have unto the Lord, for the exalting of his name, then will God load us with his richest benefits both in time and in eternity!

Let none say, "This mercy may be shown to others, but not to me;" for God is sovereign in the distribution of his gifts; and, if he has already given us a desire to serve him, he will infallibly recompense our services in a better world. The widow of Zarephath was a Gentile; yet, as our Lord told the Jews, was Elijah sent to her, while all the widows that were in Israel were passed by! [Luke 4:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.25-26).

In like manner may God send his blessings to us, however far off we are from him; yes he may send them to us in preference to those who appear more likely to obtain them. This to a proud Pharisee is an offensive truth, [Luke 4:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.28-29); but to a humble penitent it is replete with comfort. Let us only attend to his Word, and it shall be well with us, "Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful! [2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20)."

***~~#343~~***

***~~THE WIDOW'S SON RAISED BY ELIJAH~~***

**[1 Kings 17:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.22-23)**

"The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

Though God was pleased to separate for himself a peculiar people to whom alone he communicated the knowledge of his will, he gave frequent intimations to them, that his mercy would in due time be extended unto the Gentiles also. The history of the widow of Zarephath was particularly noticed in that view by our Lord himself. In his first sermon at Nazareth, he warned the Jews, that they must not rest in their outward privileges, since, if they walked unworthy of them, God would again, as he had frequently done before, transfer to the Gentiles those blessings to which they foolishly supposed themselves exclusively entitled, [Luke 4:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.25-27). The peculiar mercy referred to by him is that which we have already considered, the feeding of her by miracle during the years of famine, while no such mercy was granted to any widow in Israel.

But in our text we are informed of another mercy which she received, and which was the first of the kind that was ever given to any child of man, namely, the restoring of her son to life. In bringing this part of her history before you, we shall distinctly notice,

***~~I. The widow's trouble.~~***

She had lost her son, her *only*son. This was a very heavy affliction to her; it would be so to any parent; but it was more especially so to her, because she had previously been reduced to widowhood, and therefore had none to be the support and comfort of her declining years. In her son all her affections were centered, and with her son all her hopes were destroyed. But the affliction was the heavier, because,

***~~1. Her tragedy was unexpected.~~***

Two years before, when she thought her child near to death, she spoke of it with the most perfect composure, verse 12; but now her distress and sorrow were exceeding great; on the former occasion she saw her little provision gradually being consumed, and death advancing with rapid strides; and therefore her mind was prepared for the event. But here the event was so sudden that she had not time even to go to the prophet, and desire his intercessions in her behalf; hence the stroke was almost insupportable; and made her even reflect upon the prophet, as though he had occasioned her calamity.

***~~2. Her tragedy was singular.~~***

Had the calamity been general, she would have found some consolation in the thought that she suffered nothing but what was common to those around her. We doubt not but that this consideration rendered the famine more supportable to each individual than it would have been if the calamity had been peculiar to himself. In like manner, if she had found many other widows despoiled of their children like herself, her sympathy with others would have lessened her grief on her own account. But no such consolatory thought was left for her—she seemed to be singled out to bear her burden alone.

***~~3. Her tragedy was, in her apprehension, penal.~~***

This adds a ten-fold weight to any calamity which we are called to suffer; *the wrath of God is the bitterest ingredient that can be infused into any cup!*Hence was her grief so different from that which she had manifested on the former occasion; she regarded her calamity as a judgment sent from God. She knew that the famine had been sent for the wickedness of Israel, in answer to Elijah's prayers. She thought therefore that this affliction had been sent to her by the same means, and on the same account, namely, for some transgressions she had committed previous to his visit, or for some which he had seen during his continuance with her.

And here we may observe, that this is a view in which afflictions readily appear to a humble mind. A person truly humbled, is jealous of himself, and apt to fear that he has offended God; and while an affliction regarded as a paternal chastisement, would be borne by him with grateful submission, the same, as a vindictive judgment, would utterly overwhelm him. To this consideration we chiefly ascribe the impatience that was manifested in the widow's address to the prophet on this occasion; she spoke, not the result of her deliberate judgment, but the hasty dictate of an oppressed mind.

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. The widow's deliverance.~~***

The prophet, animated by the highest and best of principles, overlooked her unjust reflections; and, filled with tenderest sympathy, took the child out of her bosom, and carried it to his chamber, and laid it on his own bed, and, as though he would have infused life into him out of his own body, thrice stretched himself upon the corpse. After crying earnestly to the Lord in behalf of the child, he restored him back again to the mother a living child. This was a wonderful deliverance to the afflicted mother. Let us notice,

***~~1. How the deliverance was wrought.~~***

It were absurd to imagine, though some have been guilty of the absurdity, that the physical warmth of the prophet had any efficacy towards restoring a dead corpse to life; it was by prayer alone that he prevailed. He begins with a humble expostulation with God; not as though he thought the stroke unjust, but as fearing lest the enemies of Jehovah should take occasion from it to represent God as a hard master, whom it was in vain, and even dangerous, to serve. Such was the expostulation which Moses offered, when God had threatened to destroy the whole Jewish nation, [Numbers 14:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.13-16). No doubt, when dictated solely by a concern for the honor of God, Elijah's prayer is highly pleasing unto God; as its prevalence on this occasion fully proved.

Next, he offers a petition, such as never had been before offered, "O Lord, my God, I beg you, let this boy's life return to him!" What a wonderful petition!

How presumptuous does it at first sight appear! But it is our misfortune and our fault that we are not more enlarged in our petitions at the throne of grace. I mean not to say, that we are authorized to ask for such an exertion of Omnipotence as this; but this I say, that "we are not straitened in God, but are straitened in our own affections;" and that this is the true reason of our receiving so little from God. However "wide we might open our mouths, God would fill them," provided we asked in faith, and according to his will. As great as the petition was, God answered it in its utmost extent, and enabled the prophet to present to the widow her child restored to life.

***~~2. How the deliverance was received.~~***

We may in some measure conceive the joy that would pervade the minds both of him who had obtained the blessing, and of her who received it. But the effect which the deliverance produced in enlarging her knowledge and confirming her faith, is that which particularly calls for our attention. Her trial had so discomposed her mind as for a moment to shake her faith in God: "How can this be the true God, who, after all his mercies to me, afflicts me thus? and how can this be a man of God, who makes me such a recompense for all my attention to him?"

Nor let us wonder that a poor Gentile was thus shaken in her faith, when a similar effect was produced by an unexpected trial on one of the most distinguished servants of the Lord. Joshua, on the defeat of Israel before Ai, and the loss of about thirty-six men, actually expressed more than this poor widow even ventured to imagine, [Joshua 7:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.7-9).

Indeed this is the common fruit of affliction on our impatient minds; we are ready to ask, "Is the Lord among us, or not? [Exodus 17:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.7)." But the manifestation of God's power and mercy dispelled the cloud, and led her to confess him as a gracious and faithful God. This was the effect produced on Moses after the passage of Israel through the Red Sea, [Exodus 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.11); and it is the proper effect to be produced on all.

***~~Let us learn then from this history,~~***

***~~1. How to interpret providences.~~***

We are apt to listen to sense rather than to faith, and to say, "All these things are against me!" But *how can they be really against us, when God has promised, that all things shall work together for our good.*In some points of view, they may be *against*us; but they shall be *for*us on the whole. With what abundant benefit did this widow receive her child again!

It is needless to repeat the benefits which Jacob ultimately received from the dispensation which he regarded as so calamitous. "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy! [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11)."

It may be that your temporal happiness may not be increased; but the loss of it shall be more than counter-balanced by your spiritual prosperity. What our Lord said respecting Lazarus, may be justly applied to every afflictive dispensation, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby! [John 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.4)." The reproof which our Lord afterwards gave to Martha, may justly be given to most of us, "Did I not say unto you, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God, [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40)."

*Let us learn to regard afflictions as blessings in disguise!* Let it be our endeavor to walk more by faith and less by sight, according to that direction of the prophet, "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)." If the dispensation is impenetrably dark, let it then suffice us to know, that "what we know not now, we shall know hereafter."

***~~2. How to improve providences.~~***

*Every leaf in the book of providence is full of instruction respecting the perfections of our God.*O what might we not learn of his wisdom, his power, his love, his faithfulness, if we were observant of his dispensations towards us? Many a time would we exclaim with the widow, "Now I know that his Word is true!" I do not take it upon trust; I see it, I know it; and am ready to attest it before the whole universe. This is the kind of evidence which Job had, when he said, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you!"

A small measure of such experience as this is of unbounded value. If it were only for our own comfort, we should cultivate it to the uttermost; but it is of unspeakable benefit to those around us, inasmuch as it encourages them also to trust in God.

See how David represents this when emerging out of temporal affliction, "Many shall see it," says he, "and fear, and shall trust in the Lord! [Psalm 40:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-4)." And again, when brought up from the depths of spiritual trouble, "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto you in a time when you may be found, [Psalm 32:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.3-6)."

The knowledge which we have of God and of Christ is mere theory, until we have learned the same by our own personal experience; but when our faith is confirmed by actual experience, then it is as convincing as sight itself. O that we may all aspire after this knowledge, and improve every dispensation for the attainment of it! Then will it be to us a source of unclouded peace, and prepare us for that blessed place, where faith shall be lost in sight, and hope in enjoyment!

***~~#344~~***

***~~OBADIAH'S EARLY PIETY~~***

***~~[1 Kings 18:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.12)~~***

"I your servant have feared the LORD since my youth."

It is comfortable to reflect that *in the worst of times there are some who fear God, and that the state of religion is rarely so bad as it appears*. The days of Ahab were peculiarly unfavorable to the existence of real piety in Israel; for, in addition to that king's personal aversion to everything that was good, he was stirred up by Jezebel his wife to destroy every prophet in the land; and so bitter was he against Elijah in particular, that he sought him in all the adjacent countries, and even exacted an oath of their governors that they could not find him.

But in the midst of all this wickedness, there was one even of Ahab's household, and he "the governor of his house," who retained his integrity, and used all his influence to protect the servants of the Lord. This man, constrained in vindication of his own character to bear testimony to himself, was enabled to declare to the Prophet Elijah, "I your servant have feared the LORD since my youth."

In considering the subject of early piety, we shall notice,

***~~I. The nature of early piety.~~***

We would not on any account disparage devotional feelings; but we must entertain some jealousy respecting them as a criterion of early piety. We know their immense value; but we know also how susceptible of strong impressions the youthful mind is, on whatever subject it is occupied; and that the characteristic mark of a very numerous set of unprofitable hearers is, that "they receive the word with joy." We must therefore look for some better and safer test of piety than this.

Nor would we by any means undervalue a clear knowledge of the Gospel. *A view of ourselves as sinful creatures, altogether helpless and hopeless in ourselves, and a view of Christ as the only and all-sufficient Savior of the world, and a habitual consciousness that we must receive everything out of his fullness*—all this, I say, is absolutely essential to the Christian character; but then it may all exist in the mind as a mere theory, without entering into the heart as a principle of life. Not only do the thorny-ground hearers evince this melancholy truth, but daily observation and experience compel us to acknowledge it.

There is however a test which is subject to no such uncertainties, namely, "the fear of God." By this we mean: *a reverential awe of the Divine Majesty,  
a dread of offending him, and  
a determination through grace to obey every one of his commandments*.

This must be an abiding principle in the soul, operating as forcibly upon us in our most secret actions, as the presence of a fellow-creature would in reference to anything which would expose us to universal execration.

Let it not however be supposed that we are now speaking of a *slavish*fear, arising from an apprehension of God's judgments. We speak of a *filial*fear, which is excited as much by a sense of "his goodness," as by a dread of his displeasure.

It is remarkable, that, when the Prophet Hosea foretold the piety that should reign under the gospel dispensation, and in the millennial period, he characterized it in the very way that we have now done, "They shall seek the Lord, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days, [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5)."

That we may be led to cultivate piety in early life, let us consider,

***~~II. The great advantages of early piety.~~***

"Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;" and the earlier it is acquired, the more will its inestimable value appear. Consider its use:

***~~1. To the person who possesses it.~~***

When piety has acquired a just ascendant over a young person, it will determine his connections. He will not be unequally yoked with unbelievers as friends, and much less in that relation of life which death only can dissolve. Piety will also form his habits, leading him:  
to the study of the Holy Scriptures,  
to constant prayer,  
to holy watchfulness and self-denial,  
and to a conscientious regard for God in everything that he does.

Piety will also form his character; it is scarcely to be conceived what difficulties they have to struggle with through life, who have spent their early days in sensual indulgences; but *those who have been early trained in the exercise of self-denial are enabled with comparative ease to restrain forbidden appetites, and to mortify unhallowed affections.*Not that a life of holiness is easy to anyone; it is a constant warfare, as long as we continue in the body; but the more we exercise ourselves in it, the more effectual will our efforts be, and the more certain our victory.

***~~2. To the world around us.~~***

Early piety attracts particular attention, and produces great effects, in encouraging the young, and in putting to shame the old. Only compare the benefits which the world receives from one who has the fear of God in his heart, with the evils it derives from one who lives, as it were, "without God;" how many are instructed, and comforted, and edified by the one, while multitudes have reason to curse the day that ever they beheld the other!

It is truly said by Solomon, that "one sinner destroys much good!" Yes, one sinner encourages and hardens many others in their iniquities, and places a stumbling-block in the way of all who desire to return to God; and, if he afterward has repentance given him from the Lord, he would in vain attempt to undo a thousandth part of the evil that he has done; many of his former associates in iniquity cannot be found; many are gone into the eternal world beyond a possibility of redemption; and if he were to warn all those to whom he could get access, the greater part of them would only laugh at him, and think him mad. All these distressing consequences of iniquity are avoided by him who devotes his early years to the service of his God; and perhaps, instead of having to reflect on the ruin that he has brought on others, he will find many in the day of judgment to whom his Words and his example have been a source of good.

What may be done by a single person even under the most unfavorable circumstances, we see in Obadiah. No less than a hundred of the Lord's prophets did he conceal and nourish at his own expense, and at the risk of his own life; when, without his interposition, they would all have been put to death. And though we may never be in a capacity to render such a public service to the Church of God, we may be the means of keeping many from destruction, and of saving their souls alive.

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who are fearing God in their youth.~~***

We rejoice that there are many *Obadiahs*among us, and perhaps some *Timothys*also, who even "from their childhood have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus." Happy people, and greatly to be envied, in thus consecrating to the Lord "the first-fruits" of your days! Regard not then the scoffs and ridicule of those who have no fear of God before their eyes. The day is coming when they will reproach themselves more than ever they reproached you, and approve your choice far more than ever they condemned it.

***~~2. Those who have passed their youth without having yet obtained the fear of God.~~***

Ah! what have you lost! But blessed be God that you have not yet been given up to final condemnation. O listen to the voice of God, who says to you, "Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts!" Learn to improve the present hour, for you know not how soon your day of grace may terminate, and all possibility of salvation be cut off forever.

***~~#345~~***

***~~DECISION OF CHARACTER~~***

**[1 Kings 18:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.21)**

Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

If a heathen should visit this country in order to ascertain what our religion was, and whether it was such as it befit him to embrace, he would be altogether at a loss what judgment to form respecting it. From what he saw and heard in our churches, he would form a most favorable conclusion. He would say: "Those people worship one God. They approach him through one Mediator, who died for them on a cross, and now lives to make intercession for them in Heaven. They receive from God a divine almighty Agent, whom they call the Holy Spirit; through whose gracious operations they are enabled to turn from sin, and to walk in the ways of righteousness and true holiness. They are certainly a holy people; for from time to time they entreat of God that they may be enabled to live a righteous, sober, and godly life, to the glory of his holy name."

But if that same stranger followed us home to our houses, he would begin to doubt whether we had any religion at all among us! He would find no worship of God in our families; perhaps none, or at best a mere formal worship, in our closets. He would hear nothing about religion in our daily conversation. He would see nothing in our conduct that would distinguish us from the better sort of heathen, and much that the more decent heathen would be ashamed of. He would therefore conclude, that we had no fixed opinion about religion at all; that we did not believe our own creed; and that we thought people would be as happy without any religion, as even Christianity itself could make them.

Such was the state of Israel of old, except that there was an outward idolatry established among them, whereas *the idols which we worship have their temples only in the heart*. To bring the Jewish nation to a more consistent state, the Prophet Elijah expostulated with them in the passage before us; and, for their conviction, proposed to put it to the trial, whether Baal or Jehovah were the true God.

We do not intend to consider the text as connected with the history, because we reserve the history for a distinct sermon, we propose at present to illustrate and recommend decision of character.

**I. Decision of character ought to show itself in our opinions**.

To form our opinions strongly upon doubtful points, or without sufficient evidence, is no part of that character which we wish to recommend; on the contrary, we would advise all to carefully examine every sentiment before they embrace it, and, when they have "proved all things, then to hold fast only that which is good."

***~~The opinions which we profess to hold, are not doubtful.~~***

As members of the Established Church, we hold that "there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." We hold also, that "all who worship this God, must worship him in spirit and in truth;" and that it is not a mere bodily service that he requires, but the service of the heart, and the entire devotion of the soul. Respecting these two points, the proper object of our service, and the service which we are required to render him, we apprehend there can be no doubt at all. Whether we consult the precepts of the Gospel, or look at the examples of the holy Apostles, the matter is equally clear; we can have no doubt but that *it is both our duty and our privilege to serve God, yes to serve him with our whole hearts*.

**On these things therefore our minds should be fixed and decided.**

If we consult the opinions of those around us, we shall be continually wavering in our judgment. But it is not from the vain conjectures of men that we are to form our opinions. Let men speak as they will respecting the propriety of serving Mammon, and of being satisfied with mere forms of godliness; let them agree to call everything else by the odious terms of fanaticism or hypocrisy; our judgment must not be in the least altered, unless they will undertake to convince us from the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God is the only standard of true doctrine; and to it we must adhere, though the whole universe should oppose us.

Baal's prophets gave them no advantage with respect to truth; nor were Elijah's opinions the more questionable, because he alone was found openly to maintain them; truth is the same, whether maintained by many or by few; and when we know what truth is, we should allow no considerations whatever to invalidate its force, or to obstruct its influence.

**II. Decision of character ought to show itself in our conduct.**

*The only use of right opinions is to regulate our conduct.*When therefore we are convinced that there is a God who has a right to all the love of our hearts, and the service of our lives:

***~~1. We should be committed to serve God with ardor.~~***

Lukewarmness is but ill suited to the service of our God. "We might as well be altogether cold, as neither cold nor hot." We should be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

Do we pray to God? We should "pour out our souls before him."

Do we render thanks? We should call forth "all that is within us to bless his holy name."

"Whatever our hand finds to do, we should do it with our might." The people who contended in the games, whether they ran, or wrestled, or fought, should be just examples for us; yes, inasmuch as our contests are more important than theirs, our exertions should be proportionably greater.

***~~2. We should be committed to serve God with fortitude.~~***

No man can engage heartily in the Lord's service without finding much to try his courage. To be a thorough Christian, especially in some circumstances, requires as much fearlessness as to face an armed host. Many thousands there are, who could brave death on a field of battle, who yet could not endure scorn and contempt from an ungodly world. But in whatever way we may suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, we should be ready to meet it. Instead of being intimidated by the cross, we should rejoice and glory in it; and account death itself, in such a cause, to be rather an object of ambition than of dread. If only we are convinced that the Lord is God, we would serve him without the smallest concern about the consequences which such conduct may bring upon us.

***~~3. We should be committed to serve God with perseverance.~~***

We are as much in danger of drawing back through weakness, as of being turned aside by fear. There are many who have suffered much for the cause of Christ, who yet become "weary in well-doing." But we must never think that we have attained anything, as long as anything remains to be attained. We must "forget what is behind, and reach forward to that which is before." We must engage in the service of our God, not for a season only, but for life; and as long as life lasts, our motto must be, "This one thing I do!" "If we put our hands to the plough, and look back, we are not fit for the kingdom of Heaven."

***~~To recommend this decision of character to all who are journeying towards Heaven, we observe that it is:~~***

***~~1. The easiest way.~~***

We know it is not easy to attain such a fixedness of mind and purpose; but, when we have attained it, our way is rendered far easier than when we are halting between two opinions or two courses, [Matthew 6:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22-24). The man who has not a fixed principle is doubting and hesitating every step he takes; but he who inquires simply, What is my duty? and, What does my God require of me? has a plain path before him, and has nothing to do but to "walk in it."

***~~2. The safest way.~~***

When a man is desirous of going to the utmost verge of what is lawful, and of conforming to the world as far as will consist with a hope of final salvation, he must often stand on very slippery ground; and it must be a miracle indeed if he does not one day fall. But he who, with a noble contempt of earthly things, is enabled to seek only what shall be most conducive to his spiritual welfare, stands at a distance from temptation, and, by "walking uprightly, walks surely! [James 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.8); [2 Peter 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10)."

***~~3. The happiest way.~~***

Any deviation from the path of duty must of necessity weaken the testimony which conscience might give respecting the rectitude of our minds. It is certain that God will not grant the witness of his Spirit to those whose hearts are not right with him. These sources of happiness therefore must be closed to those who are not of a fixed decided character.

Indeed such people have very little comfort in anything. *Their regard for God prevents their full enjoyment of the world; and their love of the world renders it impossible for them to find any real delight in God.*Their prospects of future happiness too are by no means cheering to their souls; for they have reason to fear that God will not accept the service of a divided heart.

On the contrary, the man "who follows the Lord fully," enjoys now that peace of God which passes all understanding, and looks forward with confidence to that day, when he shall receive the plaudits of his Divine Master! [1 John 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.20-21).

In every view, therefore, decision of character is most desirable. It is better to maintain a holy firmness with Elijah, though we are opposed by the whole world, than to halt between two opinions, or to be attempting to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and Mammon.

***~~#346~~***

***~~ELIJAH'S CHALLENGE TO THE PROPHETS OF BAAL~~***

**[1 Kings 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.24)**

"Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God."

*Unbounded is the dominion which God exercises over the minds of men!*"The hearts of kings are in his hands, and he turns them wherever he will." The heart of Ahab was exasperated against Elijah in the highest degree; insomuch that he sought him not only throughout his own kingdom, but through all the neighboring kingdoms, in order that he might wreak his vengeance upon him.

Yet, behold, now Elijah presents himself before Ahab; and the hands of the infuriated monarch are tied; yes, the prophet sends him word that he is coming to meet him; and yet the king, who might have had a band of soldiers at his command, uses no means whatever to apprehend him. Moreover Elijah retorts upon him his injurious accusation, and tells him plainly, that Ahab himself was "the troubler of Israel, by forsaking the Lord and following Baal." Nay more, Elijah enjoins the king to summon all the prophets of Baal to meet him at Mount Carmel; and the king obeys the mandate, as if he had been the subject, and Elijah the sovereign. When they were convened, the prophet appears in the midst of them all, unprotected and alone; yet can neither the king, nor the people, put forth a hand to touch him—so awed were they and restrained by the invisible agency of Jehovah.

***~~I. The challenge which Elijah gave the worshipers of Baal on this occasion, is the first point to which we shall call your attention.~~***

Neither Ahab nor his prophets would submit to the declarations of God's Word; of course, any appeal to the Mosaic writings would have been in vain. But the claims of Baal and of Jehovah might be tried by an appeal to miracles; to them therefore, doubtless by divine direction, Elijah makes his appeal; and proposes, that "the God who should answer by fire," should be acknowledged as the true and only God. Mark,

***~~1. The test proposed.~~***

No proposal could have been more wise than this. By such a test as this, the matter might be decided without giving any undue advantage to the worshipers of Baal. On their side were the king, the court, the false prophets; so that, if anything could have been effected by means of a confederacy, no doubt they would have strained every nerve to gain their point; and Elijah, being alone, would have been borne down, as it were, by the popular current; but here was no scope for fraud; no contrivances of theirs could counterfeit the sign proposed; nor could any doubt remain on the minds of the spectators when the sign itself should really appear.

Nor could any proposal be more equitable. The very idea of a God, supposes that he is one who can vindicate his own honor, and maintain his own authority; and that he will do so when a just occasion calls for it. When therefore the point at issue between Jehovah and Baal was to be settled for the satisfaction of the whole world, it was reasonable that there should be some display of omnipotence resorted to as the means of establishing their respective claims.

Of all tests that could have been devised, none could be more decisive than that proposed. *Omnipotence alone could so control the elements, as to send down fire at the request of man.*

Satan indeed is called "the prince of the power of the air;" and on some occasions he has agitated the elements in a tremendous way. But Satan's power is limited—and he can exert it only when, and as far as, God sees fit to allow him. Could he have produced the sign in favor of Baal, doubtless he would have been glad to do so; but God's own character was at stake; and no such permission could be given him.

***~~2. The outcome of the trial.~~***

The worshipers of Baal prepared their sacrifice, and continued from morning to mid-day imploring from Baal the proposed evidence of his divinity. No answer coming to them, Elijah taunted them, and ridiculed their vain hopes. But they did not yet despair; yes rather, they renewed their application to Baal with redoubled earnestness, leaping upon, or around, his altar, and cutting themselves with knives and lancets, to mix their own blood with that of their sacrifice. But all their efforts were in vain; no voice, no answer came; and Baal was proved to be an impotent and senseless idol.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, the very hour when the sacrifice was offered at Jerusalem, Elijah repaired an altar of the Lord, which had been broken down, and laid the bullock upon it in order; and, to show that there was no collusion on his part, poured water in great abundance on the sacrifice, and on the wood, and filled with water also the trench that was round about the altar, and then made his supplication to his God, imploring from him the appointed sign, for the establishment of his own honor, and for the conversion of the people's souls.

Instantly God answered in the appointed way, "a fire came down from Heaven, and consumed not only the sacrifice and the wood, but the very stones of the altar; and licked up the water that was in the trench!"

No doubt now remained. The people in the first instance had approved the proposed method of determining the point; and now "they fell upon their faces, and exclaimed: The Lord, He is God! the Lord, He is God!"

Thus we see the triumphant issue of the contest, and the indisputable right of Jehovah to the worship and service of the whole world.

***~~II. We now propose to give a similar challenge to all who worship the idols of their own hearts.~~***

That all men are by nature idolaters is certain; for they all without exception "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, [Romans 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.25)." The prophet speaks of men "setting up idols in their own hearts;" and what those idols are, we are at no loss to declare. They are "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life".

Now we have before established the principle, that the right of any Being to our worship ought to be judged of by his power to benefit those who devote themselves to him. Even the worshipers of Baal acknowledged the equity of this saying in reference to it, "It is well spoken."

Let us then examine the claims of the world, and of Jehovah, by this test. Which of them ever has "answered by fire," or ever imparted spiritual blessings to his worshipers?

***~~1. Which of them can communicate the blessing of light?~~***

Behold the votaries of the world—what insight have they ever gained into any one spiritual truth? What do even the most learned among them know of:  
the evil of sin,  
the beauty of holiness,  
the glory of Christ,  
or of a thousand other subjects connected with the spiritual life?

Truly, "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; neither *can*he know them, because they are spiritually discerned, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)."

On the other hand, the followers of Christ have the "eyes of their understanding enlightened;" and that "the things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, are revealed unto them by the Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10)." Yes, it is as true at this day, as it was in the hour when our Lord himself declared it, that "God has hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes; even so, because it seems good in his sight! [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26)." He can have very little knowledge of the Christian world who is not acquainted with innumerable instances, wherein this assertion of our Lord is verified.

**2.** **Which of them can communicate the blessing of strength?**

What lust have the votaries of the world been ever able to subdue? All, it is true, are not equally enslaved; but all are slaves to sin and Satan, though they do not all serve him in precisely the same way. As children of disobedience, they are under Satan as their god, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2); nor can any "recover themselves out of his toils, until Jehovah gives them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)." Indeed the people of the world themselves confess this; for, when urged to walk according to the commandments of God, they do not hesitate to vindicate their disobedience by saying, that the obedience required of them is impractical.

But does not our blessed Lord and Savior communicate strength to his followers, so that they are enabled:  
to "overcome the world,"  
to "mortify the flesh," and  
to "bruise even Satan himself under their feet?"

Yes, there is armor provided for them, through the proper use of which they are made victorious over all their enemies, "nor does any sin retain its dominion over them." They do indeed often cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" but they may always add, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

***~~3. Which of them can communicate the blessing of peace?~~***

The voice of inspiration has plainly told us, that "there is no peace to the wicked." Their consciences indeed are often stupefied, and even "seared as with a hot iron," so that they are altogether insensible of their lost state; and this insensibility is often mistaken for peace. The votaries of this world are strangers to that delightful feeling which results from a sense of acceptance with God, and an assured hope of dwelling with him forever.

But the follower of Christ has "a peace that passes all understanding." "Being justified by faith, he has peace with God," together with a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." This peace he has even when all his guilt is most present to his mind, and when death and judgment appear close at hand; because "he knows in whom he has believed," and is assured, that "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Hence he determinately obeys that injunction, "You shall know no God but me; for there is no Savior besides me! [Hosea 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.4)."

Such are, in some little measure, the grounds on which we may decide between God and the world.

***~~We beg permission then to put to this whole assembly the following questions.~~***

***~~1. What is your judgment?~~***

Which has the better entitlement to your love and service—the world, or God? If "God is a wilderness to Israel," or, if the world can do more for you than He, then we are content that the world shall be your God, and that Jehovah shall hold an inferior place in your esteem. But if God is a fountain of living waters, and the whole creation is only as broken cisterns, then we call upon you to acknowledge "God as your God forever and ever!"

***~~2. What should be your determination?~~***

"Every man, as the prophet tells us, will walk in the name of his god"—whatever his idol may be, whether pleasure, or riches, or honor! "But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever! [Micah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.5)." In this resolution we should be fixed! [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8). What though all Israel be against us, and we stand alone? Shall we withhold our testimony on that account? No! truth is truth, whether embraced by many or by few.

The prophets of Baal were not at all the more right in their views, because they were so numerous; nor was Elijah the less right, because he had none to concur with him; nor did he account his singularity in what was good any reason for relinquishing it. On the contrary, though alone, he determined to adhere with all steadfastness to the Lord; and we in like manner should say with Joshua, "Though all Israel should depart from God, we and our houses will serve the Lord! [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15)."

***~~#347~~***

***~~ELIJAH VISITED AND REPROVED BY GOD~~***

***~~[1 Kings 19:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.11-14)~~***

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

*The history of all the Scripture saints of old sufficiently proves that there is no such thing as sinless perfection to be found!* There certainly have not been many more distinguished characters than Elijah; yet was he not exempt from sinful infirmities. *Circumstances of peculiar difficulty are like a furnace that tries the gold*; and highly favored indeed must he be, who, when in them, does not show that he has yet a remainder of dross, from which he needs to be purged. Doubtless the trials of Elijah were very heavy; he had asserted the honor of Jehovah in opposition to Baal; and had obtained such a triumph as might well lead to expect a most successful outcome to his labors, in bringing back the people to the acknowledgment and worship of the true God. Methinks, this hope gave lightness to his spirits, and added wings to his feet, when he ran before Ahab to Jezreel.

But behold, he had scarcely arrived at Jezreel, before Jezebel sent him word with bitter imprecations that she would have him put to death within the space of one day. This so discouraged him, that he fled instantly to the land of Judah; and not thinking himself secure even there, he "left his servant behind him, and proceeded a day's journey into the wilderness." The condescension of God towards Elijah on this occasion forms a striking contrast with his conduct. Let us notice:

**I. The weakness of the prophet.**

It is justly said of him, and most probably in reference to these very events, that "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, [James 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17)." In this part of his history we behold:

***~~1. His unbelieving fear.~~***

On former occasions he had shown great fortitude; he had just before dared to accuse Ahab to his face as "the troubler of Israel;" and to confront alone all the worshipers of Baal with four hundred and fifty of his prophets at their head; he had also put all those prophets to death, and then had accompanied Ahab to Jezreel.

But now his faith failed him, and he doubted whether his God could protect him from the rage of Jezebel. Hence, instead of prosecuting the advantage which he had gained, and encouraging all the people to follow up their convictions, he fled from the scene of danger, and, by his cowardice, caused the whole people of Israel to return to the worship of Baal, whom for a moment they had disclaimed.

*Alas! what is man, if left to himself! The most eminent saint, if unassisted by fresh communications of grace—sinks and becomes, like Samson shorn of his locks, as weak as other men.* In the instance before us we have a striking evidence that man of himself, can do nothing.

***~~2. His impatient desire.~~***

Wearied and disconsolate, he requested of God to "take away his life! verse 4." He had seen how little effect had been produced by former prophets; and from present appearances he thought that "he was no better than they," nor likely to have any more success; and therefore he desired a speedy termination of his fruitless troubles.

But how unfitting was this! Whether successful or not in his endeavors, he was glorifying God by them, and should have accounted that an ample reward for all that he could do or suffer in his cause. Had he desired to depart in order that he might have a richer enjoyment of his God, the wish might have been good. But to desire death through mere disgust and weariness of life, was the sad fruit of criminal impatience!

***~~3. His hasty self-vindication.~~***

When the Lord interrogated him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" *He thought of nothing but his own services—and the sins of others!*Yes, when the question was repeated, he returned the same answer. How strange that he should not, on the repetition of the question especially, suspect himself, and acknowledge that he had come there without any call or direction from his God!

*Even the best of Christians are more ready to look with delight on their virtues, than with contrition on their sins. All are ready to censure the faults of others with severity, while they overlook their own!*According to the prophet's own account, he had done nothing amiss; but, if he had fairly stated the whole matter, his criminality would instantly have appeared. This shows that there is not a man in the universe whose representation can be fully trusted in things which affect his own character. There is a partiality in all, which leads them to some degree of concealment in their own favor, and that, not only in the things which concern their conduct towards men, but even in the things which relate to God.

Let us now contemplate,

***~~II. The goodness of God towards Elijah.~~***

God, ever slow to anger, and rich in mercy, exercised towards him the most astonishing kindness. Instead of noticing with severity what the prophet had done amiss,

***~~1. God supplied Elijah's needs.~~***

The prophet had fled to the wilderness, where he could have no provision except by miracle; and he had little reason to expect, that, while he was fleeing from the path of duty, God would again interpose to feed him by ravens, or to point out another hostess that should sustain him by a miraculous supply of meal and oil. But God would not forsake his servant in his extremity; on the contrary, he now ministered to his needs by the instrumentality of an angel, giving him a miraculous supply of food, and afterwards sustaining him forty days and nights without any food at all.

How marvelously gracious is God to his offending creatures! Indeed, if he did not display in this manner the riches of his grace, where is the creature that could hope for anything at his hands? But this is the constant method of his procedure with sinful men: he finds us outcast and helpless, and he bids us to live; and *makes the depth of our misery an occasion of magnifying his own abundant mercy!*[Ezekiel 16:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.4-6); yes, "where sin has abounded, grace oftentimes much more abounds! [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20)."

***~~2. God reproved Elijah's errors.~~***

The question put to him was a kind reproof; it was, in fact, the same as saying, "Think whether you have not deserted the path of duty?" And when the question had not produced its desired effect, he displayed before him the terrors of his majesty in three successive manifestations of his power. And then, to soften and abase his yet unbroken spirit, he spoke to him more effectually in a still small voice; thus renewing to him the wonders formerly exhibited on the same mountain unto Moses, both the terrific scenes of Sinai, and the milder display of his own glorious perfections. *Truly it is amazing that the Almighty God should so condescend to the weakness of his creatures, and labor so to prepare their minds for the richer effusions of his grace and love.*

***~~3. God rectified Elijah's fearful apprehensions.~~***

Elijah supposed himself to be the only one in Israel who maintained a regard for God; but God informed him, that there were no less than seven thousand people who had not yielded to the prevailing idolatry. What an encouraging consideration was this to the desponding prophet! Well might he return to his labors, when so many yet remained, either to cooperate with him in his exertions, or to be benefitted by his instructions.

Indeed it is a most consolatory thought to the Lord's people in every age, that there are many "hidden ones," who serve and honor God in secret, though their light has not so shone as to attract the attention of the world around them. The answer which God made to the prophet on this occasion is adduced by Paul for this very end, namely, to show us, that, in the very lowest state of the Church, there is, and ever shall be, "a remnant according to the election of grace! [Romans 11:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.2-5)."

***~~Among the various lessons which this history is suited to teach us, we may learn,~~***

***~~1. To place no confidence in ourselves.~~***

Who that sees how the great Elijah failed, while at the same time he was unconscious of his failings, must not be ready to suspect himself? If God say, "One of you shall betray me," the reply of every one should be, "Lord, is it I?"

Let us then inquire with ourselves, "What am I doing I here?" Am I in the place that God would have me? and in the spirit that God would have me? Even the Apostles themselves on some occasions "knew not what spirit they were of." Let us remember, that *the less we suspect ourselves, the more reason we have to fear that there is somewhat amiss in our conduct*.

***~~2. To be confident in our God.~~***

We need look no further than to the history before us to see how exceeding abundant are the riches of God's grace and mercy. Surely the backsliders in heart, or act, may take encouragement to return to him. In reference to the Church also, we may be well assured, that "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it!"

***~~#348~~***

***~~A REMNANT IN THE WORST OF TIMES~~***

***~~[1 Kings 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.18)~~***

"Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

*We cannot always judge by outward appearances in religion.* There is in some people a forwardness, and display of piety; while in other people there is a reserve and a delicate withdrawment from public notice. Among the former, a very great proportion turn out like the stony or thorny-ground hearers; who, if they fall not altogether from their profession, never truly honor and adorn it. Where, on the contrary, there is little of outward zeal, we are ready to imagine that the word has produced little or no effect.

In the days of the Prophet Elijah, there were none to join him by a bold and open testimony for God; so that he conceived that he stood alone in the midst of an apostate and idolatrous people. But there were many of the class referred to, even seven thousand, who had not been carried away by the general torrent of iniquity, but had maintained in secret a faithful adherence to their God. This, in answer to Elijah's complaint, was declared by God himself; and from that declaration I shall take occasion to show:

***~~I. That in the worst of times, God has an elect people in the world.~~***

***~~In support of this very position, Paul quotes the words before us.~~***

It appeared in the Apostle's days, that God had "cast off" his ancient people entirely. But Paul adduces himself as a proof to the contrary; and then, citing the answer given by Jehovah to his complaining servant Elijah, who thought that he was the only person in Israel that had remained faithful to his God, "Yet I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal! [Romans 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.1-4)." Or "kissed it, in token of their religious veneration, [Hosea 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.2)." Paul takes occasion to say, "Even so at this time, also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5)."

***~~And on these words we may ground the same observation at this time.~~***

Through the tender mercy of God, we live in very different times from those of the Prophet Elijah. But the exercise of God's sovereign grace is still the same; and *every Christian who faithfully adheres to God, amidst the wickedness that abounds in the world, is indebted altogether to the distinguishing grace of God, whose power alone has quickened and upheld him!*

This is a truth which many are extremely averse to hear; and, if it were really and of necessity connected with all the evils with which men load it, I would not wonder at the prejudices which are entertained against it. But indeed, when this doctrine is stated as it is revealed in Scripture, it is replete with godly comfort. For, who is there that would ever be saved, if he were left, like the fallen angels, without any help from on high? Who would ever turn effectually to the Lord his God, if "God did not first give him both to will and to do of his good pleasure, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)."

I may further ask, Who is there of whom we need despair? I will suppose him to be at this moment as bitter a persecutor as ever *Saul*was; yet may he, if God sees fit, become a vessel of honor, like Paul, who was, even in the midst of all his violence, a chosen vessel, and had been so even from his mother's womb! [Galatians 1:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.13-15) with [Acts 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1-2); [Acts 9:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.14-15).

If any man ever seemed beyond the reach of divine grace, it was *Manasseh*, who filled the temple of God itself with idols, and "made the streets of Jerusalem to run down with the blood of innocents!" Yet even he, in consequence of God's electing love, was converted, and sanctified, and eternally saved, [2 Chronicles 33:3-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.3-13).

So it may be, that some of our dear friends and relatives, who are at this moment immersed in wickedness of every kind, may yet have the eye of God fixed upon them for good, and, in despite of all their heinous wickedness, be "made willing people in the day of God's power! [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)."

We read, that "those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he *predestined*, he also called; those he *called*, he also *justified*; those he justified, he also *glorified!* [Romans 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29-30)." For anything that we know, the same process may await some of whom we are ready to despair; and we may have the joy of seeing God's purpose, which was formed before the world began, effected in the conversion of our friends, and consummated in their glorification before the throne of God!

In fact, the people who are now most eminent in the divine life were once dead in trespasses and sins, even as others. They all, without exception, will gladly acknowledge, in their own case, the truth of our Lord's declaration to his Apostles, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you! [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16)." All of them have within themselves an unquestionable evidence, that as soon would a cannon-ball return of its own accord to the orifice from whence it has been discharged, as they, if left to themselves, would ever have returned to God, from whom they had so deeply revolted.

But to this cheering truth I must add,

***~~II. That the number of these elect far exceeds all that the most optimistic of God's saints would imagine. In the days of Elijah they amounted to "seven thousand men in Israel".~~***

True, these were but few, when compared with the whole nation of Israel; but they were many, when compared with one single individual.

And who can tell but that they may, even in our country, be many times as numerous as they appear to be?

We are apt to estimate the number of the Lord's people by the numbers who make an open profession of religion; but there may be multitudes throughout the land, who serve their God in sincerity; while, from a variety of circumstances, they have not been led to such displays of piety, as should attract the attention of the public. They conform not to the corrupt habits of the world around them, but "bow their knee to Jesus," their Divine Savior! [Romans 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.10-11); and "kiss the Son," as the exclusive object of their homage! [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12).

They may possibly be secluded in the bosom of a family who are opposed to true piety; or they may not be within the reach of an energetic ministry or pious associates; or they may be in a station of life where occupation and confinement preclude them from any great interaction with their neighbors. But, whatever be the occasion of their privacy, I doubt not but the fact is as I have stated; and that God has, "in this and other lands, many hidden ones," who, like plants in a wilderness, blossom unseen, and diffuse their fragrance unperceived, except by God himself!

***~~But to all of you I would say,~~***

***~~1. Let your religion be such that God himself may bear witness to it.~~***

God saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, and bare witness to him, as "an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no deceit." Let "your hearts also be right with God," my beloved brethren. Let him see that you resolutely withstand "the corruptions that are in the world;" and that you "walk with him," even as Enoch did, in sweet communion, and in unreserved obedience.

***~~2. Let your religion be such that God may be glorified by it.~~***

Certainly it is the duty of every man to confess Christ before men, and to glorify him by an open profession of his faith. Where an opportunity is afforded, this is absolutely indispensable; and, if we are deterred from it by any consideration under Heaven, we must pay the penalty, even the loss of our immortal souls. "With the heart, indeed, man believes unto righteousness; but it is with the mouth that confession is to be made unto salvation, [Romans 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.10)." Be not, then, ashamed of Christ; but "take up your cross daily, and follow him;" and "so make your light to shine before men, that all who behold it may glorify your Father who is in Heaven!"

***~~#349~~***

***~~CALL OF ELISHA TO THE PROPHETIC OFFICE~~***

***~~[1 Kings 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.21)~~***

"Then Elisha set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant."

It is an unspeakable consolation to an aged minister to see others springing up around him, who shall carry on the same blessed work in which he has spent his life, and promote among the rising generation the Redeemer's interests, when he shall be removed to a better world. It pleased God to confer this happiness upon his servant Elijah. Elijah had thought himself alone in the kingdom of Israel; but God informed him that there were no less than seven thousand others who had in heart adhered to him, though they had not openly testified against the worship of Baal. He moreover directed him to anoint Elisha to be a prophet in his stead; and assured him, that the nation of Israel should continue to be benefitted by the ministrations of his successor, when he should be removed from the world.

According to the direction given him, Elijah sought Elisha; and, finding him engaged in agricultural labors, called him from them to an employment altogether new and heavenly.

In this appointment of Elisha to the prophetic office there are two things to be noticed:

***~~I. Elisha's peculiar call.~~***

Elijah, in passing by, cast his mantle upon Elisha. In this action there was nothing that could at all convey the intent for which it was done; nor did Elijah utter a word in explanation of it; on the contrary, when he saw Elisha instantly running after him, he said, "Go back again; for what have I done unto you?" But *there was a secret power accompanying this act, which wrought effectually on the mind of Elisha, and constrained him to devote himself wholly to the Lord.*

Now this will serve to show the true nature of conversion in general.

***~~God makes use of different means for the conversion of mankind.~~***

Many he awakens by some remarkable dispensation of his providence, [Matthew 27:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.54). Many he enlightens by the preaching of his Word. And many, without any external means, he leads to the knowledge of himself by the teaching of his Holy Spirit.

***~~But whatever are the means, the work is God's alone.~~***

There is not any more power in the creature, no, not even in miracles, to effect the conversion of men, than there was in the mantle cast upon Elisha. There were thousands who saw and heard all that took place at our Savior's death, as well as the centurion, and yet remained unaffected with it. Multitudes also heard the preaching of our Lord and his Apostles without experiencing from it any saving influence.

Just so, the external call, by whoever given, has been resisted by myriads in every age, [Romans 10:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.21); [Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37). That which alone has made the difference between one man and another, has been *the influence of the Holy Spirit accompanying the Word*, "Neither Paul nor Apollos could effect anything; it has been God alone who gave the increase, [1 Corinthians 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.5-7)." He has "revealed his arm, [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1)," and made men "willing in the day of his power, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3);" He has "breathed upon the dry bones, and bid them to live, [Ezekiel 37:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.1-10)."

A divine energy was felt by Elisha; as appears clearly from,

***~~II. Elisha's prompt obedience.~~***

Instantly he ran after Elijah because of his desire to become his stated attendant.

What appears to have expressed reluctance, proceeded in reality from no such feeling.

Elisha desired to go home first and say good-by to his parents, and then to wait upon Elijah. Had this arisen from a desire to defer his obedience to the heavenly call, it would have been wrong; because the call of God supersedes every other consideration under Heaven! [Luke 9:59-62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.59-62). But it arose from a love to his parents, and a desire to approve himself to them as a duteous son. He was sensible that they must wonder at the sudden change that had taken place in his views and conduct; and he was desirous to show them at least that his zeal for God had not diminished his regard for them.

In this view there can scarcely be a more useful example found in all the sacred records. Young people, when first made to feel the importance of a heavenly life, are apt to forget that they ought by every possible means to win their parents. They should cultivate to the uttermost a meek, humble, conciliatory spirit; and show, that, if they are constrained to act in opposition to the wishes of their parents, they are not actuated by conceit or self-will, but by a sense of paramount obligation to God. They should be as careful as possible to evince the excellency of their principles by the modesty of their demeanor, and by their increased endeavors to fulfill every relative and social duty. This would render religion amiable in the eyes of many, who, in the conduct of their children, find nothing but stumbling-blocks and occasions of disgust.

The making a feast also of two of his oxen may appear strange; but we apprehend that it was done in much the same spirit as that which he manifested towards his parents. His destroying a yoke of oxen with their instruments might be intended, in part, to show, that he henceforth renounced all secular employments; and, in part, to express love to all for whom he made the feast.

In this view it strongly confirms all the foregoing observations respecting his parents; and teaches us to *cultivate every benevolent disposition towards the people of the world, while we separate from their company, and condemn their practice*. If from a sense of duty we "come out from them and are separate," and shun all unnecessary conformity to their ways—we should give them no room to think that we either hate or despise them; but should convince them, that, like Noah, we would press them all into the ark, if they would but listen to our voice, and comply with our advice.

Elisha instantly became an attendant on Elijah, and served him.

Though from his ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen it appears that he was a man of some consideration—yet he did not think it any indignity to wait upon Elijah as a menial servant, 2 Kings 3:11. His reasons for this were various. He did it doubtless from a sense of love to God. Knowing that Elijah was greatly beloved of the Lord, and feeling that he himself had received through his instrumentality the richest blessings to his soul, Elisha delighted to express his love to God by his zeal in the service of this distinguished prophet.

Moreover Elisha hoped now to be himself useful in advancing the cause of God in the land. It was true, that, as a novice, he could add but little to Elijah; but he hoped to learn from that honored servant of the Lord, and to receive from his instructions and example, lessons, which might be of the utmost service to himself in the future execution of his own office. For the attainment of such benefits he judged that no sacrifice could be too great, no service could be too laborious.

This showed that there was on Elisha's mind not a mere transient impression caused by the novelty of this extraordinary call, but a real radical change of heart, agreeably to that which has been manifested by all true converts. [Exodus 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.1); [Matthew 4:18-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.18-25); [Matthew 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.9); [Matthew 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.27). That which Paul represents as having taken place in the Macedonian Church, "They gave themselves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God, [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5)."

***~~We shall conclude with a few words,~~***

***~~1. Of inquiry.~~***

We ask not whether any of you have ever been called either suddenly or in any extraordinary manner to serve God? But we ask whether your mind and heart have ever been so changed, that, from following nothing but this world, you have been brought to serve and follow the Lord Jesus Christ? This is a change which all must experience. This is conversion, in whatever way it is effected; and nothing but this constitutes conversion.

Put away then all fanciful and enthusiastic notions about the time or the manner of conversion, and examine carefully into its effects as daily visible in your life and conduct.

***~~2. Of advice.~~***

If any of you are convinced that it is your duty to give up yourselves to God, guard against everything that may cause you to waver in your purposes. Your dearest friends and relatives will say, "Spare yourself!" But you must not yield to any such entreaties. They will tell you, "That you will injure your worldly prospects;" and "That there are few who approve such conduct;" but so Elisha found it, there being not one, except his master Elijah, who openly espoused the cause of God. They will tell you, "That you will subject yourself to persecution;" but it was in a season of bitterest persecution that Elisha joined himself to Elijah.

As to the manner of conducting yourselves towards your parents or superiors, we again say: Behave with meekness, with modesty, with love. "Kiss your father and your mother;" but do not prefer them before your God, [Matthew 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.37).

There are two extremes against which you must guard, namely, a rough, petulant, self-willed determination to follow your own way, without any regard to the feelings or opinions of your superiors, on the one hand; and an easy complying temper that sacrifices duty to self-interest, on the other hand. The union of *meekness with fidelity*, and of *love with firmness*, is that at which you must aim; combining "the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove."

***~~#350~~***

***~~AGAINST SELF-CONFIDENCE~~***

***~~[1 Kings 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.11)~~***

The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off!"

*However blinded men are in reference to their own sins, they can easily discern sin in others, and capably declare what true wisdom requires concerning others*.

We would certainly not have expected Ahab, of all men, to become a monitor; the dictates of wisdom seem but ill-suited to his lips. But the counsel, which he here gave to the king of Syria, was excellent, and is deserving of all the attention that can be paid to it.

In considering this counsel, it is my intention to point out,

***~~I. The wisdom of Ahab's counsel.~~***

It may be noticed either,

***~~1. As a political maxim.~~***

The history of all mankind attests the propriety of this advice. In every age there will be found unnumbered instances to prove that "The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned, [Ecclesiastes 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.11)." The outcome of Benhadad's boasting, as recorded in the chapter before us, is a remarkable illustration of this truth. So numerous were his forces, that he declared the very dust of Samaria would not suffice for each man to take a handful; yet were they all put to flight by a very small force (the whole of Ahab's army scarcely exceeding seven thousand men); and not by experienced warriors, but "by the young men of the princes of the provinces," and those amounting to no more than two hundred and seventy-two, verse 13-21. *Whether in public or in private life, undue confidence will be sure to entail on us the most bitter disappointments*.

***~~2. As a Christian theorem.~~***

For man to boast of anything that he will do, argues an utter forgetfulness:

of what *human nature* is, (imbecility itself; [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5).);

of what *God*is, (the sole Governor of the universe, who "works all things after the counsel of his own will [Daniel 4:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.35); [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11).");

and of what *he himself*is; (for who has not, from bitter experience, learned, that "he who trusts in his own heart is a fool! [Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26).")

Indeed, an excessive pride of our own powers is the most ready way to arm God himself against us, and to ensure the defeat of our own purposes, [Isaiah 10:13-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.13-19); With God on his side, a stripling, with his sling and stone, may overcome a vaunting Goliath, [1 Samuel 17:44-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.44-47). But, without God's assistance, the strongest man on earth can effect nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); [Jeremiah 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.23).

That we may see the practical utility of this advice, I will proceed to mark,

***~~II. The importance of Ahab's counsel.~~***

It is of special importance,

***~~1. To those who are just entering on their spiritual course.~~***

Persons in this situation are often ready to imagine that their warfare is almost accomplished, when it is, in fact, scarcely yet begun. But, if God, as in the case of Israel coming out of Egypt, [Exodus 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.17), keeps off those trials which you are not yet prepared to encounter—then do not think that you have no warfare to maintain.*The way to Heaven will not prove to be so easy as you imagine.*If you become "a soldier of Jesus Christ," you must prepare for war, and be ready to "fight the good fight of faith." Sooner or later, you shall have occasion for all the armor that he has provided for you, [Ephesians 6:10-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10-18).

***~~2. To those who are going on victorious.~~***

*Satan's wicked devices are more than can be numbered!* He may, and no doubt often does, recede for a time, that he may renew his assaults to greater advantage. See the stratagem of Joshua against the men of Ai, and you will have a just picture of the wiles by which Satan, that subtle serpent, is laboring to destroy you, 2 Corinthians 11:3; [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8). Your only safety is in watchfulness and prayer, [Mark 14:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.38).

***~~3. To those who are most advanced in the divine life.~~***

To you, no less than to others, is this counsel of great value.

Did *Lot*, after withstanding the temptations of Sodom, fall into sin in the cave?

Did *David*, after all his high attainments, fall into sin?

Did *Solomon*fall into sin "after the Lord had appeared to him twice?"

Did *Peter*violate all his proud resolutions?

Did *Demas*, after his long course of steadfastness, relinquish at last all his professions?

Who, then, are you, that you shall be secure? "Let him who thinks he stands, whoever he is, take heed lest he fall, [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12)." Let him "not be high-minded, but fear [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20)." "Blessed is the man who fears always, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14)." If Paul needed to keep his body under control, "lest, after preaching to others, he himself should become a castaway, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)," then there is no creature under Heaven to whom the counsel in my text is not altogether suitable and necessary. To all, then, I say, "Look to yourselves, that you lose not the things that you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John verse 8."

***~~#351~~***

***~~AHAB'S SIN IN SPARING BENHADAD~~***

**[1 Kings 20:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.42)**

He said to the king, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.'"

*In every page of the Holy Scriptures we are reminded that the Lord disposes of all events according to his sovereign will, while at the same time he suits his dispensations to the conduct of mankind.*

Between the parties spoken of in our text there was little difference with respect to their desert before God. Ahab was an idolatrous Israelite; and Benhadad was a proud atheistical heathen. *God appointed them, as his instruments, to punish each other*; his primary purpose indeed was to destroy the heathen prince, and to rescue from his tyranny the king of Israel. For this end, God left Benhadad to follow the dictates of his own proud spirit, and gave to Ahab the directions and encouragements that were necessary to ensure success.

But Ahab neglected to execute the commands of God; and then God reversed his sentence, and denounced against Ahab and his people, the destruction that had been designed for Benhadad and his people. This is told to us in the words which we have read; and which will serve to show us,

***~~I. The power which God will exercise towards us.~~***

Great has been the temporal deliverance recently given unto us.

[Preached a few days after Napoleon's return to Paris from his invasion of Russia in 1812, after the destruction of his army, and just previous to its utter annihilation. What has been done for our northern allies, has in reality been done for us. And, behold what a wonderful deliverance that is which the official reports announce to us! The resemblance between it and the facts recorded in the chapter before us is so striking, that, notwithstanding we do not in general approve of minute statements of this kind in a public discourse, we cannot forbear to point it out to you.]

**Behold then the origin of the contest between Benhadad and the king of Israel**.

The war was altogether unprovoked on the part of Ahab, and proceeded from the insufferable pride and tyranny of the Syrian monarch. Behold his boastings, while yet he was "only girding on his armor;" yet, notwithstanding his confederate armies were so numerous, he was vanquished by a little band of Israelite princes, whose efforts he utterly despised; and this proud boaster fled away on horseback from the field of battle, while his army was defeated with great slaughter. Mortified beyond measure, but not humbled, Benhadad determines to collect another army, numerous as the first, and to effect the destruction of his victorious enemy. At the return of the year he renews his attempts; but, notwithstanding the immense disproportion of the contending armies, he is again defeated with the loss of a hundred thousand men; and God completes his destruction by causing the walls of Aphek to fall, and bury in their ruins twenty-seven thousand more of those who had escaped the edge of the sword! Thus was this tyrannical oppressor constrained at last to hide himself in an inner chamber, and to become a suppliant for his own life.

***~~Behold the parallel to our present circumstances.~~***

Napoleon, the proudest and most tyrannical oppressor that has appeared in modern ages, invaded Russia for no other reason than because she would not be subservient to his will, and aid his ambitious designs. He went at the head of an immense army of confederate princes; boasting that no power could withstand him; but through the merciful intervention of Providence he has been vanquished, and that too by men whom he had despised as incapable of standing before a single regiment of his warriors; and he himself fled on horseback from the field of battle, and hastened back in disguise to his own country, leaving his whole army to be a prey to the sword of the avenger, and to the elements, which have left scarcely any remaining to record the history of their disasters!

Napoleon however is now boasting, like Benhadad, that he will with the returning spring replace his armies, and renew his assaults. He pours the same contempt on God that the Syrian monarch did. Benhadad indeed did acknowledge his defeat to have proceeded from a superior Being, though he limited God's power to the hills, and thought to overcome him in the plains; but this atheistical ruler discards God entirely, and talks of nothing but "fate and fortune." What shall be the outcome of his future attempts, God alone knows; but we think it highly probable, that he is working out his own destruction just as Benhadad did!

We cannot fail of acknowledging the interposition of God in the history of Benhadad; let us be willing also most thankfully to acknowledge it in the events which we have just recited.

***~~Great also is the spiritual deliverance which God will grant to all who look unto him.~~***

The power of our spiritual enemies is infinitely more disproportionate to our power, than that of Benhadad' power to the king of Israel, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12). But God has instructed us how to overcome them, and will enable us to do it, [Ephesians 6:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.13-18); No enemy shall prevail against us, if only we rely on God, and follow his directions, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17); [Romans 8:31-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31-39). His people in every age have been made victorious, [Hebrews 11:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.32-34); and we also, if we fight manfully under the banners of the cross, shall have "Satan himself shortly bruised under our feet!"

In this connection it is highly requisite to contemplate,

***~~II. The fidelity we should exercise for God.~~***

***~~God punished Ahab for not faithfully executing the work assigned him.~~***

As Agag, king of Amalek, had formerly been delivered into the hands of Saul in order to his destruction—so was now Benhadad delivered into the hands of Ahab. But Ahab, elated with vanity, spared the captive monarch, and restored him to his throne; and thus brought upon himself and upon his own people the destruction which was primarily intended for their Syrian enemies!

The way in which this sentence was denounced against him was very remarkable. A prophet was required to impersonate a wounded soldier, and by a well-contrived parable to get Ahab to condemn himself. The artifice succeeded; and Ahab unwittingly condemned himself, and thereby justify God in executing upon him the sentence which he had passed upon the supposed offender. *It was but about three years afterwards that Ahab himself was slain in battle with the Syrian monarch, whom he had so inconsiderately spared*.

***~~And shall not we be called to account for the manner in which we execute his commands in relation to our spiritual enemies?~~***

As to what may be God's will in reference to our great *temporal*foe, we presume not to judge; and where an express revelation is lacking, we must be guided by justice and political expediency.

But respecting our *spiritual*enemies we have no doubt. He requires them all to be slain without exception; not one is to be spared. The great *master-sin*, whatever it is, "the sin that most easily besets us," must be the object of our more determined hostility, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1). If one sin is spared, our life must go for the life of that; if it is dear as "a right eye," or necessary as "a right hand," we have no alternative, but to destroy it utterly, or to perish eternally "in Hell fire! See how frequently this awful truth is repeated, and this terrific language used, in [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48)." *Shall we then rest content with any victory, while so much as one lust remains to be mortified and subdued?*

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. The proud and presumptuous.~~***

Let none imagine that it an easy thing to get to Heaven. Our foes are exceeding numerous and powerful; and the more secure we are in our own conceit, the more certain we are to be subdued before them, "Let us not be high-minded, but fear."

***~~2. The timid and desponding.~~***

Our weakness, though a reason for crying mightily to God for aid, is no reason for despondency. "When we are weak—then are we strong," because God will then interpose to "perfect his own strength in our weakness." If, as we are told, "a worm shall thresh the mountains! [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-15)"—then no man need fear, if only he goes forth in Jehovah's strength, and follow the directions which God has given him. The language of the feeblest saint should be, "Who are you, you great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)."

***~~3. The humble and victorious.~~***

There are some who, though crying occasionally, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" are yet able to add with joy, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Yes, many there are who can say, "Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ!" Let them therefore be more and more joyful and confident in their God.

But let none ever forget, that their enemies, however often repulsed, are watching for opportunities to renew their assaults. While we are in this world we must not for a moment lay aside our armor, or intermit our exertions. Soon the time of final victory shall arrive; and then shall we be invested with that glorious kingdom which God has promised to all that overcome! [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

***~~#352~~***

***~~AHAB AND ELIJAH IN NABOTH'S VINEYARD~~***

***~~[1 Kings 21:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.20)~~***

Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy!"

"I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD."

The office of a minister is doubtless the most honorable that can be sustained by man; but it is at the same time the most arduous. If indeed the people to whom we carry the glad tidings of salvation were willing to put away their sins and embrace the offered mercy, there would be comparatively little difficulty in discharging our duty; but men are averse to receive our message; they "love darkness rather than light;" yes, *"they hate the light," and would even extinguish it, rather than be constrained to see the evil of their ways.*

Hence those ministers who are faithful, are universally accounted "the troublers of Israel," and the "enemies" of those whom they labor to convert; and they must go with their lives in their hands, if they will approve themselves to God and to their own conscience. The justice of this observation is manifest from the address of Ahab to the Prophet Elijah; in which we see,

***~~I. How greedily men commit sin.~~***

**Horrible beyond measure was the conduct of Ahab which is here recorded.**

We do not blame his wish to be accommodated with Naboth's vineyard, nor the equitable offers which he made to obtain it; but we blame the inordinate desire which he entertained for so worthless an object, and the vexation which the disappointment of it occasioned. *What a striking proof have we here of the misery which unsubdued lusts create!*A king possessed of large dominions, augmented lately by the acquisition of immense power, is dejected, and sick at heart, because he cannot obtain a little plot of ground adjoining to his palace—of ground which the owner could not alienate consistently with the commands of God.

Jezebel his wife, indignant that a potent monarch, like him, should be thwarted in his desires, undertakes that they shall not long be ungratified. She takes his seal, and gives orders in his name, that the elders of Israel shall proclaim a fast, as if some great iniquity which threatened the safety of the state had been committed; that then they shall arrest Naboth as the guilty person, and incite false witnesses, who shall accuse him of blaspheming God and the king; and that they shall instantly proceed to stone him to death. As shocking as this injustice was, methinks its enormity was small in comparison with that impious mockery of religion with which it was cloaked.

But what must have been the state of that nation where such an order could be given so confidently, and be carried into execution with such facility! Truly we can never be sufficiently thankful for the equity with which our laws are administered in Britain, and the security which we enjoy, both of our lives and properly, under their protection.

The tidings of Naboth's death being announced by Jezebel, Ahab instantly proceeded to take possession of Naboth's vineyard; manifesting thereby his perfect approbation of all that Jezebel had done. Conscious of his cordial participation in her crimes, Ahab could make no reply to the prophet's accusation, "Have you killed, and also taken possession?" He could only say, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" In truth, his own conscience testified against him, that "he had sold himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

***~~As horrible as this was, and far surpassing anything which is commonly found among us—it yet is in many respects imitated by the great mass of mankind.~~***

It is surely no uncommon thing for men at this day to covet what does not belongs to them, and so inordinately to desire it as to use unlawful and dishonest means of obtaining it. Nor is it uncommon for men to feel a disappointment so acutely, as to lose the enjoyment of everything they possess through vexation about something unpossessed. And so are the consciences of some men formed, that they will connive at wickedness which of themselves they would not perpetrate, and avail themselves of the advantages which the iniquity of others has procured for them. Let valuable articles be offered for sale as having been clandestinely imported without a payment of the tax due; how few will turn away from them on account of the unlawful way in which they have been procured! How few will say, "Perhaps a crime has been maintained for these, and the blood of some revenue-officer has been shed to preserve them;" at all events such risks are incurred by this traffic, and the lives of multitudes are daily endangered by it; and shall I satisfy my appetite with that for which so many "have jeopardized their lives? [2 Samuel 23:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.15-17)."

No; the generality of people, who yet pretend to be honest and humane, will be as pleased with the possession of what has been thus iniquitously gained, as ever Ahab was with the acquisition of Naboth's vineyard.

Again, there are those who for lucre sake, will aid in betraying or corrupting an innocent unsuspecting female; and how many are there who would readily enough avail themselves of an advantage so obtained; or at least conspire to rivet the chains once forged, and to derive pleasure to themselves from the misery of their fellow-creatures!

Alas! the world is full of characters, whose "hearts are exercised with covetous practices, [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14)," and who "work all impurity with greediness, [Ephesians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.19);" or, as the prophet expresses it, "do evil with both hands earnestly! [Micah 7:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.2-3). This paints with great exactness the conduct of multitudes who tread in the steps of Ahab; and the last clause expresses their delight in their sins."

If we presume to remonstrate with such people, we shall soon see,

***~~II. How indignantly men receive reproof.~~***

***~~Great was the indignation which Ahab expressed against Elijah.~~***

Possibly there might be some surprise expressed in that question, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Certain it is that Ahab little expected to find Elijah there; nor would he have gone down to the vineyard of Naboth, if he had at all conceived that he should have met there such an unwelcome monitor. But there was also much wrath contained in this address, "What business have you here? What do you mean by presuming to interfere with me? Are you privy to what has been done? Have you come to gratify your spleen as in past times by denouncing judgments against me?" Never was a human being so odious in Ahab's eyes, as Elijah was at this moment.

***~~This however only shows what is in the heart of all against the faithful servants of the Lord.~~***

Ministers are sent by God as monitors, to "show the house of Jacob their sins, [Isaiah 58:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.1);" but who welcomes them in that character? Let them go to any company, or even to an individual that is violating the laws of God, and let them testify against the evil that is committed; will their admonitions be received with thankfulness? Will not their interposition be deemed rather an impertinent intrusion? Yes; such is the light in which it will be viewed, however gross and unjustifiable the sin that has been committed.

When Amaziah had conquered the Edomites, he took their gods to be his gods in preference to Jehovah; and when Jehovah sent him a prophet to remonstrate with him on the folly and impiety of his conduct, instead of yielding to the reproof, he threatened the prophet with death, if he did not instantly forbear! [2 Chronicles 25:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.16)."

In the same light it is viewed, however gentle and kind the expostulation may be. When the inhabitants of Sodom required of Lot to deliver up to them the men whom he had received into his house, nothing could exceed the tenderness of his reproof, "I beg you, brethren, do not so wickedly!" Nay, he even adopted the unjustifiable expedient of offering them his two daughters in their stead; yet, notwithstanding this astonishing condescension, they were full of wrath against him, and threatened to "deal worse with him than with them! [Genesis 19:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.5-9)."

We must further say, that it was viewed in this light, when God himself became the monitor. When Cain had murdered his brother Abel, God came to him and asked, "Where is Abel your brother?" to which this impious reply was made, "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper? [Genesis 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.9)." The truth is, that men think themselves at liberty to do what they please against God; but no one is to presume to espouse the cause of God against them, [Amos 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.10). The plain language of their hearts is, "Our lips are our own! Who is Lord over us? [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)."

It would be well too if this presumptuous spirit were confined to those who are the open enemies of God; but it is frequently found even among the *professed*followers of Christ; for it was to such that the Apostle addressed himself, when he said, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth? [Galatians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.16)." Let religious professors be on their guard against this great evil; for, in proportion as it prevails, it gives reason to fear that they are deceiving their own souls, and that their religion is vain!

But however boldly they reply against God, we may see in the answer of Elijah,

***~~III. How certainly they ruin their own souls.~~***

***~~The fearless prophet soon taught the murderous monarch what he was to expect.~~***

"I have found you," and God has found you, and his judgments before long will find you too! Agreeably to the prediction of Elijah, though the judgments were deferred in consequence of Ahab's forced humiliation; the blood of Ahab, like Naboth's, was licked up by dogs, and the body of Jezebel was devoured by them in the very place where Naboth had been destroyed by her command. And, not long after, the elders of that very city Jezreel, who at the command of Ahab had slain Naboth, slew all the seventy sons of Ahab in one single night at the command of Jehu! [2 Kings 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 9.26); so exactly were the threatened judgments of Elijah executed upon him and upon his whole family!

***~~In like manner shall the judgments of God overtake all who continue obstinate in their sins.~~***

"He who being often reproved, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, says the Lord, and that without remedy!" Men hope that "they shall escape for their wickedness;" but God beholds it, and will call them to account for it in due season. It is in vain to think that anything shall be hidden from him; for "there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves! [Job 34:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.21-22)."

*Adam*, after the commission of his sin, hoped to hide himself from God; but God sought him out, "Adam, where are you?"

*Achan*thought he had altogether escaped notice; but God appointed the lot to fall upon him, when, according to human calculations, the chance was two million to one in favor of his escape.

On many occasions too the punishment has instantly followed the detection, as in *Gehazi's*leprosy, and the sudden death of *Ananias*.

But where the sins of men remain concealed or unpunished in this world, they shall not escape notice in the world to come; for "God will bring every secret thing into judgment;" and fulfill in its utmost extent that awful declaration of the Psalmist, "Your hand will lay hold on all Your enemies; Your right hand will seize Your foes. At the time of Your appearing You will make them like a fiery furnace. In His wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them! [Psalm 21:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.8-9)."

***~~This subject speaks powerfully to different characters:~~***

**1. To willful and impenitent transgressors.**

What Moses said to all Israel, we must say to you, "Be sure your sin will find you out!" You may glory in your success, and "roll your iniquity under your tongue as a sweet morsel, as Ahab did, but your sin shall before long meet you to your sorrow and confusion! Yes, every sin that you have ever committed shall meet you at the bar of judgment! The patience of God may bear with you for a season; but "your judgment lingers not, and your damnation slumbers not! [2 Peter 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.3); 2 Peter 3:9."

***~~2. To those who have repented of their sin.~~***

Your sins, purged away by the precious blood of Christ, shall be sought for, but not be found! [Jeremiah 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.20). God has "blotted them out as a morning cloud," and "cast them all behind him into the very depths of the sea! [Micah 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18-19)." It is an express engagement of his covenant, that "your sins and iniquities he will remember no more, [Hebrews 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.17)." Think, my brethren, what an unspeakable mercy this is, and let it be your daily and hourly employment to abase yourselves before God, and to wash in the fountain of your Redeemer's blood.

**3. To those who are God's messengers to a guilty world.**

It is at the peril of the watchman's soul, if through sloth or cowardice he neglects to warn men of their approaching danger. Brethren, we must, like Elijah, put ourselves in the way of sinners, and bear testimony for God against them. This is a painful, but necessary duty. You admire the discharge of it in Elijah; do not then disapprove of it in us. But we must "speak, whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear." God's command is plain, "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully! [Jeremiah 23:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.28-29)."

O that every servant of the Lord might resemble this man of God! and that instead of having to appear as witnesses against you at the bar of judgment, we might now find you obedient to the word, and have you in that day as "our joy and crown of rejoicing" for evermore!

***~~#353~~***

***~~THE FEIGNED REPENTANCE OF AHAB~~***

***~~[1 Kings 21:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.27-29)~~***

"When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."

There is much which bears the semblance of religion, and which brings with it a present reward; while in the sight of God it is of no avail for the salvation of the soul.

The hopes of the presumptuous,  
the fears of the desponding,  
the joys of the hypocrite,  
and the sorrows of the worldly  
—are of this kind.

An instance of the last occurs in the passage which we have just read; wherein Ahab's repentance was honored with the notice and approbation of Heaven to a certain degree, though we have no reason to think that it ever availed for his final acceptance before God.

In speaking of Ahab's repentance, we propose to show:

***~~I. What there was in Ahab's repentance that was good.~~***

If there had not been something good in it, God would never have called the attention of Elijah to it, or have honored it with a reward. The two principal things in it that were good, were,

***~~1. A fear of God's judgments.~~***

Many, when God's judgments are denounced against them, only "puff at them, [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-5)" as unworthy of any serious regard. They do not believe that God will execute them; the language of their hearts is, "God will not do good, neither will he do evil, [Amos 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.10); [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12); [Malachi 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.17)." But Ahab credited the predictions of the prophet Elijah, and sought deliverance from the judgments he foretold.

It was this which prevailed in behalf of the Ninevites, when "they repented at the preaching of Jonah, [Jonah 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.5); [Jonah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.10);" and God on the present occasion was so pleased with it, that he pointed it out with special approbation to the Prophet Elijah.

***~~2. An acknowledgment of God's justice in inflicting punishments.~~***

Had Ahab thought himself unjustly dealt with, he would have complained of the severity of the sentence that was passed against him; but he complained only of his own sins, which had so justly brought on him the divine displeasure. This was a public testimony that God was worthy to be served, and that the most exalted monarchs are bound, as much as others, to be obedient to God's laws. Such an acknowledgment, from so abandoned a character, was honorable to the Lord; it "gave glory to him, [Joshua 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.19); [Jeremiah 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.16); [Jeremiah 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.18)," as a God of holiness and power, and consequently was so far good and acceptable in his sight.

Still, as it availed not for his salvation, it will be proper to show,

***~~II. Wherein Ahab's repentance was defective.~~***

The terms wherein it is set forth are doubtless strong; but yet it was altogether defective:

***~~1. Ahab's repentance was defective in its principle.~~***

If there had been no punishment denounced against him, Ahab would have felt little concern about his iniquities; he had no real hatred of sin, no sincere shame on account of his having transgressed against so good a God. It was fear, and fear alone, that called forth his penitential acknowledgments. But if his repentance had been genuine, he would have mourned for his sins even though there had been no punishment annexed to them, [Ezekiel 20:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.43); [Ezekiel 36:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.31). He would have seen a hatefulness in his sins, as transgressions of the holy law of God; and would have hated and abhorred himself on account of them, even though God should have blotted them from the book of his remembrance, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63). *Hatred of sin, and not fear of punishment, is the true source of penitential sorrow.*

***~~2. Ahab's repentance was defective in its measure.~~***

His repentance was expressed only by external signs, such as fasting and clothing himself with sackcloth; but it should have proceeded to operate in the renovation of his heart and life. He should have instantly begun to put away his sins. But we read not of any such effects produced upon him. He turned not from his idolatry, nor did he, as far as we know, restore the vineyard to Naboth's family. But *true repentance would have led him to mortify his besetting sins*, [Hosea 14:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.1-3); [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8). That alone is the repentance which is not to be repented of.

**3.** **Ahab's repentance was defective in its end.**

Could Ahab have escaped the miseries he had brought upon himself, he would have been contented though God had still been as much dishonored as ever. *He had no view to God's glory, but only to his own safety.*But if his sorrow had been of a godly sort, he would have inquired, how he might best counteract all the evil he had done, and cause his subjects to honor Jehovah as much as they had before slighted and despised him, [2 Corinthians 7:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10-11).

Nevertheless God was pleased to reward it; and it is of importance to inquire,

***~~III. What the honor which God put upon Ahab's repentance was designed to teach us.~~***

It was designed to show,

**1. That God will not overlook the smallest things that are done for him.**

We have many instances in Scripture of actions rewarded, even where there was little, if any, reference to God in the minds of the actors.

*Ebed-melech*had some regard to God in the services he rendered to Jeremiah the prophet.

*Jehu*was more actuated by pride than any feeling of true piety.

*Nebuchadnezzar*, in his siege of Tyre, had not the least idea that he was doing Jehovah's work.

Yet these were all rewarded for the services they performed, [2 Kings 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.30); [Jeremiah 38:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 38.7-10) with 39:15-18; [Ezekiel 29:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 29.17-20).

If those of us who have done the least for God would consult the records of their lives, they would find that he has in some way or other recompensed to them whatever they have done, and never long continued in their debt.

***~~2. That God will surely receive every true penitent.~~***

The apostle Paul, in reference to the rites of the ceremonial law, argues thus, "If the blood of bulls and of goats availed for the least things, how much more shall the blood of Christ avail for the greatest, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14)." In like manner we may justly say in reference to the history before us, if the feigned repentance of Ahab availed for the deferring of temporal judgments—then how much more shall true repentance avail for the removal of all sins, and for the everlasting salvation of the soul! Let anyone only see how God longs to behold his people returning to him, [Luke 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.5); [Luke 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.9); [Luke 15:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.23-24); and how he rejoices over them when they do return, [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.27); [Hosea 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 8.5); [Hosea 11:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.7-8); and we shall not doubt, but that instead of "willing the death of any sinner, God desires that all should turn from their wickedness and live, [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11); [1 Timothy 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.4); [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9)." "He will not despise the day of small things [Hosea 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.10);" but will hear the groans, and regard the sighs, and treasure up the tears, of all who truly turn unto him. He never has said, nor ever will, "Seek my face in vain."

***~~We cannot conclude without a few words,~~***

***~~1. Of caution.~~***

Many there are who conceive that they have repented, because they can look back upon some time when they were humbled before God, either in an hour of sickness, or after some awakening discourse. But those *temporary affections of the mind*are a very small part of true repentance. They have been experienced by thousands, who yet have "turned back with the dog to his vomit, or the sow to her wallowing in the mire, [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-37); [Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15)." Let it be remembered therefore, that if we dissemble with our God, his sword shall certainly overtake us [Jeremiah 42:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 42.20-22). You have been long and faithfully warned of your danger; and if you despise the admonitions of the weakest of God's servants, it will ensure and aggravate your eternal condemnation! 2 Chronicles 36:12; [2 Chronicles 36:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.17).

***~~2. Of encouragement.~~***

"With God there is mercy and plenteous redemption." Do but bear this in mind, and you will frequently put yourselves in the posture of Ahab, and "walk softly" before him all the days of your life. Were it only *temporal*deliverance that you were authorized to expect, it would be right to mourn as Ahab did. But when God promises to multiply his pardons beyond the utmost reach of your sins, [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7); [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20), you may be sure that nothing shall ever be lacking to those who seek him with their whole hearts. O that God might now see in us occasion to address us: "See how those people humble themselves before me! Because they so humble themselves, and "wash in the fountain" of their Redeemer's blood, "their iniquities shall all be blotted out," and "cast behind me into the depths of the sea!"

***~~#354~~***

***~~FAITHFUL MINISTERS OBJECTS OF HATRED~~***

***~~[1 Kings 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.8)~~***

Ahab, the king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but*I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad*. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."  
"The king should not say that," Jehoshaphat replied.

It is generally supposed that opinions adopted by the great mass of mankind, especially if they are maintained also by those who from their personal advantages and official character are considered as best qualified to judge, must, of necessity, be right. But, whatever deference may be due to the opinions of others, we cannot concede to any man, or to any number of men, that measure of confidence which is due to God alone. *Even in relation to the sciences, we frequently find that universally received axioms are at length exploded, and systems of a very different aspect are established in opposition to them.*In religion there is but one standard, to which everything must be referred; and however numerous or learned the people may be who would impose their opinions upon us, we must bring them all "to the word and to the testimony," and discard everything which accords not with that unerring test.

On a subject of great importance to the kings of Israel and of Judah, no less than four hundred prophets were consulted; and they all, with one voice, gave their judgment in such a way, as to flatter the pride, and gratify the inclinations, of those who consulted them. But there was one poor despised prophet, Micaiah, whom Ahab had intentionally kept in the background, because he dreaded the advice which he might give; and, when inquiry was made respecting him, Ahab said, "I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad!"

Now, though this saying had respect to one individual, and may therefore be supposed to be confined to him, the reason assigned by Ahab is of a general nature, and is applicable to all who faithfully declare the mind of God. This saying therefore of Ahab will furnish me with a fit occasion to show,

***~~I. The necessity imposed on every faithful minister.~~***

***~~A servant of God must declare the truth consistently and fearlessly. Fidelity to God is essential to his very character!~~***

***~~1. God requires it of us.~~***

Ministers are ambassadors from God, and must deliver faithfully the message entrusted to them. An unfaithful man may be called a servant of God; but he is, in fact, a servant rather of the devil, who assumes in him the appearance of "an angel of light! [2 Corinthians 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13); [2 Corinthians 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.15)." Paul's representation is this, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful! [1 Corinthians 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.1-2)." And to every such character God gives this solemn charge, "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully! What is the chaff compared to the wheat? [Jeremiah 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.28)." We are not to fear the face of man, but to speak the truth of God, "And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briers and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious! [Ezekiel 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 2.6-7)." And when men say to us, "Prophesy unto us *smooth*things, prophesy *deceits!*[Isaiah 30:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.9-10)"—our answer must be like that of Micaiah, "As the Lord lives, what the Lord says unto me, that will I speak! verse 14." God has plainly told us, that "if we seek to please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ! [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)."

***~~2. It is of the utmost importance to all to whom we speak.~~***

*It is to be expected that men who look to us for instruction will imbibe the opinions we convey.* And if we deceive them in relation to temporal matters, the mistake, though injurious, may be rectified; but if we mislead them in their everlasting concerns, the consequence must be eternally fatal!

It is doubtless a great misfortune to any, if, like Ahab, they are betrayed by false prophets and by blind guides; but, like Ahab, they will reap the bitter fruits of such erroneous counsels.

Our blessed Lord, by a very simple figure, conveys to us this truth in a most convincing way, "If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch? [Matthew 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.14)." We cannot doubt of this, in relation to this world; nor is there any more reason to doubt of it in relation to eternity. It will be*no excuse*to any, especially to any who have had the Scriptures in their hands, that they were deceived. They had access to the fountain of knowledge; and they might have obtained by prayer the influences of the Holy Spirit to instruct them; and therefore they are altogether responsible for the errors they have imbibed, and for the counsels they have followed. In them will surely be fulfilled that declaration of the prophet, "The leaders of this people cause them to err; and those who are led of them are destroyed! [Isaiah 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.16)."

***~~3. The salvation of our own souls depends upon it.~~***

As from God we have received our commission, so to God are we responsible for our execution of it. In truth, so solemn is our responsibility, that nothing but a conviction that we are "called to it by the Holy Spirit," could prevail upon us to undertake the office of ministering to immortal souls. Hear what God himself has spoken to us, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood! [Ezekiel 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 3.17-18)."

Here you see that if the consequences are fatal to others, they are doubly so to ourselves; for those who perish through our unfaithfulness, have only their own souls to answer for; but we must perish under the accumulated guilt of destroying, not our own souls only, but the souls of all that have been committed to our charge!

Well does the Apostle Paul again and again make that request, "Brethren, pray for us;" for indeed we need your prayers; since we are sure to incur *man's*displeasure, if we are faithful; and *God's*displeasure, if, through any motive whatever, we shrink from a full discharge of our duty.

Ahab's mind towards the faithful Micaiah shows to every minister,

***~~II. The recompense the faithful minister must expect for his fidelity.~~***

It might be supposed, that in proportion to the fidelity with which he exercises his office, a minister should be loved; but by the ungodly world he will rather be hated like Micaiah, and for the very same reason, "*because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad*."

***~~1. This hatred to the faithful pastor will be invariable.~~***

If we go back to the beginning of the world, we shall not find one faithful minister that ever escaped the hatred of those around him! Noah "condemned the world" in his ministrations; and was regarded by them with scorn and contempt. If we ask how Moses, David, Elijah, and all the prophets were treated? Our Lord has told us, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" As for the Apostles, our blessed Lord plainly warned them, that they also would have their cross to bear, being "hated, reviled, persecuted, for his sake."

But it may be thought that our blessed Savior could never become an object of aversion to any; since the perfection of his wisdom, and the extent of his goodness, and the efficiency of his power—would preclude a possibility of his being regarded with any feelings but those of love and gratitude. Yet, though "he spoke as never any man spoke," and wrought miracles far more numerous than those which had been wrought from the foundation of the world, he was more an object of hatred than any other man! As he says, "The world cannot hate you; but it hates me, because I testify of it that its works are evil, [John 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.7)."

Even at this day there is not to be found on earth one faithful minister who does not experience the truth of that assertion, "If they have hated Me, they will hate you also." It matters not what wisdom these servants of God exercise, or what talents they possess, or what blamelessness they maintain; if they will discharge their duty faithfully to God and man, they shall surely be made conformable to their Savior's image in this respect; for, "It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! [Matthew 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.25)."

**2.** **This hatred to the faithful pastor will be universal**.

It is not the profane and profligate alone that will hate the servants of God; but the moral, the sober, and those who have in some respect a regard for religion. Indeed, those who are of more decent habits are, for the most part, the very leaders in opposition to the faithful ministers of Christ; insomuch that Satan found not any more willing or more efficient instruments to persecute Paul and Barnabas, than a number of "devout and honorable women, [Acts 13:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.50)."

As bound as kings are to protect the servants of the Most High, they have often been found their most cruel oppressors. Ahab would gladly have wreaked his vengeance on Elijah, even as Jezebel had already done on a vast multitude of the Lord's prophets. And at different periods have the great and mighty of the earth exerted all their power to extirpate the servants of the Lord. From this enmity, no rank or order of men is exempt, "the fat bulls of Bashan" have been forward to lead the way; and "dogs have joined in compassing" about the servants of the Lord, to destroy them.

Even little children have encouraged one another in this impious work. No less than forty-two of them ridiculed Elisha, saying, "Go up, you bald head! Go up, you bald head!" expressing thereby their contempt, if not their disbelief, of the miracle that had been wrought in the assumption of the prophet Elijah in a fiery chariot to Heaven.

Just so, at this day, we can scarcely have a surer criterion of the state of men's minds towards religion, than in the conduct of their children towards the faithful ministers of Christ. So true is that declaration of our blessed Lord to his faithful servants, "You shall be hated by all men for my name's sake!"

**3.** **This hatred to the faithful pastor will be inveterate**.

There is no other thing which excites so much enmity as this. Persons guilty of any crime meet with some compassion; and, if they are treated with too much severity, they will find some to vindicate their cause. But a faithful servant of Christ may be persecuted with ever so much virulence, and none will venture to interpose for him. Ahab acknowledged that he had no other ground of displeasure against Micaiah, than his fidelity in declaring the messages of the Most High. And when he avowed both his hostility to him, and the grounds of it, Jehoshaphat, notwithstanding his piety, dared not to espouse the cause of this hated prophet any further, than merely to suggest, "Let not the king say so." And, when he heard the prophet doomed to imprisonment and all its attendant horrors, he uttered not one word in his defense, but left him to experience all the wrath of his vindictive persecutor.

So it was with our blessed Lord. When he stood at Pilate's bar, not one, out of the many thousands whom he had healed, would bear testimony in his favor, or endeavor to avert from him his impending doom.

So it is at this day, "all manner of evil may be spoken, and spoken falsely," respecting a pious minister; and the utmost that anyone will dare to say in his behalf, is, "Let not the king say so." True it is, that persecution does not rage to the same extent as formerly; but this is owing to the laws of the land, and to the spirit of toleration which has superseded the bigotry of former times. The enmity of men's hearts, if unrestrained, would break forth with the very same fury that it ever did; and the cry of "Crucify him! Crucify him!" would be heard, wherever the character of Christ and his Apostles was exhibited.

***~~Desirous, however, of approving myself to God, let me address:~~***

***~~1. Those who, like Ahab, determinately follow their own way.~~***

Of Ahab's idolatries, I say nothing. The point before us is, his determination to follow his own way for his own temporal advantage. And need I say how common a character this is? I dare not, then, "speak flattering words" to such people. No, "I cannot speak good concerning them, but only bad." Indeed, my brethren, God's will must be regarded by you as of paramount obligation; and, if you will not obey his voice, you must inevitably perish.

Tell me not whether a Jehoshaphat concurs with you, or false prophets uphold you; if all the Jehoshaphats in the universe concur with you, or all the false prophets in the world support you—I care nothing about it! It is at their own peril so to do; and it is by God's Word, and not by man's precept or example, that you shall be judged in the last day. Let me not, then, be deemed "your enemy, because I tell you the truth! [Galatians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.16)." I cannot "sew pillows to your arm-holes," or "daub your wall with untempered mortar." "I cannot speak peace to you, when there is no peace! [Ezekiel 13:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.10-11); [Ezekiel 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.16); [Ezekiel 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 13.18) with [Jeremiah 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.14)." Believe me, brethren, there is no happiness but in serving God; and *there is no safety but in an entire surrender of your souls to him.*

***~~2. Those who are induced to make compliances which their own consciences condemn.~~***

Be assured that a holy firmness in the way of duty is best. Your ill-advised compliances will only bring shame and trouble to your own souls. Who can tell what might have been the result to Ahab, if Jehoshaphat had acted with the firmness that befit him? He might, perhaps, have prevented all the evil that ensued.

And you also, my brethren, if you will be faithful to your God, may prove blessings to many, whom by your dissimulation and cowardice you deceive. Let every child of God consider himself as a witness for God; let him "shine as a light in a dark world;" let no consideration under Heaven tempt him to be "a partaker of other men's sins." Let him "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11)." Yes, let him rebuke sin, though he is hated for it; and act uprightly, though he be abhorred for it! [Amos 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.10).

Whatever any man may suffer for righteousness' sake, let him rejoice in the thought, that they so persecuted the prophets that were before him, and that in proportion to his sufferings will be his reward in Heaven! [Matthew 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.11-12).

***~~#355~~***

***~~SATAN'S STRATAGEM TO DECEIVE AHAB~~***

***~~[1 Kings 22:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.19-23)~~***

Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that. Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' " 'By what means?' the LORD asked. " 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. " 'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the LORD. 'Go and do it.' "So now the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you!"

In order to have a correct view of Scripture truths, we must consider particularly the style in which the Scriptures are written. Scriptures are accommodated to the weak apprehensions of fallen man. Hence in various descriptions of God, he is represented as having eyes and ears and hands, and as deliberating and acting according to circumstances, just as if he were a man like unto us. But we must not therefore conceive of him as a man, but only as ordering his dispensations towards us with unerring wisdom.

In like manner he is represented in the text as holding a conference with Satan, and as adopting a plan proposed by him for the effecting of purposes originating with himself. But we must not therefore suppose that God did not know how to effect his own purposes without any help from Satan; we must only understand that *God overruled the devices of that wicked fiend for the accomplishment of his own will*.

Indeed the particular representation here given, has an evident reference to what had actually taken place between the two confederate kings. They had put on their royal robes, and seated themselves on thrones in the midst of all their courtiers verse 10, in order to receive the counsel of the prophets respecting the projected war; and, agreeably to that, the prophet represents God as enthroned amidst all the heavenly hosts, and holding a counsel with them about the best method of inflicting on Ahab his deserved punishment. It is not intended that we should construe this literally, as if all these questions and answers were really uttered by the different parties in a public assembly; but merely that *God determined to make the designs of Ahab the means of his destruction*.

There is however one point which may obviously be collected from this account, namely, the power of Satan to deceive men; and it will form a very profitable subject for our present consideration. Let us then inquire into,

***~~I. The sources of Satan's power.~~***

Satan has from the beginning been the great deceiver of mankind. Whence has Satan this power to deceive? We answer,

***~~1. From his having so many other evil spirits under his command.~~***

The fallen angels are many in number, and so numerous, that one single person possessed by devils called Himself "Legion," because of the exceeding greatness of the number that dwelt within him. Of these there are different ranks and orders, just as there are of the good angels; and they are all united under one head, even "Beelzebub, the prince of the devils."

Of Ahab's prophets there were four hundred; and, through the influence of one spirit, they were all possessed by spirits perfectly united with each other for the accomplishment of one end. Now this gives them an immense advantage. Had there been but one, or only a few, we might have hoped to escape their notice, or be visited by them but seldom; but there is reason to believe that they are immensely more numerous than the human race, so that *there is not a human being that is not infested with them, nor a moment of time when they are not ready to take advantage of us.*

***~~2. From his wisdom and subtlety.~~***

"The serpent was the most subtle of the brute creation," and was therefore made use of by Satan as an instrument whereby to deceive our first parents; and in reference to that event, Satan is called "that old serpent, the Devil! [Revelation 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.9)." Of his subtlety there is much spoken in the Holy Scriptures. Like a fowler he spreads his net, and "takes men alive in his snare! [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)." So deep are his "wiles" and "devices," that no human wisdom can fathom them, no human sagacity escape them. As a spirit, he is a utter intelligence, like the holy angels, disrobed indeed of his holiness, but not of his intellectual powers. He knows what is suited to the dispositions of men, and what is most likely to prevail with them under all the circumstances wherein they are placed. In his assaults on our blessed Lord, he seized the moment most favorable for his purpose, and urged the temptations most likely to prevail. It is reasonable to suppose that the experience of six thousand years has contributed not a little to his proficiency and advancement in every species of deceit.

***~~3. From his easy access to the minds of men.~~***

A material being would have found difficulty in presenting himself to men on many occasions; but an immaterial or spiritual being finds no obstacles, except what arise from the internal principles of those whom he would assault. He has access to one as well as another at all times. What an immense advantage does this give him! Indeed, if it were not that we have good angels also attendant on us and ministering unto us, and, above all, that we have the Spirit of the living God continually dwelling in us for the express purpose of counteracting and defeating his influence—we could have no hope whatever of escaping from his toils.

***~~4. From the number and influence of his confederates.~~***

There is not a wicked man in the universe who is not actuated by him, and made subservient to his designs; from all of them therefore he derives much support; but especially from those whose situation in life gives them greater sway over the public mind. If he can prevail on a prince or monarch to exert his influence, he will gain a rapid ascendency over a whole kingdom. The instant that Jeroboam set up his golden calves, the whole people of Israel "willingly ran after his commandment." If he can prevail on those in the prophetic office to sanction error by their preaching, or iniquity by their conduct, he will easily draw in their train the great mass of their followers.

The text shows us how the united testimony of four hundred prophets deceived even the pious Jehoshaphat; and the more pretensions to piety such prophets make, the more useful to Satan will their labors be; since he never exerts himself with more effect than when he "transforms himself into an angel of light! 2 Corinthians 11:13-15."

***~~5. From the willingness of men to be deceived.~~***

This perhaps is the greatest source of his power. Men are not impartial judges of good and evil, or of truth and error. Their judgment is warped; they have corrupt inclinations which bias them, [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20); [Jeremiah 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.5); [Jeremiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.6). Their own "heart is deceitful and desperately wicked;" and hence, when Satan has undertaken to assault them, he finds traitors in their own bosoms ready to open the gates to him, and to admit him into the very citadel, before they are aware of his approach! The truth of this is manifested whenever an attempt is made to suppress evil or inculcate good. We see in a moment to which side men lean, and that arguments are weighed, not according to their real solidity, but according to the aspect they bear on our favorite propensities. Of course, this is extremely favorable to the interests of Satan, who needs only to present things to us in a specious view, and is sure beforehand that we shall be as ready to comply with his temptations, as he is to solicit our compliance.

The case of Ahab is one of daily occurrence. There are thousands who hate the light, and say to their ministers, "Prophesy unto us *smooth things*, prophesy deceits![Jeremiah 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.31)." It is obvious therefore that Satan finds in the sinful dispositions of men, the most successful advocate.

Having seen the sources of his power to deceive, we proceed to point out,

***~~II. The limits of Satan's power.~~***

Doubtless Satan's power is inconceivably great, since he deceived man even in his state of innocence, and from that time has "deceived the whole world, [Revelation 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.9)."

***~~1. But Satan's power is limited in its duration.~~***

Satan shall not always have the ascendant that he now has; there is a time coming, (and, we hope, at no great distance now,) when he shall "be bound, and deceive the nations no more for the space of a thousand years! [Revelation 20:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.1-3); [Revelation 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.7)." What a blessed period will that be! What peace, and joy, and holiness will abound in the Church, when that wicked fiend shall cease from defiling and troubling the souls of men! [Zechariah 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.20-21) with [Isaiah 30:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.26); [Isaiah 60:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19-22); O that the happy period were arrived! May "God hasten it in his time!"

***~~2. Satan's power is limited in its objects.~~***

As wide as his influence is, it is not universal; for God has delivered his chosen people from his malignant influence. We say not indeed that there are any so delivered, but that they need to be continually on their guard against him, [Zechariah 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.1); [Matthew 26:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.41); [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3). But our Lord has assured us that "it is not possible for him to deceive the elect, [Matthew 24:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.24);" and the reason of this is, that God has revealed to them his devices, [2 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.11); and armed them against his assaults, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11); and engaged to "guide them by his counsel, until he receives them to glory! [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24)."

A further reason is, that Jesus, our all-prevailing Advocate, "intercedes for them, that their faith may not fail [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32);" and hence it was, that, while "Satan desired to have Peter, as well as Judas, to sift him as wheat"—he could prevail over him only for a season; so that Peter rose again and overcame him, while Judas hanged himself, and became the everlasting prey of the destroyer!

**3. Satan's power is limited in its operations**.

Satan could only *persuade*Ahab, but he he could not *compel*him. Nor can he influence any man in opposition to his own will. He is "a roaring lion;" and all before him are but as lambs; yet in prosecuting his malignant purposes against them, he destroys only those "whom he *may*devour," not all those whom he *would*desire,[1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8).

This is a most encouraging circumstance; for, if only we cry to God for grace to desire, and strength to do, his will, we may defy all the hosts of Hell. Such resistance overcomes Satan, and makes him flee, [1 Peter 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.9) and [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7). No fiery dart that he can cast at us will pierce the shield of faith; nor all his skill enable him to withstand the sword of the Spirit, [Ephesians 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16-17), when wielded by a believing hand.

***~~Advice.~~***

***~~1. Guard against obstinacy in sin.~~***

*A willful perseverance in sin constrains God to give men over to their own lusts,*[Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12); [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); [Isaiah 66:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.4), and to leave them in the hands of their great adversary! To what a fearful extent God will proceed against us in this way, we cannot even read without horror! [2 Thessalonians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.11), [12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thessalonians 2.12). Beloved brethren, let me entreat you not so to provoke your God, as to bring upon yourselves this fearful curse. If once God says, "He is joined to idols, let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17); [Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 9.12)," It would have been better for you that you had never been born!

***~~2. Seek a saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ.~~***

Christ has vanquished that great enemy of God and man, agreeably to what was foretold to man in Paradise, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15); in the garden, and upon the cross, he vanquished him, [Matthew 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.10); [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15); and he has engaged to "bruise him under our feet shortly! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)." Seek then a saving interest:  
in his death, to ransom you;  
in his intercession, to preserve you;  
and in his grace, to strengthen you!

So shall you "be more than conquerors through Him who loved you," and shall enjoy the fruits of victory in Heaven, when "the deceiver of mankind shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone" to receive the due recompense of his sinful exertions in everlasting torment! [Revelation 20:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.10).

**2 KINGS**

***~~#356~~***

***~~ELIJAH CALLS DOWN FIRE FROM HEAVEN~~***

***~~[2 Kings 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.11-12)~~***

At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, this is what the king says: Come down at once!"

"If I am a man of God," Elijah replied, "may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!"

Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men!

Many things recorded in the Old Testament appear at first sight to savor of harshness and severity. The utter extirpation of the Canaanites, and the judgments inflicted occasionally on the Israelites themselves, were surely such dispensations as we cannot contemplate without feeling that "God is very greatly to be feared!"

The instance before us is of a very solemn nature; and we may be ready to wonder, how a godly man could deliberately call fire from Heaven to consume two whole companies of fifty each, when they had no alternative but to fulfill the orders given them, or be put to death for a violation of them. But, *if anything appears to us inexplicable, it is owing to our ignorance, and not to any inequality in the divine government.*As to the conduct of Elijah, we will proceed to show,

***~~I. How it may be vindicated.~~***

As being "a man of like passions with us," he might err, and did err, on some occasions; but in this matter he did nothing that was in any wise unfitting his high character. Consider,

***~~1. The provocation given.~~***

This was exceedingly great. Ahaziah walked in all the steps of his father Ahab; and this alone was abundantly sufficient to call forth the displeasure of God against him. But he had now been pouring contempt on God in a more than ordinary degree. He had fallen through a lattice, and the injury he had received was likely to prove fatal. Anxious to know what the outcome would be, he sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the God of Ekron. By this conduct he declared, not to Israel only, but even to the heathen themselves, that there was no God in Israel able to solve the question, and that the God of Ekron, a city of the Philistines, was superior to Jehovah. What an insult was this to the God of Israel, "whose name is, Jealous!" And what a tendency had this to confirm the heathen in their idolatry, and to justify them in their rejection of the true God!

Besides this, when Jehovah sent his servant Elijah to reprove the messengers, and to give them the information which they were going to seek, Ahaziah, instead of humbling himself for his offence, and preparing for his latter end, rose up in anger against the God of Heaven and earth, and sent a band of soldiers to seize the prophet, in order to wreak his vengeance on him. He knew that Elijah was a most distinguished prophet of Jehovah, and yet he determined to slay him, for no other reason than because he had delivered the message which God had sent him to deliver. What was this but to contend with God himself?

But further, when the whole band with their commander were consumed by fire from Heaven, the enraged king did not at all relent, but sent another, and another band, as though he was determined never to relinquish the unequal contest.

Can we wonder that God should inflict signal vengeance on such a man, and mark the evil of his conduct in the severity of his punishment?

***~~2. The judgment inflicted.~~***

Fire was sent from Heaven to consume the men. But could Elijah do this? Or was he any other than the mere organ of God, to announce the judgment, and assign the reason of it?

When *Moses*entreated of God to interpose and show whom he had chosen for his high-priest, fire came forth to consume all the competitors of Aaron!

Or when *Korah*, *Dathan*, and *Abiram*, with all their families, were swallowed up alive in the earth according to the prediction of Moses; was Moses the author of the judgments? The people indeed foolishly complained of him as such; but it is manifest that it was Jehovah alone, and not Moses, that inflicted these punishments on the offending people.

So it was with *Elijah*; he did not even pray for the judgments as one under the influence of revenge, but merely denounced them according to the will of his Divine Master.

The terms in which they were denounced are worthy of notice. The captains, in calling him "a man of God," did not mean to honor, but insult him; it was as though they had said, 'You boast of Jehovah as your Master; but we come to you in the name of a greater king than he; King Ahaziah says: Come down, come down quickly.' Then says Elijah, 'If I am a man of God, you shall have a proof of it, and of the greatness of that King whom I obey.' He had before desired fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice, and it produced no permanent effect upon them; now therefore he declares from God, that they shall be the sacrifice, and fall a prey to the devouring flames.

What was there here that can in any way reflect upon the character of Elijah? He was but the organ to declare what a holy and offended God saw just occasion to inflict.

If it is said, that the soldiers themselves acted under the orders of another, we answer, that they could not but know the character of Elijah, who had confounded all the worshipers of Baal; and that they should rather have submitted to have military law executed upon them, than be the instruments of man to fight against God.

***~~3. The ends for which the judgment was inflicted.~~***

Almost the whole nation of Israel had rejected God; and all the means which had been used to bring them back to their allegiance to him, had failed. Now they had an evidence which, it might be reasonably hoped, they could not withstand. The information, conveyed by Elijah to the king's messengers, was sufficient to convince both the king and his people, that Elijah's God was *omniscient*. And when they still refused to acknowledge him, and rose up in arms against him, the judgment he inflicted was sufficient to convince them that he was *omnipotent*; and had it produced this beneficial effect, the judgment, however severe it may appear, would have been an act of mercy.*The temporal destruction of a few would have been a merciful expedient for the salvation of a whole people*. If it produced not this happy effect, the fault was not in God, but in them.

Thus this conduct of Elijah was justifiable in every view. Let us then proceed to show,

***~~II. How it may be applied to us.~~***

As the dispensation appears dark, it may be proper to throw some further light upon it; and, when our views of it are rectified, it will afford us some valuable lessons. We will improve the subject therefore,

**1. In a way of caution.**

We must not imagine that we are at liberty to act in all things as the prophets did, or even as our blessed Lord himself did. Their peculiar office gave them an authority, which we are not called to exercise. This thought is of great importance; for, if we do not advert to it, we may think ourselves justified in a line of conduct which is most opposite to the path of duty.

The Apostles themselves materially erred in this very way. They supposed that this conduct of Elijah afforded a proper precedent for them; and therefore when the inhabitants of a Samaritan village refused to receive them, they proposed to our Lord, "Do you want us command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?" But our Lord said, "You know not what spirit you are of; for the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them, [Luke 9:53-56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.53-56)." Here our Lord rectifies their apprehensions. *They were under the influence of a vindictive spirit, and were wanting to make Jehovah the avenger of their wrongs.*

But this was very different from the spirit of Elijah, and quite contrary both to the precepts and example of Christ. Christ was injuriously treated by all ranks and orders of men—yet he never exerted his power to destroy his enemies; on the contrary, he sought with invincible patience to convert and save them. On one occasion indeed he did, when an armed band came to apprehend him, strike them all backward with a word! [John 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.6). But he only struck them down; he did not strike them dead, though he could as easily have done the one as the other; his design was to bring this history to their remembrance, and to show them that they were fighting against God.

On other occasions, he wept over the most inveterate of his enemies, and at last laid down his life for them; and, after his resurrection, commanded that the very first offers of salvation should be made to them!

This then is the manner in which we are to act. We must never seek to avenge ourselves; but must rather bless those who curse us, and do good to those who despitefully use us, and persecute us. We may indeed heap coals of fire upon their heads; but it must be, to melt them into love, [Romans 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.20-21). The rule that is universally established for the regulation of our conduct, is this, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

***~~2. In a way of instruction.~~***

Two things only will we notice under this head, namely:  
  The *danger*of persecuting the saints of God.  
  The *security*of all who trust in God.

The danger of persecuting the saints of God.

Behold one party slain by fire from Heaven; and soon after, another party, of fifty each! What has called forth these signal acts of vengeance? They sought to lay hands on a faithful servant of the Lord. We do not indeed expect that all persecutors will be visited with the like judgments; but we know what God has spoken respecting them, "He who touches you, touches the apple of my eye." We know also what our blessed Savior has said, "It would have been better that a millstone were hanged about their necks, and that they were cast into the depths of the sea, than that they should offend one of his little ones." And would it not have been better for those hundred soldiers and their captains to have been thus treated? Truly, if they had been so treated for refusing to persecute a servant of the Lord, we would have congratulated them on the occasion, as martyrs in the cause of God. Or even if they had been so treated on other accounts, still they would at least not have perished under such a load of guilt as now lay upon them.

People now make a mock at religion, and turn the very names by which God designates his people into terms of reproach; and, if they were not restrained by human laws, would proceed to all the cruelties that have been practiced in former times! But let it be remembered, that Christ himself is wounded in the person of his saints; as he said once to Saul, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me?"*

So now he regards his people's cause as his own, and will surely recompense into the bosoms of their enemies whatever shall be said or done against them. "Precious in his sight is the blood of his saints." Remember this, you who revile and persecute the children of God; they may appear weak, and unable to avenge themselves; but "their Redeemer is mighty," and will in due time execute the fullness of his wrath upon his enemies, precisely as he did in the days of old! [2 Chronicles 36:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.15-16).

On the other hand, God will protect his people, as he did this distinguished prophet. He will be "as a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of them." Most unanswerable is that question, "Who is he who will harm you, if you are followers of that which is good?" If God is for them, who can be against them? "Let the weak then say, I am strong;" let them say with David, "Though a host should encamp against me—yet my heart shall not be afraid." In the hands of our adorable Lord we are safe, "nor can any pluck us out of them."

We should not, it is true, court persecution; but if it comes for the Lord's sake, we may expect to have "strength given us according to our day," and to be made "more than conquerors through Him who loved us!"

***~~#357~~***

***~~ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION TO HEAVEN~~***

**[2 Kings 2:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.9-12)**

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"  
"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.  
"You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours--otherwise not."  
As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart.

True religion, however despised by men, has invariably been honored by God. He has said, "Those who honor me, I will honor;" and he has fulfilled his Word to all his servants in all ages. The tokens of his love, and the communications of his grace, have in different measures been given unto them; and for the most part some visible manifestations of his favor have been given them, in proportion as they have visibly displayed their regard for him.

On some occasions the honor conferred upon his servants has been exceeding great. Noah, Abraham, and many others, have been so distinguished by him, as to be set, as it were, above all the rest of the human race that existed in their day. And in two instances, the one before the deluge, and the other since, he has condescended to exempt from death frail mortals like ourselves; and to exalt them in their embodied state to the celestial Paradise. Of *Enoch*we have spoken in another place; we are now to speak of the other instance, the Prophet *Elijah*.

We propose to consider,

**I. Elijah taken up into Heaven.**

In order to get a just view of this subject, we must notice,

***~~1. How Elijah was occupied.~~***

This eminent servant of Jehovah was indefatigable in his Master's work; nor, when informed of God's gracious purpose respecting him, did he relax it, but rather abounded in it more and more.

He labored for the public good. There were schools of the prophets, which he had established for the preservation of true religion, amidst the general defection to idolatry in the land of Israel. These he visited at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho, to strengthen and encourage all the students previous to his final departure from them. How blessed, how suitable an employment!

Thus did *Paul*go about "confirming the churches," and exert himself with all fidelity for the good of the Ephesian church, when he knew that they were about to "see his face no more, [Acts 20:17-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.17-38)."

Thus did *Peter*also, when he knew that his departure was at hand, 2 Peter 1:12-15.

And thus did *our blessed Lord*himself just previous to his crucifixion. What encouraging discourses were those which he delivered to his disciples, John 14; John 15; John 16; and how wonderfully sublime his parting prayer, John 17.

*Thus should every minister exert himself as long as his Divine Master shall see fit to continue him on earth*. To train up others for the same glorious service is the most acceptable office he can perform for God, and the most profitable work he can execute for man!

Nor was the prophet inattentive to the welfare of his private friends. "What shall I do for you before I go?" was the question which he put to his servant Elisha. He knew that after his departure he could benefit his friends no longer; and therefore he would improve the present moment to the utmost of his power. How worthy of his high character was such conduct as this! How carefully should every minister, yes and every private Christian, put to himself this question: 'What more can I do, for my friends? for my very enemies? What can I do as a parent, for my children? as a master, for my family? as a friend, for my most endeared companions? as a minister, for the people committed to my charge? Is there no one who particularly needs from me a word of reproof, of consolation, of encouragement?'

May the Lord grant that at whatever hour we shall be called hence, we may be found thus laboring in the way most suited to our respective spheres, and our several capacities!

***~~2. How Elijah was taken up to Heaven.~~***

"A fiery chariot and horses of fire," that is, angels under that appearance, were sent to convey him to Heaven, without his ever tasting the bitterness of death. What a blessed change did he then experience!

But such is indeed the change which every saint experiences at his departure hence. The body, it is true, must die, and be consigned to the grave; but the soul shall be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. And the body itself, after returning to its native dust, shall at the last day be re-united to the soul, and enjoy all that Elijah now enjoys, in the presence of its God! This was by the exaltation of Elijah, assured to men; for the honor conferred on him was not that he alone should have a glorified body, but that he should possess it now, while others must wait for it until the resurrection of the just.

We cannot wonder that the removal of such a man should call forth,

***~~II. The lamentation of Elisha.~~***

So deep and sincere was his grief, that he rent his clothes as the accustomed expression of it.

***~~1. Elisha lamented the departure of Elijah as a private loss.~~***

"My father, my father!" cried this afflicted saint. He regarded the departed prophet with all the reverence and affection due to a beloved parent. Indeed the prophet was his spiritual father; for it was by him that Elisha was first called to the service of his God; and to such there is an affection due, as much as to a natural parent. To our natural parent we owe the existence of our bodies only; but to our spiritual parent, the salvation of our souls, Philemon verse 19. And how great is the loss of one who has opened our eyes to eternal things, and by his watchful care and beneficial advice has led us forward toward the possession of everlasting bliss!

It might have seemed indeed, that, as Elisha expected to receive the benefit he had asked, he needed not to have laid so much to heart the loss he had sustained; but no considerations of personal benefit ought to divest us of the finer feelings of our nature.

The benefit, it is true, was exceedingly great; he had asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit; that is, regarding Elijah as his father, he desired to have the portion of his eldest son, which was double that of the younger children, [Deuteronomy 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.17) with [Numbers 11:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.17); [Numbers 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.25).

As for his asking for twice as much as Elijah himself possessed, and actually doing by virtue of it twice as much good as Elijah did—it is all fanciful and absurd; but still he had been ungrateful in the extreme, if he had not bewailed the loss of so faithful a master, and so dear a friend.

***~~2. Elisha lamented the departure of Elijah as a public loss.~~***

Horses and chariots composed the chief strength of armies in that day. Hence Elisha, judging that now the best friend and most efficient protector of his country was gone, exclaims, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" And true indeed it is, that the faithful servants of God do deserve the character here given them.

Look at *Moses*, and see how often he preserved the whole nation of Israel from ruin.

Had there been ten pious men found in Sodom, all the cities of the plain would have been spared for their sake.

Little does the world imagine how much they are indebted to the very men whom they revile and persecute; but God has declared that even one single individual who humbly intercedes for his country, may be the means of preserving it from utter destruction! [Jeremiah 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.1); [Ezekiel 22:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 22.30). Well then may such people be honored while they live, and deeply deplored when removed to a better world.

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who are more advanced in life.~~***

The time is shortly coming when you must be taken into the presence of your God. Should you not then inquire, Whether "the good work has yet begun in you; or, if begun, whether it be proceeding towards its perfect accomplishment?"

Should you not ask, What is there more that I can do for God, my neighbor, or myself? O "work while it is day, because the night comes wherein no man can work." "There is no work nor device nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave where you go;" and therefore "whatever your hand finds to do, you should do it with all your might!"

To *ministers*who are drawing near the close of their labors, this subject applies itself with peculiar force. If you see young Elishas coming forward to enter into your labors, be thankful for it; and labor, while yet an opportunity is afforded you, to raise up a succession of faithful ministers, who shall continue after your decease to advance the Redeemer's interests in the world.

***~~2. To those who are entering into spiritual life.~~***

Learn of Elisha to appreciate rightly the privileges you enjoy. The world will often endeavor to draw you from Christ and his faithful servants; and will say, "Tarry here, I beg you." But let your answer always be, 'As the Lord lives, I will not leave either my God himself, or the ministry of his Word!' In all places, and under all circumstances, I will "cleave unto my Lord with full purpose of heart." "If you have the light, then believe in the light, and walk in it, that you may be the children of the light."

Above all, take care that your eye is single, and that spiritual realities have their due preponderance in your hearts.

If God should say to you, as in truth he does, What shall I do for you? [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14). then let your soul be ever ready to reply, "Grant that a double portion of your Spirit be given to me!" Yes; let spiritual blessings be the one object of your desires; and "covet earnestly the best gifts."

***~~#358~~***

***~~ELIJAH'S GOD~~***

***~~[2 Kings 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.14)~~***

"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

When bereft of those whom we love, and with whose continuance in the world our welfare was intimately connected, we are ready to think that our all is gone. We forget that, while Jehovah lives, he can repair our breaches, and make up to us all our losses. When Elijah was taken up into Heaven, Elisha cried, "My father, my father! the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" He supposed that Israel's defense was utterly departed from them. But he soon found that God had mercy in store for Israel; and that the spirit of the departed prophet now rested upon him. Recovering therefore from his desponding fears, he took up the mantle which had fallen from Elijah, and, in full expectation of seeing the waters of Jordan separated by means of it, as they had just before been, he smote them with it, and said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

From these words we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. By what means God showed himself to be the God of Elijah.~~***

The whole history of Elijah might be adduced to illustrate this point; but, to avoid needless prolixity, we observe, that God showed himself to be Elijah's God,

***~~1. By the communications of His grace.~~***

Elijah was eminently endued with grace; he was pious in the midst of a general religious defection; he was courageous under the most cruel persecution. The whole nation of Israel had become idolaters; but he dared to stem the torrent of iniquity, and to confess Jehovah as his God. There were indeed seven thousand people who had not conformed to the worship of Baal; but as they were totally unknown to him, the effect, as far as it related to him, was the same as if there had not been one; because he derived no comfort from their countenance or example. But he was not contented to do what was right himself, without bearing his testimony against what was wrong. He therefore reproved with boldness and severity the king himself; and though on one occasion his courage seemed to fail him, [1 Kings 19:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.3); yet on the whole he was an undaunted champion for his God, and an invincible sufferer for the truth's sake.

As for the spirit of prophecy which he had, or his power to work miracles, these were no proofs that God was his God; for then God must have been the God of Balaam, who was a prophet; and of Judas, who wrought miracles. But the *graces*which he exercised and maintained in the midst of a wicked generation, incontestably showed, that he was elevated in God's esteem far above the generality of mankind.

***~~2. By the interpositions of His providence.~~***

Such was his interest with God, that by his prayers he shut up the heavens for three years and a half, and then opened them again by the same means, [James 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17-18). When he lifted up his voice to God, instantly came fire from Heaven to consume his sacrifice, [1 Kings 18:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.37-38); yes, to consume also, and that repeatedly, the enemies who were sent to apprehend him, [2 Kings 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.10-12).

While all the surrounding nations, together with Israel, groaned under the calamitous effects of a drought, he was miraculously sustained with bread and meat, twice a day for a long time together, by ravens at the side of the brook Cherith, [1 Kings 17:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.3-6). When that brook failed, he was supported by a poor widow, whose barrel of meal never decreased, nor did her cruse of oil fail, until a return of rain brought plenty to the famished land, [1 Kings 17:9-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.9-16).

On another occasion (when perhaps he could least of all expect such an interposition) an angel was sent to feed him, [1 Kings 19:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.4-8); and on taking a second meal of the food provided, he was enabled to go in the strength of it for forty days.

Waving all mention of *visions*imparted to him, [1 Kings 19:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.11-12), or *miracles*wrought by him, [1 Kings 17:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.19-23) and [2 Kings 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.8); let us pass on to the period of his departure from the world. Then we see not only the sting of death taken away, but the law relating to the dissolution of our bodies cancelled; and the man of God taken in body and soul into Heaven without ever tasting of death, [2 Kings 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.11); the only person thus honored in the new world, as Enoch had been in the old world. Can we doubt but that the person for whom God so interposed both in life and in death, was a distinguished favorite of Heaven?

Yet were not these favors from God so peculiar, but,

***~~II. That believers at this time may expect similar tokens of his regard.~~***

We readily grant, that no one at this day is warranted to expect a miracle, yet:

***~~1. Every believer shall have God for his God.~~***

God has been the God of his people in every age. He is called "The Lord God of Shem, [Genesis 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 9.26);" and it is needless to say how often he is spoken of as "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." That this honor was not confined to a few eminent saints, is manifest; for he is called by no name more frequently than "The God of Israel." Indeed he has expressly covenanted that he "will be the God of his believing people, [Jeremiah 31:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.33)," or, as that term is varied and explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews, [Hebrews 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10). See also [1 Chronicles 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 17.24), He "will be a God unto them," and do everything that an Almighty Being can do for their benefit. As "he was not ashamed to be called the God of his people" of old, [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16), so neither will he be ashamed to be called *our*God.

***~~2. Every believer shall have all the proofs that he has God for his God, that can conduce to his welfare.~~***

Think of anything that a believer can need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity; and we do not hesitate to affirm that God has made it the subject of a special promise, and that it is the believer's privilege to expect it at his hands.

Do we need temporal blessings? God has said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you! [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33)."

Are our *privations*accompanied also with great dangers? "Our place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given us, and our water shall be sure! Compare [Isaiah 33:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.16) with [2 Kings 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.10-12) and [1 Kings 17:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.3-6)."

Do we desire that our *petitions*may be heard? We are reminded that "Elijah was a man of like passions with us;" and are taught to conclude from the answer given to his prayers, that "the prayer of every righteous man avails much, [James 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16-18)."

Do we need to be *strengthened*for our manifold trials and conflicts? "His grace shall be sufficient for us [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9);" and "as our day is, so shall our strength be! [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)." True, we shall not be exempt from death, or carried in a fiery chariot up to Heaven; but the sting of death shall be taken away; and we shall be "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom! [Luke 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.22)." In a word, if only we seek God as our God in Christ, "he will give us grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from us" either in time or eternity! [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11).

What then had Elijah more than this—or what more can we desire

Having proved our point, we come to recommend the confident expectation expressed in the text.

Believer, are you just called forth, like Elisha, to face a frowning world? Fear not! Take up Elijah's mantle, and smite the waters that obstruct your path, and expect Elijah's God to open your way before you. Realize that "nothing is too hard for God." Remember that he is your God, as well as Elijah's; and as "his ear is not heavy, that he cannot hear; so neither is his hand shortened, that he cannot save, [Isaiah 59:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.1)."

See what confident expectation was manifested by God's Church of old, "Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over? [Isaiah 51:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.9-10)." Thus must you call upon your God. You cannot ask too largely, nor expect too much at his hands. If difficulties are to be surmounted, or wants to be supplied, or lusts to be subdued, go forth and say, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

Even to unbelievers methinks this subject is not without its appropriate use; for, who was Elijah more than others? Was not he once "a child of wrath even as others?" and may not those who are now children of wrath, become even as he? Yes, there is a cloud of witnesses to prove, that, though Elijah is gone, Elijah's God remains, and that he is the same gracious, merciful, loving, and almighty Friend as ever! O seek him then as your reconciled God in Christ; and you shall soon be able to say, "He is my God, and I will praise him; my father's God, and I will exalt him! [Exodus 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.2)."

***~~#359~~***

***~~ELISHA HEALING THE SPRING WITH A CRUSE OF SALT~~***

***~~[2 Kings 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.19-22)~~***

The men of the city said to Elisha, "Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive." "Bring me a new bowl," he said, "and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, "This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'" And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken."

The miracles recorded in the Old Testament are replete with most important instruction. Many of them are *typical*, such as:  
the deliverance of the first-born through the blood of the paschal lamb;  
the passage of Israel through the Red Sea;  
the guidance of them by the pillar and the cloud;  
their supplies of manna from the clouds, and of water from the rock;  
their healing by the bronze serpent; and many others.

Some miracles, which were not strictly types, were of an *emblematic*nature, and well calculated to convey instruction beyond the mere exhibition of power or grace contained in them. Among these may be ranked the miracle which is recorded in my text. It cannot properly be considered as a type; yet, I think, it may well afford occasion for the following observations. I would observe then:

***~~I. That there is no evil so great, but God is both able and willing to remove it.~~***

***~~The evil experienced at Jericho was great.~~***

I do not conceive that the water had originally been bad, or the ground barren; but that God had sent a curse both upon the one and the other, on account of the wickedness of those who had rebuilt the city, in direct opposition to his recorded will. Joshua having destroyed the city, had declared that the man who should presume to rebuild it should lay the foundation in the death of his first-born, and put up the gates with the loss of his youngest son. And until the days of Ahab, no one had dared to contravene the will of God respecting it. But at last Hiel, the Bethelite, presumed to restore the city; and on him had been executed the very curse denounced by Joshua, Compare [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).

At that time I suppose that the water and the ground were cursed by God, agreeably to what he had threatened by Moses, [Deuteronomy 28:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.2-4); [Deuteronomy 28:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.11); [Deuteronomy 28:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.15-18); so that in that instance was fulfilled what David has spoken, "He turns a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of those who dwell therein, [Psalm 107:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.34)."

And certainly the beauty of the situation could but ill repay the loss sustained by the infliction of this curse. But, as the miracle shows us, God was both able and willing to remove the evil, when he was applied unto in the exercise of faith.

***~~But have not we far greater evils to be removed?~~***

Behold what has been inflicted on mankind on account of sin! How dead are the souls of men, which, at their first creation, were as living springs of all that was good! Behold, too, how barren are their lives in respect of all the fruits of righteousness, which originally, when in Paradise, were produced by them! True, indeed, there is somewhat of man's primeval beauty still adhering to him; and if we had respect only to his faculties, as compared with all other parts of the terrestrial creation, we should say of him, "Behold how beautiful he is, as my lord sees!" But, "his heart, alas! from whence are the issues of life," has become "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9)." Yes, "it is full of evil! [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3)," and "out of it proceed all manner of abominations! [Mark 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21-23)." As to anything truly spiritual, every man's heart is a perfect desert; so barren, that not one "just work, or one good counsel, or one holy desire," is produced by it.

And to what a vast extent are these evils felt! Not only those who are in immediate contact with us, but the whole world, feel the bitter consequences of the change that has taken place in us, and of the curse that has been inflicted on us; and, if a remedy is not applied, the sad effects will be continued to all eternity!

And can these evils be removed? Yes, and shall be, if only we apply to God in prayer and faith.

But in this miracle we further see,

***~~II. That there are no means so weak, but God can render them effectual to the desired end.~~***

***~~How utterly inadequate were the means by which this miracle was wrought!~~***

There was no power in salt to render the water sweet, or the ground fertile. Or, if there had been any suitableness in the means to the end, what could a single cruse of salt have effected, in a spring of water, and in all the adjacent land? And why must it be brought in a new cruse, rather than in one which had been used?

It is plain that these means were no more than the erecting of a bronze serpent to heal the wounded Israelites, or than our Lord's making clay of spittle to restore to sight a man that had been born blind! [John 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.6).

***~~Nor are the means which we use for the conversion of souls at all more adequate to the end proposed.~~***

How is it that we attempt to operate on men, so as to sanctify their hearts and lives? It is by the simple preaching of the Gospel to them; or, as the Apostle expresses it, "by the foolishness of preaching, [1 Corinthians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.21)." How little this can effect, may be seen in the ministry of the Prophets, and Apostles, and even of our blessed Lord himself. To few, comparatively, was the word accompanied with any saving power.

"Neither Paul was anything, nor Apollos anything;" whatever was done through their instrumentality could, if God had so pleased, been as easily effected without them, as with them. So at this day, what is any minister, but "a voice crying in the wilderness?" Yet when God is pleased to make the word effectual, the dead are quickened, and the bond-slaves of Satan are sanctified unto the Lord.

Behold, on the day of Pentecost, what a change was wrought by one single discourse, delivered by Peter, a poor illiterate fisherman! Methinks, as to any intrinsic power to produce the miracle which was wrought that day, the cruse of salt was on a par with the sermon of the Apostle.

And it is a great encouragement to us, to know that no weakness of ours will be any bar to the efficacy of our ministrations, if only God is pleased to work by us; for he "has committed his treasure to earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellency of the power may be seen to be of God, and not of us, 2 Corinthians 4:7."

It is certain, too,

***~~III. That there is no benefit so great, but God will confer it through the ministry of his faithful servants.~~***

***~~What a rich benefit was that conferred by the hands of Elisha!~~***

We, who are accustomed to drink of wholesome springs, and to eat in rich abundance the fruits of the land, have very little conception how great a benefit God at this time bestowed on Jericho. There was from that time no more death in the water, or barrenness in the land. Even after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the spring continued both abundant and healthful, as the Jewish historian informs us; yes, and to this very hour it so remains, as modern travelers have attested.

***~~But what was that benefit, in comparison with the blessings conferred on us by the Gospel?~~***

The blessings of salvation itself are imparted to us by the preaching, the simple preaching, of Christ crucified. Who can estimate this benefit? Think of a new heart being given to us, and a new spirit renewed within us. Think of the whole life and conversation as so changed, that in the place of the brier grows up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorn grows up the myrtle-tree, and all the fruits of righteousness abound to the praise and glory of God. Yet shall this be wrought through the ministry of the word, in every place, and in every heart, where the Gospel is faithfully administered, and humbly received. Yes, it is not to one town or country that this mercy shall be given, but to every country under Heaven, where the Gospel comes. Nor shall the benefits be continued only through the contracted span of this life, but through the endless ages of eternity. Not that it is to be expected to any great extent, except through the intervention of his ministers; for he delights to honor his own ordinances, and his own servants, whom he has sent to minister his blessings to mankind.

He might have healed the springs of Jericho, without either the use of salt, or the agency of Elisha. Just so, he may impart salvation to men without the ministry of a preached Gospel; but it is only in the use of his appointed means that we are authorized to expect his offered blessings. Nevertheless, if we use the appointed means in faith, we may expect, from the abundance of his mercy, every benefit which our souls can desire.

***~~Address to those who feel their need of God's merciful intervention.~~***

The men of Jericho had neglected to avail themselves of the presence of Elijah, who was now forever withdrawn from them; and it was only through the unforeseen circumstance of Elisha waiting for the return of the men who had been sent to search for Elijah, that he was detained there for a few days. Now, therefore, they seize the opportunity afforded them, and beseech his intercession with God in their behalf; and thus they obtain the benefit which they so greatly needed.

Beloved brethren, think how many opportunities you have lost of obtaining salvation to your own souls. But, blessed be God! the word of the Gospel yet sounds in your ears, and God is at this moment waiting to confer on you all the blessings both of grace and glory. But how long the advantages you now enjoy may be continued to you, or you are continued to possess them, God alone knows.

Methinks what our Lord said to his hearers may now be addressed to you, "A little while is the light with you; walk while you have the light, lest darkness comes upon you. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light, [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36)." And who can tell what benefits may accrue to distant ages, if you yourselves obtain these blessings to your souls?

To those, especially, who are now before me, I would say, Cry mightily to God that the cruse of salt may be cast into this fountain, from whence so many streams are issuing. May the life-giving gospel fertilize this whole land, and be the means of diffusing life and salvation to the remotest corners of the globe!

***~~#360~~***

***~~ELISHA MOCKED BY THE CHILDREN~~***

***~~[2 Kings 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.23-24)~~***

"From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. "Go on up, you baldhead!" they said. "Go on up, you baldhead!" He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths!"

***~~Though the ministry of the word in its original purpose was intended only for the happiness of man, it but too frequently proves an occasion of his more aggravated misery.~~***

That great Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to enlighten and save the world, was "set no less for the fall, than for the rising, of many in Israel."

In like manner Paul was to some "a savor of life unto life; but to others, a savor of death unto death."

Thus the Prophet Elisha, who, in healing the waters of Jericho, not only conferred upon Israel a great temporal benefit, but showed what benefit he was sent to confer on their souls also, was speedily constrained to call down judgments upon the people whose welfare he was most anxious to promote.

The destruction of so many children for what appears to have been but a small offence, has afforded to infidels an occasion of triumph. But that this dispensation affords no just ground of complaint either against the God of Israel or his holy prophet, will appear, if we consider,

***~~I. The sin committed by the children.~~***

In their treatment of the prophet we behold a mixture:

***~~1. Of revilement.~~***

The name of "bald head" was not, it is true, any bitter invective; but it was intended as a reproach; and the evil of such reproaches consists, not in the term that is used, but in the intent of him who uses it. Opprobrious language used to anyone is sinful, [Matthew 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.22); but as used on this occasion, it was an insult to God himself. The mocking of a poor man on account of his poverty is considered by God as a reproach offered to himself, who has appointed him his lot, [Proverbs 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 17.5); much more therefore was this contemptuous treatment of the prophet an insult to that God, who had called him to the prophetic office. This is plainly declared by our blessed Lord, [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.16); and it is confirmed by a similar testimony from the Apostle, Paul [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8).

***~~2. Of profaneness.~~***

The expression "Go up, go up!" evidently refers to the recent ascension of Elijah in the fiery chariot; and it intimated that his translation was regarded by them either as a fiction to be disbelieved, or an event to be despised. In either of these views, their guilt was exceedingly great; for how could they disbelieve what was immediately attested by that stupendous miracle, the forming a dry passage through Jordan by a stroke of Elijah's mantle? It is true, that many of the people of Jericho doubted at the time, and desired Elisha to send fifty men to search for his master, lest he should have been cast upon some mountain or valley; but that very doubt, like the unbelief of Thomas, tended only to confirm the fact that had been denied; and consequently the continuance of unbelief became so much the more criminal, in proportion as the evidence had been increased to confirm the fact.

But it is probable that the fact, though believed, was deemed a fit subject for ridicule; 'Let us see you, O bald head, go up as your master did.' Thus *the very abundance of God's power and grace was turned into an occasion of profane banter*. And, as strange as it may seem, this is a very common source of ridicule among the ungodly world. Goodness in itself is not made a ground of contempt; but as proceeding from God, as illustrating his perfections, and as conducing to his glory, it is an object of general derision.

What terms, for instance, are more frequently used as expressive of contempt than "the elect," "the saints," and such like? And why are they so used, but because the sovereignty and the holiness of God are implied in them? *Such reproaches then most assuredly strike at God himself, who estimates them by a very different standard from that which we use*; we view them as a facetious exposure of folly; but *God views them as an impious contempt of Himself!*

We have a clear proof of the malignity of the offence in God's sight, from,

***~~II. The judgment inflicted on account of it.~~***

In a two-fold light must that judgment be regarded:

***~~1. As a punishment to them.~~***

We must not suppose that the judgment was inflicted by Elisha; or that he was actuated by a vindictive spirit in denouncing it. He was no more able to inflict it, than *Moses*was to send the ten plagues of Egypt, or than *Elijah*was to bring fire from Heaven to consume the bands who came to apprehend him. Nor was Elisha any more under the influence of revenge, than Peter was when he passed sentence of death on Ananias and Sapphira; or than Paul was when he declared that Elymas, the sorcerer, should be struck blind. He was merely an organ whereby God denounced his curse against them; and *the two bears out of the woods, like the whole creation, animate and inanimate, were ready to execute the vengeance of God upon them*. As the *locusts*and *frogs*came up over Egypt at God's command, or the *lion*came forth to slay the disobedient prophet, or "the *winds*and *storms*fulfilled his will" in arresting Jonah in his flight—so these *bears*received their commission from God, and executed his commands.

Now this punishment was strictly just; for *what greater dishonor could be done to the God of Heaven and earth than to make the most stupendous efforts of his goodness a subject of reproach?*As it respected the parents, they deserved to lose those children which they had trained up in such impious habits; and the children deserved to be cut off from all further enjoyment of the privileges which they so despised. *For the transgressions of their parents they might well have suffered, even as the children of Sodom and Gomorrah did; but their own iniquities richly merited the judgement they experienced*,[2 Chronicles 36:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.16).

***~~2. As a lesson to the world.~~***

Truly in this dispensation were many valuable lessons contained.

It showed that *smaller acts of persecution, as well as greater, will be noticed by God*. It might be thought a light matter to revile a servant of God; but did God account it so in the instance of Ishmael? He "mocked Isaac," as professing himself to be the child of promise, and the heir of Canaan; and for that sin both he and his mother were cast out from the house of Abraham! [Genesis 21:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 21.9). This conduct of his is by Paul expressly called persecution, and is set forth as illustrative of the way in which carnal men still persecute the children of God, and of the everlasting exclusion from Heaven which they shall suffer for their impiety! [Galatians 4:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29-30). Jude also, having declared that there will be "mockers" in the Church, tells us what fearful ruin they must expect from the hands of an angry God! Jude verse 15, 18. To all therefore who are disposed to deride either religion itself or those who profess it, we would say with the prophet, "Now stop your mocking, or your chains will become heavier! [Isaiah 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.22)."

Another lesson which this judgment teaches us is, that young people, as well as adults, are objects of God's just retribution. We readily acknowledge that *the criminality of our actions is deep, in proportion as our light is clear, and our judgment matured*. *But we must not on that account imagine that God will take no notice of the evils committed by young people*; we have here a solemn instance to the contrary. We are told in Scripture, that a young person who shall despise his earthly parents, shall be visited with some heavy calamity [Proverbs 30:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.17); and shall God be so careful of the honor of earthly parents, and not be jealous of his own honor? Shall young people insult him with impunity? O let them not suppose that their youth is any excuse for their misconduct; for, if they are old enough to know what is right, they are old enough to do it; and "to him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin! [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17)."

On the other hand, if they will employ their tongues in praising and magnifying their Redeemer, they shall receive from him a rich recompense of reward, [Matthew 21:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.15-16).

The last lesson we shall notice as arising from this dispensation, is that parents and children have a fearful responsibility for their conduct towards each other. Doubtless it sometimes happens that the most pious parents have children whom they cannot prevail upon to serve the Lord; and, if they have labored faithfully for their good, they shall not be held responsible for their faults. But *wicked parents can expect nothing but that their children shall tread in their steps; and the truth is, that young children are for the most part only an echo of their parents' opinions.*What a shocking reflection then will it be to parents, that their children perished through their neglect; or to children, that they persisted in wickedness in opposition to the instructions, example, and entreaties of their parents!

Ungodly parents, think how you will bear to look upon your children in the eternal world; and how they will one day execrate your conduct towards them, and call for vengeance on your heads for neglecting to warn them of their evil ways!

And, children, think how, if you have disobeyed the voice of your godly parents, you will execrate your own folly, when you see an impassable gulf between them and you!

Reflect a moment on the terror that seized the children the very instant the bears rushed forth upon them; and the distress which came upon their parents when they heard of the calamity that had befallen them.

This may serve as an image, though a very faint image, of the terror and distress in which negligent parents and ungodly children will be involved to all eternity. May the Lord grant that this may prove a beneficial warning to us all!

***~~#361~~***

***~~THE KING OF MOAB SACRIFICES HIS SON~~***

**[2 Kings 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 3.27)**

"Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land."

God delights to honor prayer; and often withholds the blessings which he has purposed to bestow, until he shall have been "inquired of by us concerning them, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37)."

In the preceding context we are informed that Moab had rebelled against Israel, and that the kings of *Israel*, of *Judah*, and of *Edom*united their forces in order to reduce the Moabites to their former state of subjection. In prosecution of this purpose they were left by God to adopt such measures as nearly proved fatal to the confederate armies. They attempted to pass through the wilderness of Edom, where they were in danger of perishing for lack of water. Then, but not until then, did they think of making their application to Jehovah. Jehoshaphat, a pious king, proposed it, and the other two from the pressure of their necessity united in it.

Elisha, surely by the gracious appointment of Providence, was in the camp at the time; and at the request of the three kings, undertook to lay their case before the Lord. The Lord bade Elisha to inform them that he would not only give them a miraculous supply of water, but would deliver the Moabites into their hands. The supply of water, without the intervention of any natural cause, was given; and the Moabites, mistaking the reflection of the sun upon the water for blood, supposed that the confederate armies had destroyed each other; and going therefore securely to take the spoil, were themselves destroyed.

The remnant of them with their king taking refuge in a fortress, the king brought forth his eldest son, and offered him for a burnt-offering in the sight of all his enemies. We shall,

***~~I. Inquire into the reasons of this extraordinarily wicked act by the king of Moab.~~***

Reduced to the greatest extremity, the king of Moab resorted to this expedient:

***~~1. To propitiate his gods.~~***

The gods of the heathen are supposed to delight in sacrifices, and to regard them in proportion to the worth and estimation of them in the minds of the offerers. Hence their gods are supposed above all to be pleased with human sacrifices; and hence their votaries have offered to them even their own sons and daughters, with the hope of conciliating their favor. Even the Israelites themselves, when they had departed from their God, practiced these impious and wicked rites! [Psalm 106:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.37-38).

The king of Moab, now looking to his gods for help, presented to them as an offering his own, his eldest son, as being confessedly of more value, and dearer to himself, than all that he possessed.

While we lament that Satan should have ever so blinded the eyes of men, we cannot but be filled with shame when we reflect how little we have ever sacrificed to our offended God. We all know that he has abundant reason to be displeased with us; and we know that "a broken and contrite spirit is a sacrifice which he will never despise;" but how few of us are willing to offer it! How few are at all anxious about his favor, or will exercise any self-denial in order to obtain it! Will not that ignorant heathen rise up in judgment against us?

**2. To intimidate his enemies.**

The king of Moab offered his son "upon the wall" in the sight of all his enemies. What an idea did that give them of his determination to sacrifice everything rather than surrender to his enemies, and to sell his life as dear as possible! We cannot doubt but that this act of his was publicly known among the besiegers as well as the besieged; and, methinks, it must strike them all with horror to reflect that they had driven him to such an awful act of desperation; and no doubt it tended also to inflame the hatred of his own subjects against them to the uttermost. We are told indeed that this effect ensued; for "the fury against Israel was great!" who being the principals in the war, (while the other two kings were only allies,) were the more immediate objects of their resentment.

The burning of Moscow by the Russians, on Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, to prevent it from being serviceable to their enemies, was an act somewhat similar, and tended to convince the French that the complete conquest of Russia would be no easy matter.

In fact, it produced the same effect as the expedient of the king of Moab did; it caused his enemies to depart, without pursuing any further the advantages they had already gained. And certainly the expedient so far succeeded, that the king of Moab's victorious enemies "departed from him, and returned to their own land."

We proceed to,

**II. Suggest some reflections naturally arising from this extraordinarily wicked act by the king of Moab.**

We observe then,

***~~1. How great are the calamities of war!~~***

Dreadful indeed were the evils inflicted on the land of Moab, "the cities were beaten down; every good piece of land was marred with stones; the wells were all filled up; and every good tree leveled with the ground." It is true that these judgments were inflicted by the command of God; and therefore the agents who inflicted them were blameless.

But the warfare which has so long desolated Europe, and especially that which has recently been carried on in its more northern states, has partaken much of the same spirit, and proved almost equally fatal to the happiness of millions.

What reason then have we to bless our God, that, notwithstanding all the threats of our enemies, this happy land has not been made the theater of war! And with what alacrity should we contribute for the relief and comfort of our suffering allies! *Let us learn to sympathize even with our enemies, and to moderate our joy at the victories we obtain, by feelings of compassion for the miseries we inflict.*

***~~2. How pitiable is the ignorance of the heathen!~~***

Who can forbear to pity that afflicted king of Moab, who had recourse to such an unnatural expedient as that of murdering his own son in order to pacify the deities he adored? Yet such are the methods by which the heathen almost universally endeavor to appease their gods. When once they begin to ask, "With what shall I come before my God?" they proceed to say, "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? [Micah 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.7)."

In India there are thousands, perhaps many thousands, sacrificed every year, under the idea that such offerings are pleasing to the gods whom they worship. Should we hear of such transactions then with indifference? Should not a holy zeal be stirred up within us, to turn the heathen, if possible, from those vanities, to serve the living and true God? O that we felt for the honor of God, and for the good of man, as we ought to do; and that they especially who call themselves ministers of Christ were more willing to spend and be spent in the service of their Lord!

*Alas! how few are those that are willing to forego their carnal ease and worldly interests, to save their benighted and perishing fellow-creatures!*A call to accept a lucrative situation is soon acknowledged and easily obeyed; but God may call us long enough to go and labor among the heathen, and we neither regard his voice, nor listen to his proposals. If ever there was a time that peculiarly called for missionary exertions, methinks this is that time; for never was there such a zeal for disseminating the Holy Scriptures as at this time; never were so many societies raised up to consider the state both of Jews and Gentiles, as at this moment. This alone is a call from God to contribute, each according to his ability, to the advancement of our Redeemer's kingdom, and to the salvation of a ruined world.

***~~3. How rich are the provisions of the Gospel!~~***

We all, as sinners, have reason to fear that God is displeased with us. But we need not sacrifice an eldest son to avert his wrath. No; blessed be his name! He himself has given us "a Lamb for a burnt-offering," even his only dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This sacrifice was once offered on Mount Calvary; and it was offered, not to intimidate, but encourage us; not to threat us with ruin, but to open for us a way of everlasting salvation. With this sacrifice he was well pleased; he smelled a sweet savor at the very instant it was offered; and from respect to it, he is reconciled to his most inveterate enemies!

What thanks do we owe to God for such a wonderful provision as this! How delightful should it be to us to hear, that "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all!" Let us dwell upon the joyful sound; let us put away all those vain hopes which we are apt to substitute in the place of this; and let us look to Christ for all the ends and purposes for which he was sent.

Are we afraid that God is angry with us? Let us seek reconciliation with him through the blood of our adorable Redeemer.

Are we desirous of repelling all our spiritual enemies? Let us "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might;" let us "resist the devil" in the strength of Christ, and "he will flee from us."

In Christ there is all that we can stand in need of. We are expressly taught to say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength." "In him therefore let us rejoice always;" for, as "in him we shall be justified, so in him we should glory, [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25)."

***~~#362~~***

***~~THE WIDOW'S OIL INCREASED~~***

**[2 Kings 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.6)**

When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one."

But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.

*From every event recorded in the Old Testament, there is much useful instruction to be derived.* For instance, it is impossible to read with attention the account of the miracle before us, and not to see, that, *in our deepest extremity, God is able and willing to relieve those who trust in him*. But there are often minute incidents, which a superficial reader is apt to overlook, but which, to a considerate mind, suggest very important reflections.

Of this kind is the incident mentioned in my text; the increase of oil continued as long as there was a vessel left to contain it; but when there remained no more a vessel to receive the oil, the supply ceased. So remarkable a circumstance as this cannot have occurred without a special design on the part of God that we should make a suitable improvement of it; and, that we may draw from it the instruction which it is well calculated to convey, I shall mark,

***~~I. The bounty of God towards this insolvent widow.~~***

**Certainly her distress was great.**

She was the widow of a pious minister. Her late husband was one of the sons of the prophets; and so decided had been his piety, that she could appeal to the prophet himself, "You know that your servant feared the Lord." He had died in debt; not through any extravagance of his; for *a man that will run into debt for the purpose of indulging his pride and vanity, has no pretensions to real piety*. Piety would teach him to "owe no man anything," and to deny himself any gratification rather than obtain it at the expense of common honesty.

But in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, when a hundred prophets were hidden by fifties in a cave, and fed with bread and water, at the expense of a single individual, to prevent their falling into the hands of their blood-thirsty persecutor, we do not wonder that a pious minister should be involved in debt. And, indeed, at any time a man may be so oppressed with misfortunes or with sickness, as to preclude a possibility of avoiding debt, especially if he has, like this man, a wife and family to maintain.

But, to add to her affliction, she was warned by her creditors that they would take her two sons for slaves. This the law enabled them to do, [Leviticus 25:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.39-40); [Matthew 18:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.25); and this would exceedingly augment her trouble, since to her widowhood and poverty would be added the loss of her sons, who were her only hope and support.

Under this heavy calamity she applied to the Prophet Elisha; who, though not able to relieve her himself, might possibly obtain relief for her from God.

**The relief afforded her, through the instrumentality of Elisha, was fully adequate to her necessities.**

The prophet interrogated her as to the means which were yet left her of discharging her debts; and being informed that nothing remained to her but a jar of oil, he directed her to borrow as many vessels as she could of her neighbors, and, with her doors closed in order to avoid the distraction which might be occasioned by impertinent curiosity, to pour out the oil into the vessels, under a full assurance that it should be so multiplied as to prove a supply for all her wants.

The event fully answered her expectations; and in one hour she had enough to pay all her creditors, and to support herself and family for the future. Thus, in the hour of her necessity, did she experience the truth of that proverb, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen."

But the point to which we wish more particularly to draw your attention is, the stopping of the supply, when there were no more vessels to be filled. And this, while it shows how large God's bounty is, shows also,

***~~II. Whence it is that we also are not more spiritually enriched by it God's bounty.~~***

Our state accords in a measure with that of the insolvent widow, inasmuch as *we are loaded with a debt which we can never discharge, and are threatened with everlasting bonds as the just consequence of our insolvency.*But from God do I declare,

***~~1. That spiritual relief shall be afforded to you.~~***

God is both able and willing to relieve all who call upon him. He is able; as the Apostle has said, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work, [2 Corinthians 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.8)." And to God he ascribes all glory, in that precise view, "Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us; unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end, Amen! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)."

God is as willingas he is able. It is for this very end that he has treasured up in Christ all fullness for us, that out of it we may receive to the utmost extent of our necessities, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19); [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another! [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)" on purpose that he may impart of it unto us.

**2. That if we receive not to the fullest possible extent of our spiritual necessities, it is "not in God that we are straitened, but in ourselves**,[2 Corinthians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.12)".

Most free are the invitations given us to come and receive God's blessings "without money and without price, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)." And so largely is our Savior willing to bestow them, that "they should be in us a *well*of water springing up unto everlasting life, [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14)." Yes, to all, without exception, does he make an offer, that, if they come unto him for the waters of life, "out of their belly shall flow rivers of living water." "And this he spoke of the Spirit, which those who believe on him should receive, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39)."

Jesus is represented by the Prophet Zechariah as an *inexhaustible fountain*, even as that golden bowl which by golden pipes supplies with golden oil every lamp in God's sanctuary, [Zechariah 4:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.1-6); [Zechariah 4:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.11-14).

He bids us "open our mouth wide, that he may fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)." He assures 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);" and that "according to our faith, it shall be done unto us [Matthew 9:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.29)."

Why, then, are we for the most part, so seldom filled with the Holy Spirit? The reason may be seen in the conduct of king Joash. Elisha had told him that he should destroy the Syrians who had oppressed him; and he bade the king to strike the ground with the arrows which he had in his hand. The king, being deficient both in faith and zeal, struck the ground only three times, and thereby greatly incensed the prophet against him; and was told, that the mercy promised should be reduced to the scale which he himself, by his lack of zeal, had dictated; for he should smite the Syrians only thrice; whereas, if he had struck the ground five or six times, he should have utterly consumed them, [2 Kings 13:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.15-19).

Thus, if we were more urgent in our prayers, and more enlarged in our expectations, who can tell what supplies of the Holy Spirit we might obtain? Truly I speak not too strongly, if I say, that God would "pour him out so abundantly upon us, [Titus 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.6)," that we should "be filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.19)."

***~~This, then, I would desire of you, my brethren:~~***

***~~1. Beg of God to make you sensible of your spiritual needs.~~***

You are not a whit less indigent than that insolvent widow. You see how bent she was on obtaining relief; let me entreat you to follow her steps in this respect; and to ask of God himself, who has promised to "supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus! [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19)."

***~~2. Assign no limits to the spiritual supplies which he will afford you.~~***

See what God did on the day of Pentecost; three thousand were converted in one hour! And why should not his grace abound in like manner towards us? He has said, that "a nation shall be born in a day, [Isaiah 66:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.8);" and that "when he shall breathe upon the dry bones, the dead shall arise as a whole army, [Ezekiel 37:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.9-10)." *Enlarge, then, your expectations, to the utmost extent of God's power and grace.*And, if a doubt arise whether your insignificance or unworthiness shall not divert his attention from you, or arrest his arm, know, and be assured, that no father upon earth would so readily supply the wants of his first-born child, as God would fulfill your desires for the filling of his Holy Spirit to your souls, [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.13). "Ask, and you shall receive; and your joy shall be full [John 16:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.24)."

***~~#363~~***

***~~CONTENTMENT ILLUSTRATED IN THE SHUNAMITE~~***

***~~[2 Kings 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.13)~~***

Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

"To be content with such things as we have" is a very rare attainment. Everyone imagines that some change of circumstances, and especially some addition to his finances, will increase his happiness. But the answer of the Shunamite to the Prophet Elisha may well dissipate this delusion. She, in concurrence with her husband, had provided accommodation for the prophet, that, when he was proceeding on his journeys in the discharge of his ministerial office, and should have occasion to visit Shunem, he might have a place of repose under her roof. The prophet, sensible of her great kindness, and thankful for all the care she had taken of him, proposed to do anything she might wish for the promotion of her interests. He offered to speak for her to the captain of the army, or even to the king himself, if he might thereby obtain for her and her husband anything that might conduce to their comfort. But she declined his kind offer, saying, "I have a home among my own people," and possess all that my heart can desire.

Now this was a wise and good reply. It commends itself to us as the dictate of a sound judgment,

***~~I. On the principles of worldly wisdom.~~***

Advancement in the world was offered to her, but:

**1. She preferred a state of independence, to a state of obligation.**

No man should be ashamed of a state of dependence, or of being indebted to the kind offices of others, if God has put him into a situation that requires it. *God has ordained that there shall be a great diversity in the conditions of men, on purpose that every species of virtue may be called forth into act and exercise*; in the poor, contentment; and in the rich, a liberal and tender sympathy. But to be needlessly dependent upon others is most disgraceful. No man should exist on charity, when he is able to support himself. It was a blessing which God promised to his obedient people, when he said, "You shall lend to many nations, but shall not borrow; since by the one they would be the head, whereas by the other they would be in the degraded situation of the tail, [Deuteronomy 28:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.12-13)." It was a virtuous pride therefore in this woman to decline a state of dependence, when God had given her a sufficiency for independence.

***~~2. She preferred a state of competency, to a state of affluence.~~***

She had food and clothing—what more could she need? An abundance of the things of this life is usually productive of care, and always exposes us to temptation; while yet the possessor of it has "no other benefit from it than, that of beholding it with his eyes! [Ecclesiastes 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.11). See also [Psalm 37:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.16); [Proverbs 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.16); [Ecclesiastes 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 4.6); [Matthew 6:25-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.25-30)." Why then should any man strive for worldly advancement? "A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses, [Luke 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.15)." True wisdom therefore dictates to every man the advice, which Jeremiah gave to Baruch, "Are you seeking great things unto yourself? Seek them not! [Jeremiah 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 45.5)."

***~~3. She preferred a state of domestic quiet, to all the happiness that arises from external and adventitious circumstances.~~***

It is a great mistake to imagine that happiness can be found in amusements of any kind. They involve no small measure of trouble in the pursuit of them, and they almost always issue in disappointment. At all events, they are but "as the crackling of thorns under a pot," which blaze for a moment, and then expire in smoke and darkness! [Ecclesiastes 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.6).

But in filling up our station in life with diligence, and administering to the welfare of all around us—there is real happiness. However much we diversify the objects of our pursuit of pleasures, we never attain any solid satisfaction, "The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, [Ecclesiastes 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 1.8)." But, when we are always content with whatever God has blessed us with, we possess that state of peaceful tranquility, which is the most enviable state on earth! "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 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. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness, [1 Timothy 6:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.6-11)."

If in a mere worldly view, and on the principles of common sense, this woman's choice was commendable, much more was it so:

***~~II. On the principles of Christian piety.~~***

Let two things only be considered;

***~~1. How little any worldly things can add to the happiness of a believing soul!~~***

Pleasure, riches, and honor are the great objects of men's idolatrous regard! But what pleasure can the world afford in comparison with "that peace which passes all understanding," and that "joy which is unspeakable and full of glory"—both of which are the believer's portion from day to day!

What are gold and silver when compared with "the unsearchable riches of Christ," which are given even to the poorest and lowest of God's saints!

What, too, are the most elevated titles upon earth, when put in competition with that of being "sons of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!"

If we could imagine two angels sent from Heaven, one to rule an empire, and the other to sweep the streets—they would be equally happy in discharging the offices assigned to them, because they would have no happiness but in God.

Just so it is with us, in proportion as we grow in grace. We shall, "in whatever state we are placed, be content," and, while "having nothing, consider ourselves as possessing all things."

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that!" [1 Timothy 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.6-8)."

***~~2. How entirely our future abundance depends on our present moderation!~~***

We are told by our Lord that "The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and render it unfruitful;" and we see in *Demas*this sad effect, "Demas has forsaken us, having loved this present evil world." The things of this life are as "thick clay to the feet" of one who is running a race, or as "a long garment" that impedes his every step. Hence we are told to cast off both the one and the other, that we may "so run as to obtain the prize."

Now no one would doubt the wisdom of complying with this advice when striving for an earthly crown; nor can anyone doubt it in reference to the spiritual "race that is set before us." Hence, when the question was put to David, "Who will show us any good?" he replied, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us! [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)."

***~~Seeing now that this Shunamite's choice was so wise, let us inquire,~~***

***~~1. Whey it is that this godly disposition is so rare.~~***

She improved for the Lord the property she possessed. She spent it not on carnal gratifications, but devoted what she could to pious uses. Now by acting on that principle we suppress all worldly-mindedness, and attain a superiority to all covetous desires.

But how few act on that principle! How few regard their property as given them of the Lord for the carrying on of his service, and for the promotion of his glory!

Hence it is that worldly advancement is so coveted; and that few, with such prospects as were now opened to this pious woman, would have the wisdom or the fortitude to follow her example.

***~~2. How we may attain this godly disposition.~~***

*Nothing will so soon or so effectually deliver us from worldly desires, as the acquisition and experience of heavenly joys!*Our Lord told the Samaritan woman that "whoever should drink of Jacob's well, would thirst again; but that whoever should drink of the water that he would give, should never thirst." And so we find it invariably. "By the cross of Christ, the world will become crucified unto us, and we unto the world." Let us then "set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth." So shall we both advance our happiness here on earth, and secure a more exalted happiness in the realms above.

Adam Clarke: "Who is so contented with what he has, as not to desire more? Who trembles at the prospect of riches? Who believes that there are many snares in an elevated state, or in the company and conversation of the great and honorable? How few are there that will not sacrifice everything—peace, domestic comfort, their friends, their conscience, and their God—for money, honors, grandeur, and fame?"

***~~#364~~***

***~~ALL THE DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE ARE GOOD~~***

***~~[2 Kings 4:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.26)~~***

And she answered, "It is well."

To serve the Lord with our talents is the best possible improvement of them. *Even as it respects this life, we never exert ourselves truly for God without receiving from him, in some way or other, an abundant recompense*. Behold the pious Shunamite; being provided richly with the good things of this life, she gladly imparted of them to the Prophet Elisha; and, with her husband's approbation, provided for him a comfortable accommodation in her house. The prophet, full of gratitude, desired to requite her kindness, and for that end would have exerted his influence with the king in any way that she should desire; but her contented disposition rendered all such services unnecessary. There was, however, one service which he might render. She had no child, which to a Jewish woman was a great calamity; and he might intercede with God to bestow upon her this blessing. Accordingly he did so, and prevailed; and thus her generous hospitality was richly rewarded. But she had a still better reward in her soul; for under an exceedingly deep affliction, she was enabled to make the declaration in our text, "It is well!"

In considering this declaration, we shall notice,

***~~I. The circumstances under which it was made.~~***

This son had no sooner arrived at an age to render himself helpful to his parents, than he was removed by sudden death. In great affliction the mother set off instantly to the prophet; who, seeing her at a distance, sent immediately to inquire after the welfare of herself, her husband, and her child; and to each inquiry she replied, "It is well!"

Behold here:

***~~1. The Shunammite woman's resignation.~~***

Her affliction would have been great, if she had had other children left; but to lose her *only*son, her son miraculously given, and to have him so suddenly snatched away, was a calamity which might have utterly overwhelmed her. That she felt deeply was manifest, from the manner in which she prostrated herself at the prophet's feet, and from the plea she urged with him to intercede in her behalf, "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?" That is, If I had indulged an inordinate desire after this blessing, I might well have expected this severe chastisement; but when it was given me unsolicited, as a reward for my attentions to you, surely it was not given merely to mock me, and to augment my sorrows. But, notwithstanding the anguish of her mind, she was enabled to leave the matter in God's hands, and to say, "It is well!"

Thus did she tread in the steps of Aaron, [Leviticus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.3), of Eli, [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18), of David, [Psalm 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.9), and of Job, [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21); and afforded an example of patience to the Church in all ages.

**2.** **The Shunammite woman's faith.**

She had not indeed any promise to rest upon; but she had a persuasion that God was gracious, and would hear the prayers of his servant in her behalf. Hence it was that she put the child upon the prophet's bed, and hastened with such speed to him, and pleaded her cause with him in such an affecting manner.

In this view the history before us is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "By faith women received their dead raised to life again, [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35);" and in this noble exercise of faith, she approved herself to be a true daughter of Abraham, who offered up his son Isaac, from a persuasion "that God was able to raise him up again, even from the dead, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19)." This divine principle calmed her spirits and composed her mind; and, wherever the same principle exists, it will produce a similar composure, in proportion as its operation is encouraged and felt.

Her declaration was scarcely more the language of *faith*than it was of *prophecy*—as appears from,

***~~II. The outcome whereby her declaration was verified.~~***

The prophet instantly complied with her request, and sent his servant Gehazi to lay his staff upon the face of the child, with a view to his recovery. But in this he appears to have acted without any direction from God, and without that humble reference to God which the occasion demanded; and therefore God rebuked him by not accompanying the attempt with his blessing.

The prophet, finding that his desire had failed, sought the Lord with all humility and earnestness; and, by means similar to those which had before been successfully used by Elijah, he obtained of God the restoration of the child to life. Compare verse 34, 35 with [1 Kings 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.21). The gestures were used, not as means to an end, but as emblematic of the blessing desired. Who now must not acknowledge the truth of the mother's declaration? Truly, "it was well!" and **the dispensation, though afflictive, was good**:

***~~1. As exercising and confirming her graces.~~***

How would it have been known that she possessed the graces of faith and resignation, if something had not occurred to call them forth? and how could they have been strengthened, if not exercised? The pruning of the vine is therefore good, because it tends to augment its fruitfulness, [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.2); and the putting of the choicest vessel into a furnace is good, as tending to fit it for the master's use, [2 Timothy 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.21). Thus is "tribulation good, as working patience, experience, and hope, [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5); [Hebrews 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.11)."

Hence we are authorized rather to commend the saints upon their trials, than condole with them, [James 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2-3); [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11); [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28); and the universal testimony of God's people, after they have come out of their troubles, accords with that of the Psalmist, "It is *good*for me that I have been afflicted [Psalm 119:67](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.67); [Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.71); [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.75)."

***~~2. As displaying and magnifying God's perfections.~~***

This trial of hers occasioned an application to God in her behalf; and how marvelous did the condescension of God appear in listening to the voice of his servant, and in granting his petitions! How glorious too was the display of his power! And *was not a momentary suffering good, when it was an occasion of bringing so much glory to Jehovah?* Is there a saint in the universe that would not gladly endure even more than that, for the attainment of so blessed an end? Paul desired nothing so much as that God might be glorified in him; and, provided his Lord and "Savior might only be magnified in his body," he was indifferent whether it were "by life or by death, [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20)." And, wherever the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, not even life itself will be dear to us, except as it may be improved, or sacrificed for him.

***~~Advice.~~***

***~~1. Do not be hasty to judge the dispensations of Providence.~~***

God's ways are in the great deep; his footsteps are not known; and often those very dispensations of which we are ready to say with Jacob, "All these things are *against*me," are in reality the greatest blessings that God can bestow.

Behold the case of Job; how glorious was the outcome of his trials, [Job 42:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.11-16). And, *if we could see the end from the beginning as God does, we would pronounce a similar verdict on every trial that we are called to endure*.

The forty years' sojourning in the wilderness was a dark dispensation; yet we are told, "God led his people in the right way;" so he leads us also in the right way; and *when we get to Heaven we shall bless God as fervently for all the troubles we sustained, as for any comfort we ever enjoyed*.

***~~2. Do not be remiss to improve your trials.~~***

Every trial has a *voice*to us, and is calculated to teach us some important lesson, [Job 33:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.14-17); [Job 33:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.29-30). Hence the prophet says, "Hear the rod, and him who has appointed it! [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9)." Consider then what it is intended to speak to you; take occasion from it to examine your ways, to see wherein you may have erred, or wherein you may amend your ways. Thus will every event be made a blessing to your souls; and Samson's riddle be verified in you, "Out of the eater you will bring forth meat, and out of the strong you will bring forth sweet!"

***~~#365~~***

***~~NAAMAN HEALED OF HIS LEPROSY~~***

***~~[2 Kings 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.13)~~***

Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you: Wash and be cleansed!"

Men universally claim a right to "do what they will with their own;" but they are extremely averse to concede that right to God.*Indeed*,*there is scarcely any doctrine against which the carnal heart rises with such acrimony, as against the sovereignty of God*. Nevertheless we must maintain that the Governor of the universe orders everything after the counsel of his own will, and dispenses his gifts "according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself."

He once chose the Jews for his peculiar people, not for the sake of any righteousness of theirs, but because he had ordained that he would magnify his grace in them; and for the same reason has he now transferred his favors to the Gentiles.

Our Lord, in his first sermon at Nazareth, warned his hearers, that, if they rejected his gracious overtures, the blessings of his Gospel should be transferred to the Gentile world; and, to show them how futile all their objections were, and how delusive their hopes of impunity in sin were, he reminded them, that God had in many instances given mercy to Gentiles, not only in conjunction with his people, but even in opposition to them. "For that there were many lepers in *Israel*in the time of Elisha; but had God overlooked them, while he showed mercy to Naaman the *Syrian*,[Luke 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.27).

The history to which our Lord referred, is that which is contained in the chapter before us; which we propose to consider,

***~~I. In a way of literal interpretation.~~***

Under the pressure of leprosy, which was an incurable disorder, Naaman, the Syrian, applied to Elisha for a cure. Doubtless everything that the Syrian physicians could devise had been tried, but to no purpose. It happened however that an Israelitish maid, whom the Syrians had taken captive, was living in the service of Naaman; and that she, knowing what great miracles had been wrought by Elisha, suggested, that by an application to him her master might be restored to health. The idea being suggested to Naaman, he determined without delay to apply for a cure. This he did erroneously at first to the king of Israel; but afterwards to Elisha himself; but through his own folly and wickedness he nearly lost the benefit which he was so eager to obtain; for, instead of following the direction given him by the prophet, "he turned, and went away in a rage! verse 12." Here let us pause to inquire: **What it was that so nearly robbed him of the desired blessing?**It was:

***~~1. Naaman's offended pride.~~***

He had come in great state, and with rich rewards in his hand, to the house of a poor prophet; and the prophet had not deigned to come out to him, but had only sent him word what he must do in order to a cure. This was considered by Naaman as an insufferable insult. In his own country he was regarded with the utmost deference; and was he now to be treated with such indignity by a contemptible Israelite? No! he would not listen for a moment to a message sent him in so rude a way.

*Alas! What an enemy to human happiness is pride!* How acute are its feelings! How hasty its judgment! How impetuous its actings! But thus it is with all who have high ideas of their own importance. They do not stop to inquire whether any insult is intended; but construing everything according to their own conceptions, they are as full of resentment on account of a imagined insult, as they would be if they had sustained the greatest injury; and in many instances do they sacrifice their most important interests to this self-applauding, but delusive, passion.

***~~2. Naaman's disappointed expectation.~~***

Naaman had formed an idea of the manner in which the prophet would effect the cure; nor do we at all condemn the notions he had formed. But what right had he to be offended because the cure was not wrought with all the formalities that he had pictured to himself? If he received the benefit, did it matter in what way he received it? Had he any right to dictate to the prophet and to God, in what way the cure should be wrought? Yet behold, because his own expectations were not realized, he breaks out into a passion, and will not accept the blessing in God's appointed way.

This throws a great light on innumerable occasions of offence which are taken even among good people. We paint to ourselves the way in which we think others ought to act; and then, because they do not measure up to our expectations, we are offended. We forget that *another person may not view everything in precisely the same light that we do, or have exactly the same judgment about the best mode of acting under any given circumstances.* Yet, as though we were infallible, and the other person were in full possession of our ideas, we are offended at him for not acting as we would have him; when most probably we ourselves, had we been in his situation, would not have followed the line of conduct which we had marked out for him. It is surprising how much disquietude this mistaken spirit occasions in men's own minds, and how many disagreements it produces in the world!

***~~3. Naaman's reigning unbelief.~~***

Though Naaman came expecting that a miracle should be wrought by the prophet—yet would he not use the *means*which the prophet prescribed. He did not expect the effect to be produced by the power of God, but by the mere act of washing in a river; and then he concluded, that the rivers of his own country were as competent to the end desired, as any river in Israel. Thus, because he saw not the suitableness of the means to the end, he would not use the means in order to the end, notwithstanding they were so easy, and so safe.

It is thus that unbelief continually argues: 'God, I am told, would do such and such things for me, if I would apply to him in the use of such and such particular means—but what can those means effect?' This is an absurd mode of arguing; for, when God commanded *Moses*to smite the rock with his rod, did the promised effect not follow, because a stroke of his rod could not of itself produce it? *God can work equally by means or without means; and whatever he prescribes, that it is our wisdom to do, in full expectation that what he promises shall surely be accomplished.*

When Naaman was made sensible of his folly, and complied with the direction of the prophet, then his disorder vanished; and "his flesh became like the flesh of a little child." And thus shall we find in relation to everything which God has promised, that "according to our faith, it will be unto us."

We now proceed to consider this history:

***~~II. In a way of spiritual accommodation.~~***

We are not in general disposed to take Scripture in any other than its true and primary sense; though, as the inspired writers occasionally take passages of Holy Writ in an accommodated sense, we feel it to be a liberty which on some particular occasions we are warranted to take.

We think it would be too much to say that this history was intended to show how the Gentiles are to be washed from the guilt of sin; but we are sure that it is well adapted for that end; and, as the leprosy was certainly a type of sin, and the mode of purification from it was certainly typical of our purification from sin by the Redeemer's blood—we feel no impropriety in accommodating this history to elucidate the Gospel of Christ.

We have here, then, a lively representation of:

**1. The character of the Gospel.**

Sin is absolutely incurable by any human means; but God has "opened a fountain for sin and for impurity;" and has bidden us to "wash in it and be clean!" He has even reasoned with us, as Naaman's servants did with him, saying, "Come now, let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet—they shall be made white as snow; though they are red as crimson—they shall be as wool."

In all the Word of God there is not a more beautiful illustration of the Gospel method of salvation than this. We are simply required to wash in the blood of Christ by faith; and in so doing we shall immediately be cleansed from all sin.

The direction given to the jailer agrees with this, (the only one that can with propriety be given to one who inquires after the way of salvation,) "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!"

***~~2. The treatment the Gospel meets with.~~***

Multitudes not only disregard it, but turn from it with disgust. In their eyes, the direction, "Wash and be clean," "Believe and be saved," is too simple, too free, too humiliating.

It is too SIMPLE. What! have I nothing to do, but to believe? Will this remove all my guilt? It cannot be!

It is too FREE. Surely some good works are necessary to prepare me for the Savior, and to make me in some measure worthy of his favor. Must I receive everything without money and without price, and acknowledge to all eternity that it is altogether the free gift of God in Christ Jesus—as free as the light I see, or the air I breathe? I cannot but regard such a proposal as subversive to all morality.

It is too HUMILIATING. Must I no more bring my good deeds than my bad ones, and no more hope for mercy on account of my past life, than publicans and harlots can for theirs? This is a mode of righteousness which I never can, nor will, submit to! [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3).

Now people who argue thus against the Gospel, are frequently full of indignation against it, and against all who believe it. If called upon to do some great thing for the Gospel, they would engage in it gladly, and do it with all their might; but, if invited to accept its benefits by faith alone, they resent the offer as a wild conceit and an Antinomian delusion.

From the striking resemblance which there is between the conduct of Naaman and that of those who reject the Gospel:

***~~We shall take occasion to add a few words of advice:~~***

***~~1. Do not bring to the Gospel any pre-conceived notions of your own.~~***

Every man, of necessity, forms to himself some idea of the way in which he is to obtain acceptance with God. But when we come to the Holy Scriptures, we must lay aside all our own vain conceits, and sit at the feet of Jesus, to learn what he has spoken, and to do what he has commanded. We must not dictate to God what he shall say, but with the docility of little children receive instruction from him.

***~~2. Do not let your pride dictate in matters of religion.~~***

Many who hear perhaps a single sermon, or even a single expression, are offended, and shut their ears against the truth from that time. But, if candid investigation is ever called for, surely it is required in the concerns of religion; where the truths proposed must of necessity be offensive to the carnal mind, and where the consequences of admitting or rejecting them must so deeply affect our everlasting welfare.

***~~3. Be willing to take advice even from your inferiors.~~***

Naaman, under the influence of pride and passion, thought himself right in rejecting the proposals of the prophet; but his servants saw how erroneously he judged, and how absurdly he acted. Thus many who are our inferiors in station or learning may see how unreasonably we act in the concerns of our souls, and especially in rejecting the Gospel of Christ. May the Lord grant that we may be willing to listen to those who see more clearly than ourselves, and be as ready to use God's method of cleansing for our souls, as Naaman was for the healing of his body!

***~~4. Obey God's instructions proposed for your salvation.~~***

No sooner did Naaman submit to use the means prescribed, than he derived from them all the benefit that he could desire.

Just so, shall anyone go to Christ in vain? Shall anyone wash in the fountain of his blood in vain? No! the most leprous of mankind shall be healed of his sins; and the wonders of Bethesda's pool be renewed in all that will descend into it.

Only remember that you must wash there seven times. You must not go to any other fountain to begin or perfect your cure; in Christ, and in Christ alone, you must seek all that your souls can stand in need of!

***~~#366~~***

***~~NAAMAN BOWING IN THE HOUSE OF RIMMON~~***

(A lesson in Christian Liberty.)

***~~[2 Kings 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.18-19)~~***

"But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also--when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this."

"Go in peace," Elisha said.

The operation of divine grace is uniform in every age and place; it makes a radical revolution in the views and habits of the person in whom it dwells.

See how it wrought on Naaman! Before he felt its influence he was full of pride and unbelief; and notwithstanding his request for the healing of his leprosy was granted—yet because it was not granted in the precise way that he expected, he would not comply with the directions of the prophet, but "turned, and went away in a rage."

But when his leprosy was healed, and in conjunction with that mercy the grace of God wrought powerfully upon his soul, he returned with most heartfelt gratitude to the prophet, renounced his idol-worship, and devoted himself altogether to the God of Israel!

At the same time however that he embraced the true religion, he made a request, which has been differently interpreted by different commentators; some vindicating it as illustrative of a tender conscience, and others condemning it as an indication of a sinful compliance.

We think that great and learned men are apt to judge of particular passages according as their own general views and habits of life incline them; those who are lax in their own conduct, leaning too much to a laxity of interpretation. But those who are strict in their principles, not daring, as it were, to concede to men the liberty which God has given them. We conceive that few Christians in the world would have approved of the teaching in Romans 14 concerning Christian liberty, if it had not been contained in the inspired volume. But we should neither abridge the Christian's liberty, nor extend it beyond its just bounds; and we apprehend that the passage before us will assist us materially in assigning to it its proper limits, and will itself receive the most satisfactory interpretation when viewed according to its plain and obvious import.

We propose then to consider,

***~~I. The concession that Naaman made.~~***

We do not hesitate to call Elisha's answer a concession. To regard it as an evasion of the question is to dishonor the prophet exceedingly, and to contradict the plainest import of his words. His answer is precisely the same as that of Jethro to Moses, [Exodus 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.18); and must be interpreted as an approbation of the plan proposed to him. Let us consider then the true import of Naaman's question.

Naaman proposed to continue in the king of Syria's service, and to attend him as usual to the house of Rimmon, the God whom his master worshiped; and as his master always leaned upon his arm on those occasions, (a practice common with kings at that time, even with the kings of Israel, as well as others, [2 Kings 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.2); [2 Kings 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.17),) he must of necessity accommodate himself to his master's motion, and bow forward when he did, in order not to obstruct him in his worship. This he proposed to do; and his communication of his intentions to the prophet must be understood in a two-fold view:

As an inquiry for the regulation of his judgment.

As a guard against a misconstruction of his conduct.

The case was certainly one of great difficulty, and especially to a young convert, to whom such considerations were altogether new. On the one hand, he felt in his own mind that he should not participate in the worship of his master; and yet he felt that his conduct would be open to such a construction. Having therefore access to an inspired prophet, he was glad to have his difficulty solved, so that he might act as befit a servant of Jehovah, and enjoy the testimony of a good conscience.

Being determined, if the prophet should approve of it, so to act, he desired to cut off all occasion for blame from others. He knew how ready people are to view things in an unfavorable light; and that, if he should do this thing of himself, he might appear to be unfaithful to his convictions, and to have relapsed into idolatry; he therefore entered, as it were, a protest against any such surmises, and gave a public pledge that he would do nothing that would be inconsistent with his professed attachment to Jehovah.

In this view of the subject, his question was every way right and proper. The honor of God and the salvation of his own soul depended on his not doing anything that should be inconsistent with his profession. And therefore he did right to ask advice; and lest he should by any means cast a stumbling-block before others, he did well in explaining his views and intentions beforehand.

What terrible evils had well near arisen from the neglect of such a precaution, when the tribes of Reuben and of Gad erected an altar on the banks of Jordan, [Joshua 22:9-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 22.9-34).

On the other hand, what evils were avoided, when Paul explained his opinions in the first instance privately to the elders of Jerusalem, instead of exciting prejudice and clamor by a hasty and indiscriminate avowal of them in public, [Galatians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.2). It is thus that we should act with all possible circumspection, not only avoiding evil, but "abstaining as much as possible from the very appearance of it, [1 Thessalonians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.22);" and not only doing good, but endeavoring to prevent "our good from being evil spoken of, [Romans 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.16)."

***~~The import of Elisha's answer to Naaman.~~***

This answer is not to be understood as a connivance at what was evil, but as an acknowledgment that Naaman might expect the divine blessing while pursuing the conduct he had proposed. Can we imagine that Naaman at that moment saw the thing to be evil, and yet desired an approval to commit it? Did he, at the very moment that he was rejecting all false gods, and acknowledging Jehovah as the only true God, and determining to build an altar to Jehovah in his own country, and desiring soil from Jehovah's land to build it upon, did he then, I say, at that moment ask for a licence to play the hypocrite? And can we suppose that he would confess such an intention to Elisha, and ask his sanction to it? Or can we imagine that Elisha, knowing this, would approve of it, or give an evasive answer, instead of reprobating such impiety? Assuredly not! The request itself, as made on that occasion, must of necessity have proceeded from an upright mind; and the prophet's concession is an indisputable proof, that the request, made under those particular circumstances, was approved by him.

Elisha saw that Naaman was upright; he knew that the bowing or not bowing was a matter of indifference in itself; and that, where it was not done as an act of dissimulation, nor was likely to be mistaken by others as an act of worship—it might be done with a good conscience; more especially as it was accompanied with a public disavowal of all regard for idols; and arose only out of the accidental circumstance of the king leaning on his hand at those seasons. In this view of the subject, the prophet did not hesitate to say to him, "Go in peace!"

Such, we are persuaded, was the concession made. Let us now proceed to consider,

***~~II. The instruction to be gathered from it.~~***

The more carefully we examine this concession, the more instructive will it be found. We may learn from it:

***~~1. How to determine the quality of doubtful actions.~~***

Many actions, such as observing of holy days, or eating meats offered to idols, are indifferent in themselves, and may be good or evil, according to circumstances. So far as the practice of Christian Liberty goes, two things are to be inquired into:

1. The *circumstances*under which they are done.

2. The *principles*from which they flow.

Had Naaman acted from a love to the world, or from a fear of man, his conduct would have been highly criminal; or, if by accommodating himself to the notions of the king he would have cast a stumbling-block before others—he would have sinned in doing it. But with his *views*, and under his *circumstances*, his conduct was blameless.

In this sentiment we are confirmed by the conduct of *Paul*. Paul, when taking Timothy with him as a fellow-laborer, circumcised him in order to remove the prejudices of the Jews, who would not otherwise have received him on account of his father being a Greek. But, when required to circumcise Titus, he refused, and would on no account give way; because a compliance in that case was demanded as a necessary conformity with the Mosaic law, which was now abolished. In both of these cases he acted right, because of the *difference of the circumstances*under which he acted. So, when he "became all things to all men," he acted right, as well in conforming to legal observances as in abstaining from them, because his principle was right, [Acts 21:22-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.22-26) and [1 Corinthians 9:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.19-22).

While *Peter*, on the contrary, sinned in a very grievous manner by conforming to the Jewish prejudices, because he acted from fear, and not from love.

We do not mean to say that every action which proceeds from a good principle, is therefore right. For *no principle, however good, can sanctify a sinful action; though a sinful principle will corrupt the best of actions.*An investigation of the *principle*from which an action flows, accompanied with an attention to the *circumstances*under which it is done—will serve as the best clue whereby to find what is really good, and to distinguish it from all specious and delusive appearances.

***~~2. How to act in doubtful cases.~~***

Circumstances must sometimes arise, wherein it is difficult to draw the precise line between good and evil; and in all such cases we shall do well to consult those whose deeper knowledge, and exalted piety, and more enlarged experience qualify them for the office of guiding others.

We are ourselves liable to be biased by passion or self-interest; and are therefore we are oftentimes too partial judges in our own cause. Another person, divested of all such feelings, can generally see more clearly where the path of duty lies. *We shall always therefore do well to distrust ourselves, and to take advice of others.*See how the Church of old acted, [Acts 15:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.1-2).

But, above all, we should take counsel of the Lord. He has promised, that "the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way;" and, though we are not to expect a voice from Heaven to instruct us, or a pillar of fire to go before us—yet may we hope for such an influence of his Spirit as shall rectify our views, and be, in effect, an accomplishment of that promise, "You shall hear a voice behind you, saying: This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left, [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)."

If, after much deliberation we cannot make up our minds, it is best to pause until we see our way more clear. The commandments given to us by God himself on this point, are very express, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. [Romans 14:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.5-6)." "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died, [Romans 14:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.13-15)."

If we are upright in our minds, and inquire of others, not to get a sanction to our own wishes, but to obtain direction from the Lord, we shall certainly not be left materially to err; and for the most part, we shall at all events enjoy the "testimony of our own consciences, that with simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conduct in the world, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12)."

**3. How to deal with tender consciences.**

The prophet did not begin to perplex the mind of Naaman with precise distinctions; but, seeing the integrity of his heart, encouraged him to proceed; not doubting but that, as occasions arose, God himself would "guide him into all truth."

Thus should we also deal with young converts, [Romans 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.1); we should feed them with milk, and not with meat, which, on account of their unskilfulness in the word of righteousness, they would not be able to digest, [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12); 1 Corinthians 3:2; [Hebrews 5:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.11-14).

There may be many things proper for them both to know and do at a future period, which, under their present circumstances, need not be imparted, and are not required. We should therefore deal tenderly towards them, being careful not to lay upon them any unnecessary burden, or exact of them any unnecessary labors; lest we "break the bruised reed, and quench the smoking flax." Our endeavor rather must be to "lift up the hands that hang down, and to strengthen the feeble knees, and to make straight paths for their feet, that the lame may not be turned out of the way, but may rather be healed, [Hebrews 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.12-13)."

This was our Lord's method in [Matthew 9:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.14-17); and an attention to it is of infinite importance in all who would be truly serviceable in the Church of Christ.

***~~Lest this subject be misunderstood, we shall conclude with answering the following questions:~~***

***~~1. May we ever do evil that good may come?~~***

No; to entertain such a thought is horrible impiety; and if any man impute it to us, we say with Paul, that "his condemnation is just! [Romans 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.8)." But still we must repeat what we said before, that things which would be evil under some circumstances, may not be so under others; and that while the question itself can admit of no doubt, the *application*of it may; and *we ought not either to judge our stronger* *brethren, or despise our weaker brethren, because they do not see everything with our eyes!*[Romans 14:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.3-6); for both the one and the other may be accepted before God, while we for our uncharitableness are hateful in his sight, [Romans 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.10); [Romans 14:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.18).

***~~2. May we from regard to any considerations of ease or self-interest act contrary to our conscience?~~***

No! *Conscience is God's viceregent in the soul*, and we must at all events obey its voice. We must rather die than violate its dictates. Like Daniel and the Hebrew youths, we must be firm and immovable. If a man err, it will never be imputed to him as evil that he followed his conscience, but that he did not take care to have his conscience better informed.

We must use all possible means to get clear views of God's mind and will; and, having done that, must then act according to our convictions, *omitting nothing that conscience requires, and allowing nothing that conscience condemns*. The one endeavor of our lives must be to "walk in all good conscience before God," and to "keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man."

***~~3. May we on any account forbear to confess Christ?~~***

No! We must show, before all, our love to the God of Israel, and our communion with his people. In every place where we go, we must erect an altar to our God and Savior. "If on any account we are ashamed of him—then he will be ashamed of us;" and, "if we deny him—then he will deny us."

Nevertheless we are not called to give up our duties, because there is some difficulty in fulfilling them aright; we are rather called to approve ourselves to God in those situations, and to fulfill them to the glory of his name. We must indeed take care that we are not led into any sinful compliances in order to retain our honors or emoluments; but we must avail ourselves of our situations to honor God, and to benefit mankind.

***~~#367~~***

***~~THE HYPOCRISY OF GEHAZI~~***

***~~[2 Kings 5:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.21-22)~~***

So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

"Everything is all right," Gehazi answered. "My master sent me to say, 'Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.'"

In the preceding chapter we have seen a similar inquiry made by Gehazi himself; and a similar reply from the Shunamite, who came in quest of Elisha, 2 Kings 4:26. The answer as made by her, under her most afflictive circumstances, justly fills us with admiration.

But the answer as here given by Gehazi, calls forth our severest indignation. Naaman, when he saw Elisha's servant running after him, was afraid that something was amiss; and therefore asked with great anxiety, "Is everything all right?" Gehazi, the hardened villain, one might have hoped, should have relented at the sight of Naaman's simplicity; but that same wicked spirit who put the evil into his heart, furnished him with a ready answer, "Everything is all right."

Now this answer is of considerable importance:

**I. As illustrating the character of Gehazi.**

Previous to this we have nothing that gives us any particular insight into the character of Gehazi. He lived with a pious master, enjoyed the benefit of his instructions and example, and was an eye-witness of the miracles he wrought. One might have hoped therefore that he was impressed with a sense of true religion. But in this answer we see that *he was a subtle, self-deluding hypocrite*.

As far as related to the general scope of Naaman's inquiry, the answer was true; but was it true, as conveying all that Gehazi intended to convey? Or would Naaman have thought it true, if he could have seen all that was in the heart of this vile impostor? Was all well, when you were coming on so base an errand? When you had fabricated such a falsehood and were making it an occasion of such dishonest gain? Was all well, when you were so belying your master, so dishonoring religion, casting such a stumbling-block before Naaman, and bringing such guilt upon your own soul? Did not your own conscience reprove you, when you thus confidently dared to assert, "Everything is all right."

From your composure on the occasion it was evident that you expected to reap the fruit of your iniquity in peace; and that, when you replied, "Everything is all right" you apprehended no consequences.

But did you forget that God saw you? Did you forget that he notes down everything in the book of his remembrance, and will bring it forth at the last day in order to a final retribution? Did you forget that even now God could reveal your wickedness to his prophet, and punish it by some heavy judgment?

Had you known at that moment that your master's eye was upon you, and that in less than an hour afterwards the leprosy of Naaman would cleave to you, and that it would be the wretched inheritance of your children to their last posterity, would you then have said, that Everything is all right?

Above all, if you could have realized your appearance at God's bar of judgment, and the sentence that there awaited you, would you then have said, Everything is all right?

So it is that sin blinds the eyes of men, and hardens their hearts. Nor is there any sinful passion in the human mind, which, if allowed to gain an ascendant over us, may not produce in us the very same effect.

The selfish ambition of Absalom,  
the envy of Cain,  
the revenge of Jacob's sons,  
the covetousness of Judas,  
the lewdness of Herod  
—sufficiently show that where there is a mere *professed*regard for religion, a predominant lust will soon break down the barriers of conscience, and issue in many evil principles!

Let us now contemplate the answer,

***~~II. As affording some valuable lessons to the world at large.~~***

*The great improvement which we are to make of Scripture history, is to deduce from every part of it lessons for our own instruction.*Now from the conduct of Gehazi we learn:

***~~1. That such hypocritical professors must be expected to exist, even among the godly.~~***

If in the house of Elisha, his only servant was such an impostor; if even among the Apostles of our Lord there was a *Judas*. yes, and if among the very first Christians immediately after the day of Pentecost such a deceiver as *Ananias*was found—then what reason have we to be surprised, if such professors exist in our day? Is not human nature now the same as ever it was? Has not our Lord taught us to expect, that, wherever the seed of his Word is sown, the enemy will sow tares; and that no effectual separation of the tares can be made until the last day?

Doubtless it is most distressing when any are found to act unworthy of their Christian profession; but the wonder is rather that so few hypocrites are found, than that some occasionally are detected in the Church of Christ!

***~~2. That the existence of such hypocritical professors is no argument against true religion.~~***

People are apt to impute the misconduct of hypocrites to the doctrines that they profess. But is there anything in the Gospel that tends to encourage hypocrisy? No! Is not every branch of morality carried to its utmost height in the Gospel, and required as an evidence of our faith in Christ? Are all who embrace the Gospel hypocrites? Was Elisha a hypocrite because his servant was so? What would Naaman have said, if he had been dissuaded from embracing Judaism because he had been deceived by a Jew? Would he not have said, 'Naaman's wickedness must rest on his own head. I myself am a monument of Jehovah's power and grace, and am under the most unspeakable obligations to him; and, if all who profess his religion were hypocrites, it would be no reason why I should not worship him in spirit and in truth!'

Thus then must we say, "Offences will come, but woe be to those by whom they come!" But while I know myself to have been a leper, and feel that the Lord Jesus Christ has healed me of my leprosy, I must love him as my Benefactor, and serve him in the presence of the whole world.

***~~3. That in whatever light men now appear, they will before long be seen in their true colors!~~***

Gehazi little thought that his master's eye was upon him during the whole transaction; but his iniquity was soon exposed, and fearfully punished.

Just so, in whatever place we are, God's eye is upon us! In vain do we say, "Tush, God shall not see;" for he sees even the most secret recesses of our hearts! The time is quickly coming, when, he "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the hidden motives of the heart."

Do not let any of us then deceive our own souls. Let those who declaim against hypocrites remember, that, if they seek not after God, *the hypocrisy of others will be no justification of their neglect*. There is but one rule of judgment for all, and by that shall every man be justified or condemned, [Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10-11).

But let those in whom hypocrisy of any kind is found, tremble for themselves; for their guilt is heinous, and their condemnation will be proportionably severe! "If there be woe to the world because of offences, much more will there be to him by whom the offence comes."

Against every sin therefore I would most earnestly caution you, but more especially against that sin which ensnared Gehazi. "The love of money is the root of all evil, and drowns many in destruction and perdition! [1 Timothy 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.9-10); [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10); [2 Peter 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14-15)." *Covetousness is most particularly the sin to which people professing godliness are apt to be addicted*, and under which they are most satisfied with their own state, [Ezekiel 33:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31); but, whatever profession they may make, they deceive themselves to their eternal ruin!

***~~#368~~***

***~~ELISHA PROTECTED BY CHARIOTS OF FIRE~~***

**[2 Kings 6:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.15-16)**

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city.

"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

It has been justly said, that*a servant of God is immortal, until his work is done*. He will indeed be exposed to many dangers; and probably to more, in proportion as his zeal is exercised in the service of his Lord; but the promise made to Jeremiah is fulfilled to every faithful champion, "They shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you."

The prophet Elisha eminently experienced this blessed truth. He had been enabled by God on different occasions to reveal to the king of Israel the plans which the king of Syria had laid for his destruction. The king of Syria at first thought that his plans were all betrayed by some confidential servant of his own; but when he learned that they were revealed by God to the prophet Elisha, he determined to kill the prophet; and for that end he sent a large army to besiege the city wherein Elisha was. This was effected with such rapidity, that the city was encompassed before anyone suspected that an army was near; and Elisha's servant, conceiving that the enmity of the king of Syria was chiefly directed against his master, was filled with despondency; taking for granted now that no possible method of escape for him remained.

But Elisha knew that God was his protector, and therefore bade his servant to dismiss his fears, assured that, while he had the Creator on his side, he need not feel the smallest anxiety, though the whole creation should be against him.

Now from this answer of Elisha we shall take occasion to show you the excellency and efficacy of faith in:  
its discoveries,  
its consolations,  
its triumphs.  
  
Let us consider,

***~~I. The excellency and efficacy of faith in its discoveries.~~***

The affrighted servant saw nothing but the invading army; but Elisha saw that there were invisible hosts of angels engaged in his defense; and he begged of God to open the servant's eyes, that he might have visual demonstration of that fact, which he had beheld by faith.

Now this is the proper effect of faith—it discerns God as everywhere present to support his people by his providence and grace, [Hebrews 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.27). Faith beholds myriads of angels also waiting upon God, and flying at his command to execute his will, and to minister to his people. The chariots of fire and horses of fire were not more visible to the eye of sense, when God withdrew from the servant's face the veil that concealed them, than they were to Elisha by the *eye of faith*. If we could only conceive aright of Elisha's views at that moment, we would have a perfect idea of the proper office of faith, and of the high privilege which belongs to every believer.

From the *discoveries*of faith we may judge of,

**II. The excellency and efficacy of faith in its consolations.**

The servant was full of fear and terror, "Alas, my master! what shall we do?" But Elisha was as composed as if no enemy had been near. Thus it is that faith uniformly operates.

However we are threatened by persecutors, faith keeps us tranquil, [Psalm 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 3.6); [Psalm 27:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.3) and [1 Peter 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.14-15).

However exposed we are to troubles of any kind, faith preserves us in a peaceful state, [Isaiah 26:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3).

How calm were Daniel and the three Hebrew youths, when threatened with the most cruel death! It assures us that though the waves and billows rise ever so high, there is at the helm a Pilot, who can guide our vessel in safety to the desired haven. The language of the heart on such occasions is, "If God is for me, then who can be against me?" Or, "Who is he who shall harm me, if I am a follower of that which is good?"

Those who in conflicts experience the *consolations*of faith, shall after their conflicts enjoy also,

***~~III. The excellency and efficacy of faith in its triumphs.~~***

While the servant was yielding to despair, the master was deriding the vain efforts of his enemies, and laughing them to scorn. In this light we must understand his address to them—it was not a solemn assertion, but a derisive banter; 'You have come here to seek the prophet, but you are all under a mistake; come all of you with me; I will show you the man whom you are seeking after.' Thus did he, alone and unarmed, lead captive, as it were, the armed hosts that came to apprehend him.

Innumerable are the instances in holy writ where faith has triumphed in like manner, even before the conflict has been begun! How gloriously did: *Moses*exult over the Egyptians, [Exodus 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.13-14); *David*exult over Goliath, [1 Samuel 17:45-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.45-47); *Jehoshaphat*exult over three confederate armies, [2 Chronicles 20:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.17); 2 Chronicles 20:20; *Hezekiah*exult over the proud Sennacherib [2 Kings 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 19.21); *Paul*exult over all the enemies of his salvation, [Romans 8:34-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34-39).

Thus it is our privilege also to "know in whom we have believed," and to be assured that we shall be "more than conquerors through Him who loved us! In confirmation of this, see [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14); [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20)."

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. Our chief danger.~~***

The agency of spiritual beings is here confirmed beyond all doubt; and, if holy angels are active in our preservation, we may be well assured that evil angels are active in seeking our destruction. The truth is, that we are more in danger from the agency of evil spirits than from all other causes whatever; because of their malice, their subtlety, and their power. Were our eyes opened as those of Elisha's servant were, we would see ourselves surrounded with myriads of those malignant foes, all acting in concert with each other under Beelzebub their head, and combining their efforts to destroy us.

Let us remember how they are "working in all the children of disobedience," and actually "leading the whole world captive at their will!"

Let us particularly call to mind also the power which Satan exerted over Judas, Ananias, and even the Apostle Peter himself.

et us, under a sense of our insufficiency to withstand him—cry mightily to God, "to arm us for the combat, to strengthen us with might, and to bruise him under our feet! [Ephesians 6:10-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10-18); [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10); [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

***~~2. Our great security.~~***

*Of ourselves we have no sufficiency for the smallest thing—all our sufficiency is of God!* Let us beg of God then to "hold us up, that we may be safe." Let our eyes be directed to him in every danger, temporal and spiritual! Let us "commit the keeping of our souls to him in well-doing." Then, however numerous and powerful and deceitful our enemies may be, "we shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end." He will not leave us in the hands of any enemy, but will "keep us by his power through faith unto everlasting salvation!"

***~~#369~~***

***~~KING JEHORAM'S UNBELIEVING OFFICER PUNISHED~~***

**[2 Kings 7:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.18-20)**

It happened as the man of God had said to the king: "About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."

The officer had said to the man of God, "Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?"

The man of God had replied, "You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it!"

And that is exactly what happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died."

This is a repetition of what had been said in the two first verses of this chapter; or rather it is a renewed recital of the prediction, as accomplished in all its parts. Now we are not to imagine that this repetition was without design. It was surely intended to call our attention to the history in a more peculiar manner, that we might observe it carefully throughout. In truth, it is a singularly instructive history, especially as revealing to us what we propose distinctly to consider—the folly and danger of unbelief.

***~~I. The folly of unbelief.~~***

*Faith appears to many to be a foolish naivete; and unbelief a discreet estimate of causes and effects.* Sceptics look with contempt upon Believers, even as Jehoram's officer did upon the prophet, for expecting himself, and teaching others to expect, so incredible an event, as that which he foretold. But this history rebukes the folly of such conceited men. They imagine that they have sufficient reason for their unbelief; but this history shows us that all those things which are supposed to justify unbelief, are, in fact, no grounds for it at all. Consider:

***~~1. The extremity of our case.~~***

Many, both under temporal and spiritual distresses, will say that there is no hope; and that to expect relief under such circumstances as theirs would be the height of presumption. But can any state be more desperate than that of Samaria at this time? The famine was so grievous, that things which would not have been deemed fit for food at other times, were made articles of subsistence; nor could they be procured but at a most exorbitant price. Yes, so extreme was the pressure of their hunger, that a woman, who had agreed with another to boil their children for their mutual support, came to the king, to complain of the other woman for having hidden her child, instead of giving it up according to their agreement, after having already fed upon the child of the complainant, 2 Kings 6:25-29 with [Deuteronomy 28:56-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.56-57). Can any case be more extreme than this?

We are almost ready to justify Jehoram's officer who doubted the possibility of plenty being restored to the city in so short a time as twenty-four hours. But there are no circumstances under which God cannot effectually interpose, [Isaiah 59:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.1). On the contrary, God is pleased frequently to let our troubles advance so as to appear irremediable, on purpose that his power may be the more magnified in our deliverance! [Deuteronomy 32:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.36).

***~~2. Our great unworthiness.~~***

It is nothing but pride, under the semblance of humility, that leads any upright person to be discouraged by a sense of his unworthiness. If a man lives in willful and allowed sin, he surely can expect nothing at the hands of God. But if he desires to be delivered from all sin, the deeper his sense is of his own unworthiness, the more readily will he find acceptance in the sight of God. The truth is, that God gives freely according to his own sovereign will and pleasure; and often makes his "grace to abound most, where sin has most abounded."

To whom did he send the promise recorded in our text? To Jehoram, an idolatrous king of Israel. And under what circumstances did he send the promise? It was when this wicked prince, instead of being humbled by his distresses, took occasion from them to rage still more against the God of Israel; and immediately after he had, with bitter imprecations, resolved to murder the Lord's prophet that very day! [2 Kings 6:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.31-32). Yes, to that very murderer, at the moment he was about to commit the murder, was that promise given!

It is scarcely possible to conceive a state of greater unworthiness than his; yet, behold, to him, I say again, was the promise given. Who then that desires a saving interest in the Lord's salvation, has any reason to despond on account of his unworthiness?

***~~3. The lack of any visible means of relief.~~***

Jehoram's officer doubted whether the prediction could be verified, even if the Lord should open the windows of Heaven, and rain down wheat and barley upon them, as he did manna in the wilderness. And as there was no hope of such an interposition, he concluded the prediction to be false. But what if he could see no way of relief? *Was God at any loss for means whereby to accomplish his own purposes?*

The Syrians shall be struck with a panic, and with perfect infatuation shall desert their camp and everything in it. Still the purpose is but half effected; for, how shall the people in the city know the state of the Syrian camp? Four lepers perishing with hunger, shall go over to the Syrians, to cast themselves upon their mercy; and they shall find the whole camp forsaken, and report it in the besieged city; and thus shall perfect plenty be afforded them even in the space of a few hours.

*What then cannot God effect for us?* Whether our distress be of a temporal or spiritual nature, he can in a moment "supply our needs," and far "exceed all that we can ask, or even think." "Is there anything too hard for God!"

If in this history, we see the folly of unbelief. We behold no less,

***~~II. The danger of unbelief.~~***

***~~Unbelief is justly most offensive to God.~~***

Its very nature is to doubt the power or truthfulness of God. Is this a light offence? See how greatly he was offended at it in his people of old, [Psalm 78:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.40-41); and surely he will be still more offended at us on account of it, in proportion as his mercy and truth manifested to us in the gift of his dear Son, have exceeded all that he has ever shown to mankind from the foundation of the world.

***~~In the history before us we see how certainly, and how awfully, unbelief shall be punished.~~***

The moment that Jehoram's officer had expressed his contempt of God's promise, his doom was sealed, and his punishment was declared! But Jehoram's officer, being high in the confidence of his prince, was invested with authority to control and regulate the disposal of the spoil; consequently, if there were anyone person in the city that was sure to enjoy the newly-acquired plenty, it was he. Yet, behold, the very means which seemed almost sure to defeat the divine purpose, were instrumental to its accomplishment! For the extreme eagerness of the people to obtain the food, occasioned him to be thrown down, and to be trodden to death under their feet. Yes, so had God threatened— and so happened to him."

Say then, you who promise yourselves impunity in sin, whether "God's Word shall stand—or yours?" Shall it not "happen to you as God has said?" Yes, it shall; and "unbelievers shall assuredly take their portion at the last in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone! [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)."

See what became of those who doubted God's Word in the Garden of Eden, [Genesis 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.6); [Genesis 3:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.16-19); [Genesis 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.24).

See what became of the antediluvian infidels, [2 Peter 3:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.3-6).

See what became of the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness, [Hebrews 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.18-19). See also especially [Zechariah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 1.6).

Did not God's threatened vengeance fall on them all?

"Beware then, all of you, lest you also perish after the same example of unbelief! [Hebrews 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.11)." Whether God promises or threatens—it shall surely come to pass according to his Word. "If we believe not—yet he abides faithful; he cannot deny himself, [2 Timothy 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.13)."

We may even notice some resemblance between the doom of Jehoram's officer, and that which awaits the unbelieving world at large, "He saw the promised blessing, but he did not taste of it." And will it not be thus in that great and solemn day when all shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ? Those on the left hand of the Judge shall see the blessedness of his believing people, but shall not taste of it. On the contrary, while God's faithful people shall be admitted to a full enjoyment of their promised inheritance, the whole assembly of unbelievers shall be bidden to "depart accursed into everlasting burnings!"

**APPLICATION.**

**Consider now how you are affected by the Word of God.**Does it come with weight and authority to your minds, as if you saw it about to be accomplished before your eyes? Is it a fixed principle with you, that "not one jot or tittle of God's Word can fail?" This is what God expects at our hands: he expects us to "tremble at his Word, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2);" he expects us to entertain no doubt of its accomplishment, but to "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." On that he suspends his bestowment of further blessings, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7); and, for the most part, he will make the strength of our faith to be the measure of his communications, [Matthew 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.13).

**Consider more particularly, how you are affected with all those "great and precious promises which God has given us" in Christ Jesus.**Are you enabled to receive them "without staggering at them through unbelief?"

This is your duty,  
this is your privilege,  
this is the pledge of all that God himself can bestow upon you!

***~~#370~~***

***~~ELISHA PREDICTS THE ATROCIOUS ACTS OF HAZAEL~~***

**[2 Kings 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 8.12), [13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 8.13)**

"Why is my lord weeping?" asked Hazael.

"Because I know the harm you will do to the Israelites," Elisha answered. "You will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women!"

And Hazael said, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this monstrous thing?"

There was in the heart of Hazael a root of evil which would induce him to destroy the king, in order to gain possession of his throne; and that root springing up, would bring forth such terrible fruits, as could not be contemplated without the most pungent sorrow. This the prophet Elisha saw, and deeply lamented; insomuch, that Hazael, astonished at the tears which Elisha shed, asked him with great emotion, "Why is my lord weeping?" The prophet told Hazael that he wept at the prospect of the horrible cruelties which, however incapable of committing them Hazael might now think of himself—he would certainly before long commit.

This is the point to which we would now call your attention; and it is well calculated to show us:

**I. How unconscious we are of our own depravity.**

Hazael could not conceive it possible that the prophet Elisha's predictions respecting him should ever be fulfilled. Doubtless the predicted evils were very terrible, "You will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women!" Nor do we wonder that Hazael should ask so pointedly, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this monstrous thing?"

But Hazael was a stranger to his own heart.

Just so, we are ignorant of the evils which lurk in our own heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! Who can know it? [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9)."

[2 Kings 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 8.14-15), "Then Hazael left Elisha and returned to his master. When Ben-Hadad asked, "What did Elisha say to you?" Hazael replied, "He told me that you would certainly recover." But the next day he took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and spread it over the king's face, so that he died. Then Hazael succeeded him as king."

The outcome soon verified all that the prophet had spoken concerning him; for immediately on his return to his master, he gave a false report of the prophet's answer, and (probably under a pretense of using the best means for his recovery) adopted a measure, which he had reason to expect would speedily put an end to the king's existence.

Having by these means succeeded to the throne, Hazael soon waged war with Israel, and committed all those shocking cruelties, at the very mention of which he had once shrunk back with horror! Verse 15 and [2 Kings 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.3); [2 Kings 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.7).

**Thus also do we question the representations which God gives respecting us in His Word.**

These representations are surely very humiliating, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3); [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5); [Romans 3:10-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-19); [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7). We are ready to account them as libels upon human nature. If we have been moral and sober hitherto, we have no conception that we could ever be induced to "run into the same flood of debauchery" as the most wicked have done.

*But may we not all find in ourselves the seeds of those iniquities, which in others have obtained their full growth?*Have we not seen too, in many instances, that people who once thought themselves as superior to temptation as we now do, have sunk into the grossest habits of vice, and astonished the world with their iniquities! We can know but little of ourselves, if we have not learned to ascribe to God alone, whatever difference there may be found between us and others! "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)." "By the grace of God I am what I am! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)"

Let us learn then from the prophet,

***~~II. What ought to be the frame of our minds in relation to our own depravity.~~***

If we have kept by God not to perpetrate the more heinous crimes to which we have been tempted, still it will be proper for us to consider what our frame should be:

***~~1. In reference to our depravity, so far as we have discovered it.~~***

Elisha wept at the contemplation of the future crimes of Hazael; and should not *we*weep at the evils of our own hearts—yes at the evils which we have actually committed? Truly, the best of us have done enough to humble us in the dust, and to make us weep with the deepest self-abasement. Let us look back and think of our past conduct:  
towards *God*as our Sovereign,  
towards *Jesus*as our Redeemer,  
and towards the *Holy Spirit* who has been so patient with us all our days.

Is here no cause for tears? If Prophets and Apostles wept so bitterly for *others*who kept not God's law, should not we weep for *ourselves*, [Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.136); [Jeremiah 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.17); [Romans 9:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-3); [Philippians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18). Yes, the best of us, as well as the worst, needs to "go on his way weeping," and can only hope to "reap in joy," when he shall have humbly "sown in tears."

***~~2. In reference to that depravity which is yet hidden from our eyes.~~***

Much, very much evil, there is in us, which we have never yet seen! Either we have never been brought into situations to call it forth, or God has mercifully withheld us from perpetrating all that was in our hearts. But our hearts are altogether corrupt; and therefore we should tremble; yes and "work out our salvation with fear and trembling!" Even to our last hour, "we should not be high-minded, but fear;" "watching continually and praying, that we may not enter into temptation." The confidence of *Peter*, as well as that of *Hazael*, may be a warning lesson to us. To God then must we look to "keep us by his power," even to Him who alone "can keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy!"

***~~That we may yet further improve this subject, let us learn:~~***

***~~1. To be thankful for God's distinguishing grace.~~***

What is the reason that we have not been as vile as the most abandoned of mankind? Are we made of any better materials than they? No! We owe it entirely to the distinguishing grace of God! It is He who has "hedged up our way" in numerous instances, that we might not fall into those temptations which would have utterly overwhelmed us. "He kept us," and "by his grace alone we are what we are." O let us adore and magnify him for all his goodness towards us! When we see others wallowing in iniquity, remember that it is God alone who has made us to differ from them!

**2. To be submissive to God's providence.**

It may be that God has been pleased to disappoint us in some things which we have set our heart upon, and we have been grieved and vexed at the painful dispensation. But how little do we know what would have been the effect of success! Perhaps the attainment of our wishes would have operated as Hazael's advancement did on him, and we would have long before this time have been monsters in iniquity! At all events we have reason to believe that what we have lost was only like thick clay which would have impeded us greatly in our Christian course.

Perhaps God has seen fit to lay upon us some heavy affliction. Are we sure it was not *necessary*to lead us to deeper views of our own corruption, and to a more entire dependence on the Lord Jesus? We may be sure at least that our afflictions have been sent as a pruning-knife, to lop off our excess branches, and to make us more fruitful in the fruits of righteousness to God's praise and glory!

**3. To pant after God's glory**.

It is in Heaven alone that we shall be free from sin. While we are in the body, we are exposed to the assaults of that roaring lion that seeks to devour us. It is true that we have God's promises to trust unto; but it is also true that we have wicked and deceitful hearts; and if we had attained as much as ever the Apostle Paul did, we must still, like him, "keep our body under control, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, we should be cast away ourselves." Let us then "look for, and hasten unto, the coming of the day of Christ," even that blessed day, when all sin shall be purged from our hearts, and "all tears be wiped from our eyes!"

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe! [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117)."

***~~#371~~***

***~~THE DESTRUCTION OF AHAB'S FAMILY BY JEHU~~***

***~~[2 Kings 9:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 9.36)~~***

They went back and told Jehu, who said, "This is the word of the LORD that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh!"

From nothing does the unbeliever receive more solid grounds of fear, than from the facts recorded in the sacred history. In those facts there is undeniable evidence that there is a God who "orders all things after the counsel of his own will," and who is particularly "known by the judgments which he executes." In confirmation of this truth we will show:

***~~I. How God's Word was accomplished in the history before us.~~***

We lay no stress on the fulfillment of what was spoken to Jehu, because the declaration made to him was the immediate cause of his adopting measures for the attainment of the kingship.

But the accomplishment of God's Word in the death of Jehoram and of Jezebel was independent of any human purposes whatever. The fate that awaited Ahab and Jezebel had long before been announced by the Prophet Elijah; though on account of Ahab's repentance, the evil denounced against him had been deferred, and the fulfillment of the threatening had been reserved for his children.

Now it was particularly specified by Elijah to Ahab, that "where dogs had licked the blood of Naboth, they should lick his blood;" and that "dogs should eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel, [1 Kings 21:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.19); [1 Kings 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.23)."

Behold then how exactly these prophecies were accomplished! Jehoram was at Jezreel; but how did he get there? He had gone there to be healed of the wounds which the Syrians had given him. But why did he not flee from thence, when he saw that Jehu detained the messengers that were sent to ascertain the reason of his approach? He was altogether infatuated; for instead of fleeing, both "he and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, to meet Jehu," and they actually "met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite! [1 Kings 21:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.21)." Here Jehu drew his bow against Jehoram, and smote him through the heart. And so remarkable was this accomplishment of the prophet's prediction, that Jehu himself was struck with astonishment at it, and ordered that the corpse should be there exposed to public view, in order that the justice of God, in so requiting the injury done to Naboth, might be manifest to all! Note1 Kings 21:26.

The same infatuation seized Jezebel also; for she, when she knew that her son Jehoram was dead, instead of fleeing, or consulting her own safety by submission, insulted Jehu, and was, by his order, thrown out of the window by her own servants, in the very place where God had foretold that death should come upon her!

Jehu after some hours thought that as Jezebel, though an accursed woman, was a king's daughter—it was not right to leave her dead body exposed in the streets; and therefore he gave orders that she should be taken up and buried. But, behold, when they came to look for her, nothing of her remained but her scull and her feet, and the palms of her hands; for the dogs had devoured her; and this singular accomplishment of God's Word respecting her, brought again to Jehu's recollection the prediction of Elijah, so minutely verified, not only without any design on his part, but even contrary to his design! verse 36, 37.

An attentive survey of such facts as these is of the greatest use; it convinces us that *every Word of God must be fulfilled in its season, and that "sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it should fail!"*

From beholding the Word of God thus verified in them, let us proceed to notice,

**II. How the Word of God shall be accomplished sooner or later in the history of us all.**

As our subject leads us almost exclusively to speak of those who are liable to the Divine threatenings, we shall comprehend them under two classes:

***~~1. Those who make no profession of religion.~~***

These may differ widely from each other with respect to their external conduct; but in the habit of their minds as alienated from God, and averse to heavenly pursuits—they are all alike: unregenerate, unsanctified, unhumbled! They do not fear God, "he is not in all their thoughts;" "they proceed from evil to evil, because they know not God." We again say, that they do not all commit the same iniquities; but they all live as without God in the world. And is not this agreeable to what Paul has spoken of the natural man [Romans 3:10-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-18); [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7). Yes truly, his Word is fulfilled in every child of Adam. Thus it is with them in this world.

Next, let us see how it is with them in the eternal world. They die each at his appointed time, and go into the presence of their God; but in him they find an angry and an avenging Judge! From his presence are they driven to reap the just recompense for their deeds. They would not, while living, regard his threatenings; and therefore they are left to experience the *accomplishment*of them to all eternity.

And is not this precisely according to what the Psalmist has forewarned them of, [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17). Has not Paul also again and again guarded them against deluding themselves with vain expectations of a different end, [1 Corinthians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9); [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8). Yes! in all of them will there be scope for precisely the same observation as Jehu made respecting Joram, and Jezebel, "This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servants the prophets!"

***~~2. Those who walk unworthy of their profession.~~***

Mark the different people who decline from the ways of God; there is the same variety found among them as among the carnal and ungodly world; each has his separate pursuit, and each his separate infirmity. But in this all agree; that, whatever be their besetting sin, they are led captive by it more and more; the earthly, the sensual, the devilish, become more and more enslaved by their respective lusts and passions, from the time that they depart from God! And what is this but an accomplishment of that word of Solomon, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways! [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.14)."

Follow them also into the eternal world; and there also you will find that verified, "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them! [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.21)." They "have been heaping up treasures indeed for the last days;" but they are found to be treasures of wrath, agreeably to that declaration of Elihu, "The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath! [Job 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.13). The separation predicted by our Lord takes place; nor do the privileges they enjoyed in this world avail anything for the altering of the sentence passed against them! [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23).

***~~Observe now from hence,~~***

***~~1. The folly of neglecting the Holy Scriptures!~~***

These contain the whole revealed will of God; and according to these we shall be judged in the last day. What folly is it then not to study them, and to find out beforehand what shall then assuredly come to pass! O let us search them! Let us bear in mind whose word is there contained! Let us not rest one single hour in a state that is there condemned.

***~~2. The evil and danger of unbelief.~~***

Unbelief "scoffs at the Word of God," as though it never should come to pass. But can we point out any one declaration of God that has failed of accomplishment? As Paul says in reference to the Jews, so may we in reference to the whole world, "What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of no effect? [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3)." Did not God's Word "take hold of them" at the different periods of their history? Compare [Zechariah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 1.6) with [Daniel 9:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.11-13). Yes, and in us also shall they be fulfilled in their season; nor shall one iota of them ever fall to the ground. The infidels shall "know before long, whose word shall stand, whether God's or theirs! [Jeremiah 44:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.28)."

***~~3. The truth and faithfulness of all God's promises.~~***

If the *threatenings*of God are sure—then so also are the *promises*. Nor shall any one of them fail the person who trusts in them. Let us remember, that "in Christ Jesus they are all yes and Amen." Let us lay hold on Christ, and all the promises are ours. We may plead them at the throne of grace; we may rely upon them; we may expect the accomplishment of them; and in that great day, when all the ungodly shall be banished from the presence of God—we shall have them fulfilled to us in their utmost extent, being put into complete possession of our promised inheritance.

***~~#372~~***

***~~TRUE AND FALSE ZEAL~~***

**[2 Kings 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.16)**

Jehu said, "Come with me and see my zeal for the LORD."

*Ungodly men, though they will not follow the example of the godly, are glad to have their sanction and approbation in what they do.*Jehu was indeed acting at this time under a divine commission. The work in which he was engaged was that of extirpating the whole house and family of Ahab; and as terrible as it was, he did right to execute it, because he acted under a divine command, 2 Kings 9:7-9. But his spirit in executing the work was far from right. He was too much under the influence of pride and ambition. This appears from his address to Jehonadab, in the words before us. Jehonadab was a holy man, and had considerable influence in the state; and, knowing that Jehu was fulfilling the will of God, he went to meet him, and to testify his approbation of his proceedings. And Jehu, glad to have the sanction of such a man, took him up into his chariot, saying, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord."

Now, as this zeal was partly good, and partly evil, I propose to show,

***~~I. When our zeal is such as will bear God's inspection.~~***

"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, [Galatians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.18)."

***~~1. We may be assured that our zeal is good, when it proceeds from a principle of love.~~***

Love is properly the principle from which all our actions should flow. There are, indeed, far different principles from which our zeal may spring. We may he led on by a party spirit, which will operate to the production of great efforts in the support of any cause. Or we may he actuated by a natural forwardness of disposition, which urges men to prosecute with ardor whatever they undertake. A self-righteous hope of commending themselves to God, also, will stimulate some to incredible exertions in any cause in which they are embarked. But*that which alone gives the stamp of piety to our services, is love*. We should act from a sense of the unbounded obligations which we owe to God, both as our Creator and Redeemer. "Our souls should be altogether constrained by the love of Christ, to live to him, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15);" and so far as we are actuated by that principle, we have reason to hope and to believe that our zeal is genuine, and that our services are pleasing and acceptable to God.

***~~2. We may be assured that our zeal is good, when it is regulated by the written Word.~~***

*As our zeal may spring from an unworthy motive—so it may be exercised in an unhallowed way.* It must be bounded by the occasion that calls it forth; neither exceeding it, nor falling short of it. Joshua erred in making a league with the Gibeonites, whom he was commissioned to destroy, [Joshua 11:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 11.18-20); but Saul also erred, when, "from his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah, he sought to slay the Gibeonites, [2 Samuel 21:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 21.1-6)."

There is an intemperate zeal that is highly criminal. Such was that of Simeon and Levi, who slew the Shechemites, because by the prince of that city their sister had been defiled [Genesis 34:25-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 34.25-31). They had just ground for displeasure; but their mode of manifesting their displeasure was cruel in the extreme, and brought upon them God's merited indignation, [Genesis 49:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.5-7). Not that the mere circumstance of slaying their fellow creatures when they were incapable of resistance was wrong, provided they had received a divine commission to do so; for Joshua did right in extirpating the Canaanites; as did the tribe of Levi also, when they went through the camp of Israel, every one of them slaying even his nearest relatives, if he found them worshiping the golden calf! [Exodus 32:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.25-29); [Deuteronomy 33:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.8-11).

*The Word of God is the standard by which every act must be regulated.*

It is not sufficient that we intend to please God; for James and John thought to please their divine Master by calling fire from Heaven to consume a Samaritan village. James and John were told by their Lord, that "they knew not what spirit they were of [Luke 9:53-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.53-55)."

Paul also thought he was serving God aright, when he haled men and women to prison and to death for their attachment to Christ.

Paul condemns himself afterwards as an injurious and blaspheming persecutor! [Acts 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.3); [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9); [1 Timothy 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13).

If we are able to show a Scriptural command for what we do, then our zeal in doing it is good.

***~~3. We may be assured that our zeal is good, when it is tempered with discretion.~~***

There are conflicting duties, which, as far as possible, should be made to harmonize; and neither of them should be violated without necessity. To obey the civil magistrate is the duty of all; but when his injunctions militate against the paramount authority of God, they must be disregarded, whatever are the dangers to which our disobedience may subject us. The appeal, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge, [Acts 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19)," carried its own evidence along with it. Of course, there is need of much discrimination in this matter.

The Pharisees acted well in showing a regard for the Sabbath, and a zeal for the due observance of it; but they erred grievously, when they accused our blessed Lord as violating it by working miracles on that day; for they should have known that "God preferred mercy before sacrifice," and, consequently, that acts of mercy and necessity superseded the obligation of a merely positive command, [Matthew 12:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.2-7).

Even where a duty is plain, it is proper for us to consider whether we are the people to perform it. To preach the Gospel is a most important duty; but to engage in that service uncalled, and unsent, is not by any means expedient or right; for even our blessed Lord "glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but waited for the call" of his heavenly Father, [Hebrews 5:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.4-6).

So again, we must attend to the *time*and *manner*of executing what we conceive to be a lawful act; and not abuse our liberty by exercising it in a way that may prove offensive to others, [1 Corinthians 8:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.10-13).

In a word, our zeal must be *wisely regulated*; it should be able to rise to any occasion that may call for it, [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13); but it should be under due control; nor should it ever be satisfied with a conviction that a thing is "lawful," without considering also whether, and how far, it is "*expedient*, [1 Corinthians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.12)."

We think, then, that a zeal flowing from such a *source*, and regulated by such a *standard*, and exercised in such a *way*—will bear inspection; and that, so far as we give the invitation for the purpose of self-inquiry, and not of self-applause, we may say, not to man only, but even to God himself, "Come, and see my zeal for the Lord."

But there are occasions when our zeal is blameworthy.

***~~II. When our zeal evidently manifests itself to be delusive and vain.~~***

***~~1. Our zeal is altogether vain and unacceptable to God, when it is proud and ostentatious.~~***

Such was the zeal of Jehu on this occasion. Raised to kingly power, and successful beyond his most hopeful expectations, he was elated with pride, and *desirous of having his prowess admired and extolled*. Hence his conduct, which, as conformable to a divine command, was made the ground of a reward—was, on account of the base mixture of pride and cruelty with which it was pursued, visited with signal punishment! Compare verse 20 with [Hosea 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 1.4).

*Pride and ostentation will mar and vitiate the best actions that we can possibly perform!*The giving of alms, or the waiting upon God with fasting and prayer, are acceptable services—if performed aright. But when made occasions for advancing ourselves in the estimation of men—they are hateful and contemptible in the sight of God, and will bring with them no other recompense than that which we vainly seek! [Matthew 6:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.1-5)." The declaration of God in relation to such things is plain and express, "It is not honorable to seek one's own honor, [Proverbs 25:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.27)." Therefore "let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips, [Proverbs 27:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.2)."

To this, then, we must carefully attend; for if, while professing to serve the Lord, our motive is ostentation, then be the service what it may, God will say, "Who has required this at your hands? [Isaiah 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-12)." Yes, it will be no better, in his sight, than "the cutting off a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood! [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3)."

[Matthew 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.5), "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."

***~~2. Our zeal is altogether vain and unacceptable to God, when it is partial.~~***

In this respect, also, Jehu's zeal notoriously failed. He was sent to punish Ahab's wickedness; and yet himself joined in the idolatry which he was ordered to abolish, verse 29, and indulged in all the sins which he was commissioned to correct, verse 31. Zeal, if pure, will extend to every part of our duty; it has respect to God's will; and therefore will operate in reference to all his commands; to those which require self-denial, no less than to those which may administer to our personal gratification. Zeal will be in the soul what the soul is in the body; its operation will be uniform and abiding. Whether our actions be public or private, and whether our duties be of an active or passive kind, it will stimulate us to approve ourselves to the heart-searching God; and, if it fails of this, at least in our endeavors, it is evidently not such as has God for its author, nor such as God will ultimately approve.

***~~3. Our zeal is altogether vain and unacceptable to God, when it is transient.~~***

The stony-ground hearers manifest a great degree of zeal for a season, "they readily with joy receive the word; but, having no root in themselves, they believe only for a while, and in time of temptation fall away! [Luke 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.13)." But it is not sufficient for any man to "run well for a season only, [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6)." "We must endure unto the end, if ever we would be saved, [Matthew 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22)." We are "not to look back, after having once put our hand to the plough, [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62)." "We are never to be weary in well-doing;" "never, under any circumstances, to faint."

On this our future remuneration altogether depends, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9). "The man who draws back, draws back unto perdition, [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)," and he whose zeal will not carry him to the last extremity, even to the enduring of the most cruel death—will fail of obtaining the approbation of his God! [Luke 17:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.33).

I must, therefore, guard you against ever relaxing in your zeal even for a moment. Whatever your attainments are, and whatever you may have done or suffered in the service of your God, you must "forget the things that are behind, and reach forward unto that which is before, and press on for the prize of your high calling," until you have actually finished your course, and obtained the crown which is to be awarded to you, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14).

***~~In conclusion, let me say to every individual among you.~~***

**1. Have a zeal for God.**

God is not to be served with lukewarmness, [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16). He requires the heart, the whole heart, [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26); [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2); and surely he is worthy of it; and his service well deserves it. See what zeal men display in the pursuits of this world:  
the student, for knowledge;  
the merchant, for his gains;  
the soldier, for honor.

And will you be behind any one of them? *Does our blessed Lord and Savior deserve less at your hands, than this vain and perishing world can do?*The burnt-offerings, you know, were wholly consumed upon God's altar; they were wholly God's; and the priests had no part in them. Such offerings are you to be; and to be devoted thus exclusively to God is "your reasonable service! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." Give yourselves up, then, entirely to God; and "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

***~~2. Let "your zeal be according to knowledge".~~***

Ignorant zeal will only deceive and ruin you, as it did the Pharisees of old, [Romans 10:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.2-3). There is a great deal of zeal in religion; hence come the penances and pilgrimages of the Papists; and hence come the accursed cruelties of the Inquisition? Who does not know the persecutions that Christianity has sustained from heathens; or the miseries that Popery, under the name of Christianity, has inflicted on those who would not yield to its abominations? In all these things, the agents "have imagined that they did to God an acceptable service, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2)."

Nor can I deny that even good men have sometimes been betrayed into a very erroneous line of conduct, from a mistaken notion that they were serving God, while anathematizing those who differed from them in some matters of subordinate importance. But do not be satisfied, brethren, even though Jehonadab himself be embarked in the same cause with you.

*It is not by man's judgment or example that you are to stand or fall, but by the judgment of your God, according to his written word.*Endeavor, then, to have your mind and spirit regulated by the only standard of right and wrong. And especially be on your guard against a fiery zeal. "The zeal of our blessed Lord was such as even consumed him, [John 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.17);" But remember, it was himself that it consumed, not others. Yes, when he himself suffered from the blind zeal of others, he prayed for them, even for his very murderer! [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34). "Be then followers of him." "Let it be your food and your drink to do the will of God yourselves! [John 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.34)." But, with respect to others, let all your efforts be "to save, and not to destroy, them [Luke 9:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.56);" to "win them" by love, [Proverbs 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.30), and not constrain them by force, [Luke 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.23).

***~~#373~~***

***~~THE CHARACTER OF JEHU~~***

***~~[2 Kings 10:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.30-31)~~***

The LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation."

Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit!

We can scarcely conceive any stronger proof of God's willingness to reward his people, than that which he has given us in rewarding people whose services were merely external, without any real love to him in their hearts. If we were to judge from the honor put upon Jehu, we would be ready to suppose he was, if not a blameless—yet, on the whole, a pious character; but on a review of his history, our admiration must be fixed, not on him, but on that infinitely gracious and condescending Being, who was pleased to remunerate such services as his. Let us consider:

***~~I. The character of Jehu.~~***

Here was a mixture, not uncommon in the world. Let us notice,

***~~1. What Jehu did for God.~~***

Being appointed of God to the office of avenging upon Ahab the blood of Naboth and of the prophets, he addressed himself to the work without delay. In the space of a few hours he destroyed Jehoram, with his mother Jezebel, and then instantly set himself to complete the work he had so prosperously begun. It is worthy of observation, that in extirpating the family of Ahab, he succeeded by the very same means which Jezebel had used for the destruction of Naboth. He sent letters to the great men of Samaria, to whose care the seventy sons of Ahab were entrusted, and required of them to cut off their heads in one single night, and send them to him at Jezreel; and these elders, many of whom had surely concurred in the shedding of Naboth's blood at the command of Jezebel, now, at the command of Jehu, became traitors to their king, and murderers of all his family!

But, besides cutting off the posterity of Ahab, he proceeded also to execute judgment on all the worshipers of Baal. By a stratagem deeply laid, but not according with truth or godliness, he succeeded against these also in one day; and entirely banished, as it were, the worship of Baal from the land, burning all his images with fire, and making his very temple a sink of all impurity.

In this conduct he gained the approbation of Jehonadab, whose pious character and zealous cooperation strengthened and encouraged him in this arduous undertaking. From God himself too, he obtained a decided testimony of approbation, together with a rich reward; for he alone of all the kings of Israel had the kingdom continued to his posterity of the fourth generation, or for so long a period of years.

Thus, it must be confessed, Jehu appears to have been a distinguished servant of the Lord; though, alas! he was but *partial in that obedience*which God rendered.

***~~2. What Jehu omitted to do.~~***

Against Ahab, whom it was his interest to destroy, and Baal, whom he had no wish to preserve—he executed vengeance with zeal. But against the calves of Dan and Bethel, which policy required him to preserve, he raised not up his hand. Nor indeed did he make the law of God the rule of his conduct, "he took no heed to walk according to that;" much less did he aim at it "with all his heart." No! he both indulged in himself, and tolerated in others, much that was contrary to the divine will; and thus he manifested, that, *notwithstanding all his outward obedience, his heart was not right in the sight of God!* *Such was his character, externally good, but internally depraved!*

Let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. The lessons to be deduced from it.~~***

Such characters as these are very instructive. They teach us:

***~~1. That we may perform many external duties, and yet have no vital principle of religion within us.~~***

The *actions*of Jehu, as to the matter of them, were good; and therefore they were rewarded. But in their *motive*and *principle*they were bad; and therefore God afterwards visited them with a severe punishment, [Hosea 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 1.4). This shows, that *notwithstanding all he did for the Lord, he had not within him any principle of true piety.*

And thus it is with multitudes among ourselves; they are zealous against open vice and profaneness, yes active too in many works of benevolence—and yet appear evidently to be destitute of vital godliness; they have never been truly humbled before God, never fled to Christ for refuge, never given themselves up to God as his redeemed people! How much is it to be regretted that such people, who by their external facade have gained the admiration and love of the most pious characters, and even received a recompense from the Lord also—should yet, for lack of a root of grace in them, never bring forth fruit unto perfection, and never obtain happiness in the eternal world!

Like the rich youth in the Gospel, or Nicodemus, or Paul in his unconverted state—they are zealous towards God to a certain extent, but without a new and spiritual birth must forever perish! O that all who have a zeal for God in the performance of outward duties, would carefully examine the principles by which they are actuated, and *never be satisfied with any action which has not a sense of redeeming love for its moving cause!*

***~~2. That we may profess much zeal for God, and yet have a radical alienation of heart from him.~~***

Jehu certainly professed to be actuated by a regard for God's honor, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord," said he; and when the different events had taken place, he made reflections upon them as accomplishing the divine predictions. Yet his flagrant neglect of other duties stamped him as a hypocrite in the sight of God.

And is it not thus with many who make a profession of religion in the present day? They think themselves to be zealous for God, and wish to be thought so by others; but they are manifestly under the dominion of:  
some reigning lusts,  
some evil tempers,  
some hidden abominations!

They will sacrifice the refuse to the Lord, and such things as they care but little about; but they will retain the choicest of the flocks, and the sins which are more intimately connected with their pleasures or their interests. Let professors of religion who are so ardent in talking about their favorite topics, or in attending on the ordinances of religion, inquire:  
Whether the Word of God is really loved in their hearts;  
whether they are aspiring after an entire conformity to its commands;  
and whether they are longing to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?"

Sad will it be to be numbered among those of whom James speaks, who seem to be religious, and yet, by their unbridled tongues, and unsubdued tempers—show that they "deceive their own selves, and that their religion is vain! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)."

***~~3. That if ever we would be accepted by God hereafter—then we must have our hearts right with him now.~~***

This is required of every human being, [Deuteronomy 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.12-13); [Deuteronomy 18:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.13). Absolute perfection indeed is not to be expected; but Christian obedience must be attained; nor without it will any conformity to outward rights, or any profession of Christian principles, avail us before God, [Acts 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.21). But how shall this state of mind be attained? It must be sought by prayer to God, who has promised to give us his Holy Spirit, and by the mighty working of that Spirit to bring us to a radical conformity to his will, [Ezekiel 36:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26-27). Plead then with God that blessed promise; yes, give him no rest until he accomplishes it in your souls. Then shall your heart be made right with God, as God's is with you; and with infinite condescension will he "take you up to sit with him in the chariot" of his love, and on the throne of his glory! verse 15.

***~~#374~~***

***~~ELISHA'S REPROOF TO JOASH~~***

**[2 Kings 13:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.18-19)**

Then he said, "Take the arrows," and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground." He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times."

In this passage is recorded a conversation between King Joash and the Prophet Elisha. The prophet was dying; and the king, who had utterly neglected him before, now went to visit him, and was full of concern about the loss, which both he and all his people would sustain; the king even wept over him, and most pathetically exclaimed, "O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! This is the same expression as Elisha himself had used in reference to Elijah, [2 Kings 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.12).

The people of Israel were forbidden to multiply chariots and horses, that they might look to God alone as their strength. And they were now so reduced by Hazael king of Syria, that they had only ten chariots and fifty horsemen left; verse 7. But if they had attended to Elisha, they would not have needed any such protectors, because God himself would have defended them. This truth the king now acknowledged, feeling that he was about to lose the best support of his kingdom."

***~~Thus it is that the servants of the Lord are too generally treated; they are neglected and despised in their life; but, when they are no longer able to benefit the world, their loss is deeply felt.~~***

On this occasion God put fresh honor upon his servant, and made him a messenger of glad tidings to the king. These tidings were conveyed under two symbolical representations; the shooting of an arrow towards Syria, and the smiting of a bundle of arrows upon the ground. But it seems that the king, though apprised of God's gracious intentions towards him, was not by any means either so enlarged in his expectations, or so ardent in his desires, as he should have been. He was lukewarm; and by his lukewarmness he both displeased the prophet, and deprived himself of a great measure of that mercy which God had designed to bestow upon him.

Now this subject affords us a fit occasion to consider,

***~~I. What messages of mercy God has sent to us.~~***

Innumerable are the intimations which God has given us of a glorious deliverance from all our spiritual enemies; they have been given:

***~~1. By significant emblems.~~***

What was the preservation of *Noah*and his family in the ark, but a representation to us of that deliverance which shall be given to all who are found in Christ? All the rest of the world shall perish; but they shall be "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, [1 Peter 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.20-21)."

What were the deliverances of God's people from Egypt and Babylon, but typical exhibitions of that redemption which God has given to us in Christ Jesus? In this light they are uniformly set forth in the holy Scriptures; and from them we learn never to despair, [Isaiah 40:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.4-5).

What were all the *miracles*of our Lord, but so many emblems of the spiritual blessings which shall be imparted unto us by the Gospel, [Isaiah 35:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5-6); [John 9:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.39).

Above all, what was the resurrection of our blessed Lord, but a pledge, yes, a shadowy representation also, of that restoration to a new and spiritual life, of which all shall partake who believe in Christ! Compare [Ephesians 1:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-22) with [Ephesians 2:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.4-7).

***~~2. By express promises.~~***

Where shall we begin, or where shall we end—our enumeration of the "exceeding great and precious promises" which are given us in the Gospel? Though we should confine ourselves to the precise idea of the text, and contemplate the promises solely as relating to our deliverance from spiritual enemies, we might easily collect passages almost without number:

Sin, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14).

Satan, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20).

Death, [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22).

Hell, [John 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.15-16).

Or all in one, [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18)!

These promises are made, like that in our text, even to the most unworthy of mankind.

***~~3. By the declarations and examples of dying saints.~~***

Behold Jacob on his dying bed, [Genesis 49:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.18).

Or the aged Simeon with Jesus in his arms, [Luke 2:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.29).

Or Paul, in daily expectation of martyrdom—how bright his prospects, how heavenly his thoughts! [2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8).

In such passages as these we see death entirely disarmed of its sting, and the triumphs of Heaven, as it were, begun. But we need not go back to the days of old; we may hear for ourselves precisely similar declarations, if we will frequent the chambers of sick and dying saints. In all such instances, the departing saints bring the matter home to our own feelings, and "put, as it were, their hands upon ours," to teach us how to shoot, and to encourage our efforts. See verse 16. God himself instructs us, what we also may expect from him in a dying hour.

Amidst so many gracious intimations from God, we should inquire,

***~~II. Why it is that we profit so little by them?~~***

The fault is in ourselves alone, just as it was in the king of Israel.

***~~1. Our desires for holiness are faint.~~***

We do not long for the blessings of redemption as we ought to; we should "pant after them, as the deer after the water-brooks, [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2); [Psalm 63:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-2); [Psalm 84:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.2)." But instead of this, we are satisfied with low attainments; and, if we can, as it were, just get within the door of mercy, we have no ambition either to glorify God on earth, or to obtain an augmented weight of glory in Heaven. The people of this world put us utterly to shame; they are never satisfied; the more they obtain—the more their desires are enlarged. O that it were thus with us; and that we were determined "never to be satisfied, until we awake after the perfect image of our God! [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15)."

***~~2. Our expectations for holiness are low.~~***

We do not actually deny the truth of God in his promises; but we do not view them in their breadth and length, and depth and height.

God says to us, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it!" But we have no enlargement in prayer. "We are not straitened in him; but we are straitened in our own affections."

God tells us, that "according to our faith it shall be unto us;" but we, instead of raising our expectations in proportion to the ability of the Giver, are ever limiting his power and grace; and on every occasion we ask: Can he do this thing? or Will he do it for me? This is a fault even among eminent saints.

It was for this that Jesus reproved the sisters of Lazarus; he had told them that their brother would rise again; and, when he went to the grave to raise him, they thought that the circumstance of his having been dead four days was an insurmountable obstacle to his restoration to life. But Jesus replied, "Did I not say unto you, that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

This reproof most justly belongs to us. If when we attended the gospel ordinances, or read the Word of God, or opened our mouths in prayer—we really expected such manifestations of God's power and love as he has given us reason to expect—then what might we not obtain at his hands? But God does not perform, and, if we may so speak, cannot perform, all that he would for us, because of our unbelief, [Matthew 13:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.58) with [Mark 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.5).

***~~3. Our exertions for holiness are languid.~~***

When we come into the divine presence, the arrows are, as it were, put into our hands; but we are content with striking twice or thrice. We do not "stir up ourselves to lay hold on God!" We do not wrestle with him, and determine not to let him go, until he has bestowed a blessing on our souls. We should "give him no rest," until he has manifested to us the acceptance of our prayers. But *we perform all our duties in so cold a way as rather to offend God by our lukewarmness, than to please him by our zeal.*

The prophet was justly displeased with Joash for not showing greater ardor in the cause of Israel, "You should have smitten," says he, "five or six times; then had you smitten Syria, until you had consumed it; whereas now you shall smite Syria but thrice." This prediction was exactly verified, "Joash defeated them only three times, verse 25."

Just so, do we find it in our own experience. We gain some victories, it is true; but they are only small and partial, because we do not fight with all our might.

**Advice.**

***~~1. Improve the opportunities which God affords you by his ministers.~~***

Elisha ministered for above sixty years; yet Joash never availed himself of his instructions, until they were about to be forever withdrawn. And is it not so wherever the faithful servants of God are sent? The generality, especially of the great and opulent, disregard their warnings, and despise their messages of mercy. O that it might not be found so in this place! If God has sent you the light, learn to walk in the light while you have it; lest darkness come upon you, and "the word which ought to be a savor of life, becomes unto you a savor of death!"

**2. Do not trifle with the spiritual impressions which are at any time upon your minds.**

Joash once appeared to be in a hopeful way; but he soon lost his good impressions, and died, as he had lived, an enemy of God!

Just so, are there not found among us many whose "goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passes away?" Under the ordinances perhaps, or in a time of sickness, or under the prospect of some painful bereavement, you have been affected, and been made willing to obey the voice of God's prophets. But you have soon forgotten all your vows, and "returned like the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire!" Truly if this is the case with you, "your latter end will be worse than your beginning; for it would have been better never to have known the way of righteousness, than after having known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you!"

***~~#375~~***

***~~THE BIBLE STANDARD OF RELIGION~~***

**[2 Kings 17:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 17.33)**

"They feared the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought."

The views which men in general have of religion are extremely indistinct. Hence arises the necessity of unfolding religion to them in every possible way. Sometimes we attempt it by a clear exposition of its principles from the declarations of the Inspired Volume. Sometimes we bring forth the examples of the Apostles, and show what their views of religion were. On the present occasion, I will proceed in a way of contrast, so that the difference between true religion and false religion may the more fully appear.

The people of whom my text speaks were the inhabitants of Samaria. When the king of Assyria had subdued the ten tribes of Israel, he took away the inhabitants, and dispersed them throughout his own dominions, and sent a number of his own subjects to occupy and cultivate the land of Samaria. These people, coming from different parts of the Assyrian Empire, took with them their own gods, whom they had severally been accustomed to worship. But, after a season, the lions of the forests multiplied, and caused such destruction among them, that they could not but regard it as a token of God's displeasure, for not being worshiped and served in a way conformable to his own appointed ordinances. The people stated this to the king of Assyria; and requested that one of the priests who had been taken from the land, should be sent back to Samaria, in order to instruct them how Jehovah, whom they supposed to be a local Deity, and the God of that particular land, was to be worshiped.

This request was complied with; a priest was sent to them; a number of others were appointed to officiate with him under his direction; and thus *the people united the worship of Jehovah with that of their own idols*; or, as my text expresses it, "feared the Lord, and served their own gods, verse 24-41." And in this state they continued even to the time of our blessed Lord; who said to the Samaritan woman, "You worship what you do not know, [John 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.22)."

Now, this will afford me an opportunity of showing what true religion is, by contrasting:

***~~I. The Mongrel Samaritan Standard of Religion.~~***

From the history of the Samaritans, as contained in the chapter before us, it will be seen what their religion was. It had:  
self-delight for its object,  
external religious forms for its essence,  
and custom for its origin.

**It had self-delight for its object**; for every one worshiped his own gods; as it is said, "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high-places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities where they dwelt, verse 29-31." If they added Jehovah to them, it was from fear of his vengeance, "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods;" fearing *him*by constraint, and serving them by choice. They had a general idea that it was well to acknowledge some God; and with that they were satisfied.

**It had external religious forms for its essence**, "They made unto themselves, of the lowest of the people, priests of the high-places, who sacrificed for them in the houses of the high-places verse 32." While the priests were at their posts, and performing their accustomed round of services, all was well. Respecting religion as a personal concern between them individually and the God whom they served, they knew nothing. It was with them a mere official matter; and if it was performed with regularity by the appointed officers, they felt no need, no cause for self-reproach.

**It had custom or tradition for its origin**, "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations who had carried Israel away captive from thence, Unto this day they do after the former manners, verse 33, 34." "So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children; as did their fathers, so did they unto this day, verse 41." None of them inquired whether their views were right or wrong; they took for granted that the religion which they had received from their forefathers was right; and, if they only conformed themselves to that, they had nothing to fear.

***~~And what is the religion which prevails among us?~~***

Truly, we might almost conceive ourselves to be in Samaria, rather than in Britain, where the light of the Gospel so clearly shines. For what is the object which the generality of us aim at, even in religion? Is it not merely to have within our own bosoms a foundation for self-applause? As to any real delight in holy exercises, we do not pretend to it. To read the Word of God with a devout application of it to our own particular case; to commune with God in secret, and pour out our souls before him in praise and thanksgiving; these are not really the employments we desire; as for enjoying his presence, and receiving communications from him in answer to our prayers, we scarcely contemplate such a thing as attainable by us; if we do *our duty*, as we call it, that is all that we are concerned about; that satisfies our conscience; and we neither desire nor think of anything beyond.

In perfect accordance with these views are all our services. We come to the house of God; we follow the minister in the different parts of the service, standing, sitting, kneeling, as occasion requires, and making our responses at the places assigned to us. We then attend to his discourse with interest or indifference, as it may happen; and then congratulate ourselves as having performed a duty, though the soul has not been really engaged in a single word that has been uttered either by the minister or ourselves. Samaritan-like, we devolve almost the whole service on the minister; and, if he have discharged his office with regularity and decorum—we conclude that we have done all that was required of us.

If it were asked of us, Why we professed the Christian faith at all—the greater part of us would have no better reason than that by which the Samaritans were influenced, "We follow the religion of our forefathers." We are Christians, in fact, for the very same reasons that Muhammadans or Pagans profess the beliefs maintained respectively by them. We have taken our religion upon trust from those who have gone before us, without ever having examined it for ourselves; and it is owing to the circumstance of our having been born in a Christian land, and not to any conviction of the truth and excellency of our religion, that we are Protestants and not Papists; or Christians and not Heathens.

The God of Scripture is professedly the object of our worship. But the gods whom we really worship, and by choice, are **the pleasures, and riches, and honors, of this vain world!**On them our heart is fixed. To them is our time and money are devoted. If we but attain our real gods to the extent of our desires, we bless ourselves as having gained the objects most worthy of our pursuit!

But now, in opposition to all this, let us notice:

***~~II. The standard proposed to us in the Bible.~~***

This, also, is fully set forth in the chapter before us.

***~~1. The standard of Scripture has God alone for its object.~~***

"You shall not fear other gods, nor how yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them; but to the Lord; him shall you fear, and him shall you worship, and to him shall you sacrifice, verse 35, 36." In the first and great commandment that is given us, of loving God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, there is no alienation admitted, no participation with any creature upon earth. "God is a jealous God," and must have our whole hearts. "If our heart is divided, we shall," as the prophet warns us, assuredly "be found faulty, [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2)."

Now then, if there be anyone thing under Heaven that is not truly and entirely subordinated to God, we have not yet taken so much as one step in true religion. We may have some fear of God; but while there is any other God in the universe that we serve, or that stands in competition with him—we are yet mongrel Samaritans in heart, "having the form of godliness, but not any of its power, [2 Timothy 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5)."

***~~2. The standard of Scripture has the covenant of grace altogether for its foundation.~~***

"The covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, verse 38." We have no hope whatever before God, but as founded on that everlasting covenant which the Father entered into with his dear Son, as the head and representative of his elect people, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13); [Hebrews 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20).

In ourselves we were reduced to a footing with the fallen angels, and had in ourselves no more claim on God than they. By the first covenant we were all condemned, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). But God has made a new covenant with us, "ordered in all things and sure, [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5);" and has "confirmed that covenant with an oath, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18);" and according to the tenor of that covenant, shall saving mercy be given unto us, [Hebrews 8:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.8-12). But who knows anything about that covenant?

Who even thinks of it, or has any more respect unto it than if it never had existed? The utmost that people in general know about religion is, that they need to repent; and that, if they repent, they shall obtain mercy. But under what considerations, and by what distinct means, mercy shall be accorded to them—they know nothing. They do not see everything as springing from the sovereign grace of God, and given to Christ for us, and received from Christ through the exercise of faith. Truly, so miserably defective are the most of us in the knowledge of these things, that the mongrel Samaritans themselves had almost as good a discernment of them as we!

***~~3. The standard of Scripture has the work of redemption for its great influential motive.~~***

"You shall fear the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched-out arm, verse 36." Throughout all the Old Testament, the deliverance from Egypt is urged as the chief incentive to serve and glorify God. Yet what was that, in comparison with the redemption given to us through the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? This is the *substance*, of which the redemption from Egypt was the mere *shadow*. And it is from the consideration of this stupendous work that we are exhorted to "yield up ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." It is "because Christ has bought us with a price, that we are called to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20); [1 Peter 1:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.17-19)."

See the saints in Heaven; even there are they actuated in all their services by a sense of redeeming love! [Revelation 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9-10). Much more are we on earth induced by this wonderful mystery to "live to Him, who died for us, and rose again, [Romans 14:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-9)."

***~~4. The standard of Scripture has holiness—real and universal holiness, for its end.~~***

Not even the salvation of men from perdition is so much the end of all religion, as the saving of them from sin. It was in the latter view, rather than the former, that the very name of Jesus was given to our blessed Lord, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21). He came to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)."

This also, like all the foregoing characters of true religion, is specified in the passage before us, "The statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you—you shall observe to obey for evermore, verse 37." And to this agrees the testimony of Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us; that, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him, all the days of our life, [Luke 1:67-69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.67-69); [Luke 1:74-75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.74-75)."

Now, from hence we may see how far we are possessed of true religion; for, if we desire not holiness as our chief aim, and as that which alone can render Heaven itself desirable, we have yet to learn what are the first principles of true religion. Satan himself would gladly be restored to his original happiness in Heaven; but he has no desire to be "renewed in the spirit of his mind, and to be created anew, after the divine image, in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23-24)."

These are exclusively the desires of a Christian mind; and in every regenerate soul under Heaven are they paramount and predominant. There is not a Christian in the universe who does not desire to become "holy, as God himself is holy," and "perfect, even as his Father in Heaven is perfect."

***~~And now, by way of improvement,~~***

***~~1. I call you to humiliation.~~***

Methinks the Prophet Isaiah furnishes me with the most appropriate address that can possibly be delivered to you, "Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel and who come forth from the seed of Judah; you who swear allegiance by the name of the Lord and make mention of the God of Israel—but not in truth and sincerity, nor in righteousness, [Isaiah 48:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 48.1)." (Amplified version)

Here your Christian *profession*is acknowledged; and here, alas! is your Christian *practice*described. For who among us has devoted himself to God with that entireness of heart and life which the very name of Christian implies? I must indeed warn you, that "you cannot serve two masters, who are so opposed to each other as God and the world are. To whichever of them you adhere, you must, of necessity, despise the other; you cannot serve God and mammon! [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24)."

This is the warning of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who will confirm it by His judgment at the last day. Let a sense of this humble you in the dust; and remember that if ever you would serve God acceptably—then every rival must be put away, and he alone must reign in your heart.

***~~2. I call you to decision.~~***

What is the determination which I desire you all to form? It is that which the Prophet Micah so well inculcates, "All people will walk every one in the name of his God; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God, forever and ever! [Micah 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.5)." Yes, "walk in the name of your incarnate God," whose name you bear; and let it be seen "whose you are, and whom you serve." Do this at all events, without compromising the matter, or "halting between two opinions." "If Baal is God—then follow him! But if the Lord is God—then follow Him [1 Kings 18:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.21)." Yes, and "follow him fully too, [Joshua 14:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 14.8-9);" and if you are called to bear a cross for him, do not wait until it is laid upon you by necessity; but "take it up willingly, and follow him, [Luke 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.23);" "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, [Hebrews 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.13);" and, whatever be the cross laid upon you, rejoice, and "glory in it, for his sake, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41)."

This is the Bible standard. Do not attempt to lower it. Aspire after a full conformity to it. Your Lord well deserves this at your hands. It was not by measure that he expressed love to you. There was nothing which he did not forego for you; nothing which he did not sustain for you. Walk then, in his steps; and have no other standard than this, to "love him as he has loved you," and to serve him as he has served you. Whatever he did for your salvation, that be ready to do for his honor. And whatever attainments you have made, still endeavor to advance, "walking on" with ever-increasing zeal, "forgetting what is behind, and pressing forward to that which is ahead, until the prize of your high calling is awarded to you, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14)," and you rest forever in the bosom of your God.

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***~~HEZEKIAH DESTROYS THE BRONZE SERPENT~~***

**[2 Kings 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 18.4)**

"Hezekiah removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)"

We too often see the children of godly parents turning aside from the principles in which they have been educated, and deserting the paths which parental piety has marked out for them. Here we behold a youth, whose father was branded with a special mark of infamy on account of his numerous and aggravated impieties—shining with a brighter luster than any other of the kings of Judah! verse 5, 6. No sooner did Hezekiah come to the throne of his father, than he set himself to counteract all the evil which his father had done. At the early age of twenty-five Hezekiah commenced a reformation, which, for the time at least, was attended with the happiest effects. "Hezekiah removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made." It seems that the veneration in which that memorial of God's mercy had been held, had degenerated into the grossest superstition. Where the bronze serpent had been preserved for so long a period, we are not informed. Had it been placed within the sanctuary, with the pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, being concealed from the view both of the people and the priests—it would not have become an object of idolatrous regard. But it is not to be wondered at, that, when idols of every kind were multiplied in the land, this, which as a memorial of God's mercy was really entitled to most affectionate respect, should have divine honors paid to it.

The use which was made of it by the Jewish people naturally leads me to show: How prone men are to superstition; while the zeal of Hezekiah in destroying it, will properly afford me an occasion yet further to show how earnestly we ought, all of us according to our ability, to counteract the superstition that is around us!

Observe then,

***~~I. How prone men are to superstition.~~***

Superstition, I am aware, may exist, without being carried to the extent in which it prevailed among the Jews at this time. But the same ingredients are found in superstition, whatever is the degree in which it prevails. In the instance before us its component parts are manifest. The Jews carried their veneration of the bronze serpent to a very culpable excess; they assigned to it a sanctity which it did not possess. They ascribed to it a glory which it did not merit. They expected from it a benefit, which it could not confer. Now, whether our superstition has respect to a visible creature, or only to a figment of the brain, its essential qualities are the same; and man in his fallen state is prone to it.

Superstition prevailed, and still prevails, universally among the heathen.

What were, or are, the Deities of the heathen, but men, who on account of some exploits in former days have been canonized, or mere creatures of the imagination invested with divine attributes? The philosophers of Greece and Rome knew of no other gods than these; and in that respect were scarcely more rational than any other of the heathen, whether in ancient or modern times.

Among the Jews also superstition ever did, and still does, prevail to an awful extent.

Scarcely had they been brought out of Egypt before they made a golden calf, and worshiped it as their god, [Acts 7:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.41). Through their whole abode in the wilderness they bowed down to Moloch and Remphan, the gods of the heathen that were around them [Acts 7:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.42-43). After their settlement in Canaan the Jews evinced the same propensity continually. The greatest mercies which God gave to them were abused to this end.

Was the *law*given the Jews from Mount Sinai? They rested in it for justification, instead of using it as "a ministration of condemnation," and a rule of life.

Was the *temple*of God among the Jews? In that they trusted as a security against their enemies, saying, as Micah superstitiously did when he had secured a Levite for his priest, "Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite for my priest, [Judges 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 17.13); [Jeremiah 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.4)."

The Jews had the badge of circumcision, but they thought that would suffice, though they knew nothing of the true circumcision of the heart. To this present hour the dispersed of Israel have no juster views of God and of religion, than those had in former days, of whom it is said, that, trusting in their own righteousness, they would not submit to the righteousness of God. Even the doctrines of man's invention had, and still have, a greater authority over them than the commands of God!

And what is Popery but a mass of superstition altogether? What is the worship of the Virgin Mary, and of saints, and relics? What are all the masses, the pilgrimages, and the penances that are prescribed among them as means of expiating their sins? What is their confession of sins to a priest, their priestly absolution, their worshiping of the consecrated wafer, and their administration of extreme unction?

Some, I trust, there are, who are enabled to look simply to Christ through all the *mists*that are cast around him; but those who regard the dogmas of popery as the only ground of their eternal hopes, are as far from God and truth as either Jews or heathens!

Would to God that the Protestant world were blameless in relation to this matter!

The Gospel light which we enjoy ought long since to have dispelled the clouds of popish superstition; but among the generality there still remains a most astonishing blindness respecting the Gospel of Christ.

How many are there who imagine that repentance has in itself a power to wash away their sins!

How many regard the Lord's Supper, not as a mere commemorative ordinance in and through which divine blessings are dispensed, but as a sacrificial act, that expiates their guilt, and insures their forgiveness!

Baptism, in like manner, is supposed by many to take away our sins—yes, and to renew our natures also! Those who deny this, are represented as denying the sacramental character of the ordinance.

Thus do many among ourselves run into the very same absurdity as the Jews did in relation to the bronze serpent. God once conveyed bodily health by a sight of the bronze serpent. Just so, God now conveys spiritual health in and through the ordinance of baptism [Editor's note: We find Simeon's Anglicanism expressed in this section to be unbiblical]. But the serpent did not heal all, but those only who looked to it by faith; nor did it heal them by any power of its own, but only as appointed of God to be a medium of communication from him to them. When the Jews ascribed the honor to the bronze serpent, and looked to it for future benefits, they erred. And precisely in the same manner do they err, who ascribe power to baptism as an act, instead of looking simply to God for his blessing on the use of it as an instituted ordinance, and a medium of communication with God. As reasonably might any person ascribe the refreshing water which he drinks to the pipe which conveys it to him, as imagine that the mere act of baptism can justify and sanctify his soul. There is a fountain to which the stream must be traced; and, if we allow our views to terminate on anything short of that, we are guilty of the grossest superstition!

In a word, there is in every man by nature a tendency to this fatal evil, and a readiness to rob God of his glory, by giving to the creature that honor which is due to him alone! Such is the proneness of man to superstition; and from Hezekiah's conduct, we learn,

***~~II. How earnestly we should endeavor to counteract superstition.~~***

We should counteract superstition,

***~~1. We should counteract superstition, in ourselves.~~***

There is a great deal of this evil remaining in the heart, even after we are truly converted unto God. To view God in everything; to ascribe everything, evil as well as good, to God, [Amos 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 3.6); to give him the glory of everything; and to depend wholly and entirely upon him for everything, is an attainment to which we are not soon brought; we gain it for the most part by a long and painful discipline.

There is a measure of creature-confidence and creature-dependence cleaving to us to the end. And though we are purged from it—yet is there a tendency to return to it, and a necessity to be constantly on our guard against it. Whence is that confidence which some derive from dreams, or visions, or other conceits of their own? Whence is that stress which they lay on the Word of God coming to their minds in this or that particular way? It all arises from a propensity inherent in fallen man to rest in something besides God.

The Word of God is our only legitimate ground of either hope or fear. The manner of its being applied to the mind does not alter one jot or tittle of it. The promises are not a whit more sure because they are presented with force to our minds, nor the threatenings less sure because we are strongly impressed with the idea that they shall never be fulfilled in us. And the only effect of attending to our own feelings in relation to these things is, to generate a presumptuous confidence in some, and groundless apprehensions in others. They all draw the mind away from God; and must be guarded against as superstitious vanities; and "all who trust in such vanities, shall have vanity for their recompense."

***~~2. We should counteract superstition, in others.~~***

Were superstition only a harmless delusion, then we might leave men to themselves; but when we consider how great an evil it is, and how strenuously the pious Hezekiah opposed it—then we should all use our utmost efforts to counteract it in the world. Whether we view the dishonor which it does to God, or the evil which it entails on man, we cannot but see, that we should tread in Hezekiah's steps respecting it. That it robs God of his glory, is obvious; because it ascribes to the creature what is due to Him alone. And it is most injurious to man, because while it disappoints his hopes, it actually robs him of all the blessings which the Gospel itself provides.

What did Paul say to those who relied on circumcision as securing or confirming to them the benefits of the Gospel? Did he say, "If you are circumcised, your circumcision shall profit you nothing?" No, but "If you are circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2)."

Just so must we say in reference to superstition of every kind; it not only fails to procure the benefits it aspires to, but actually deprives us of the benefits we might otherwise obtain. It would be well if those who superstitiously regard divine ordinances, whether baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or any other ordinance, as possessing any inherent virtue in themselves, and as imparting virtue by any power of their own, would contemplate their guilt and danger while under the influence of such delusions; for to those who against better light adhere to them, as necessarily conveying justification and sanctification and salvation, "Christ himself will become of no effect;" they are fallen from grace; and, as far as respects them, "Christ has died in vain! [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4) with [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.21)."

Well I know that to some these opinions will appear harsh; but fidelity to God and man requires, that, if even an angel from Heaven should countenance such an error, he should be Anathema! [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9). And if in opposing such errors anyone think that we manifest too much zeal, then what would such a one have said to Hezekiah? 'What! don't you know that that serpent was appointed as an ordinance by God himself? Don't you know how many thousands were healed by it? And do you dare to break it in pieces, and to degrade it with such an appellation as "Nehushtan [a bronze thing]"? I am shocked at your impiety. But what would Hezekiah have said? 'It is not as an ordinance of God that I degrade it, but as idolatrously substituted in God's place, as a ground of hope, and as a source of good.'

So I say of baptism and of the Lord's supper; 'In their proper and appointed use they cannot be too highly valued; but, if abused to purposes for which they were not given, and looked to as containing in themselves, and conveying of themselves, salvation to man, they are desecrated, and may justly be called Nehushtan.'

So Paul said in relation to circumcision, which corresponds with the Christian ordinance of baptism. When some abused it as a ground of hope, he would not acknowledge them as the people of God. He indignantly denominates them "the circumcision," declaring that they only were the circumcision who sought their salvation in God alone. And if any are offended with this doctrine, we refer them to Hezekiah; we refer them to Paul. It is too weighty a matter to be trifled with, seeing that it is of vital importance to every soul of man.

***~~Let us learn, then, from hence,~~***

**1. How to use God's ordinances.**

We should be thankful for them; we should honor them; we should look to God in them, and expect from God through them the communications of his grace and peace. They are to be reverenced, but not idolized. They are to be used as means, but not rested in as an end. No one is to imagine himself the better, merely because he has attended on any ordinances; for he may eat his own condemnation at the supper of the Lord, and have the word which is ministered unto him "a savor only of death."

We must look, not to ordinances, but to God in them; and just so much as we obtain from God in them, are we benefitted by them.

This present ordinance for instance—what are you the better for it, if you have not held communion with God himself in your devotions? And what benefit will you receive from the word now delivered, if it does not come to you in demonstration of the Spirit and of power? Bear this in mind, both before you come up to the house of God, and when you depart from it; and then you will find the ordinances to be blessings indeed. But, if you "sacrifice to your own net, and burn incense to your own dragnet, [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.16)," then your coming here will be in vain, and our labor also will be in vain.

**2. How to regard the Lord Jesus Christ himself.**

Methinks these Jews, though so blind and sinful, may well rise up in judgment against the generality of the professing Christian world. The serpent which they worshiped had never done anything for them; the people whom it had healed, had lived eight hundred years before; and it prevailed only to prolong for a season their physical life; and no benefit had accrued from it to any child of man since the day that it was erected in the camp. Yet they honored it, and "offered incense to it."

But the Lord Jesus Christ has been healing immortal souls; and that from the foundation of the world to this present hour; and so healed them, that they should live forever! This too he has done, by voluntarily leaving his Father's bosom, and assuming our nature, and dying on the cross under the load of all our sins, and drinking to the very dregs that *cup of bitterness*which must otherwise have been put into our hands to drink forever!

Yet how many days and months and years have been spent by most of us without ever offering to him the incense of our prayers and praise! Yes, notwithstanding he is erected for the healing of us, and is at this moment empowered to bestow on us all the blessings that we can need for body or for soul, for time or for eternity—how little is he adored and magnified by us! May we not well be ashamed when we reflect on this? May we not be confounded when we compare our treatment of him, with the conduct of the Jews towards the senseless shadowy representation of him? Yes indeed; we have reason to blush and be confounded before him!

Let us then repent of all our ingratitude towards him. Let us remember that there is no fear of honoring him too much, since He is God, as well as man; and not the medium of communication only, but the true and proper source of all blessings to our souls. Then shall our communion with him be sweet; and "the golden oil shall flow through the golden pipes, [Zechariah 4:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.11-14)," of his ordinances, from Him the fountain of it, to the enriching of our souls with all spiritual blessings, and to the everlasting glory of his great and glorious name.

***~~#377~~***

***~~HEZEKIAH'S DELIVERANCE FROM SENNACHERIB~~***

**[2 Kings 19:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 19.30-31)**

"Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this."

Great and mighty conquerors have at all times been ready to ascribe their success to their own wisdom and prowess; but in no case have they been anything more than *the sword which God has used for the effecting of his own purposes!*[Isaiah 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5); [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.15). And when God has accomplished by them his own designs, he frequently punishes their pride and cruelty by some signal judgments.

Thus he acted towards the boasting and blasphemous Sennacherib. He raised up that monarch to subdue mighty kingdoms, to lead into captivity the ten tribes of Israel, and to inflict a heavy chastisement on the two remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin. But, when the victorious monarch arrogated to himself all the glory of his conquests, and poured contempt upon Jehovah, whose instrument he was, God "put a hook in his nose and a bridle in his jaws," and turned him back with shame and ignominy; assuring at the same time his oppressed people, that, notwithstanding their present weakness, they would speedily be delivered from their insulting foe, and again be raised to stability and honor.

The words which we have now read are a part of the answer given from the Lord to the supplications of Hezekiah; and we shall find it profitable to consider,

***~~I. The promise contained in them.~~***

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin were reduced to the lowest state of desperation. But God had yet mercy in store for them; and promised, that he would once more establish them in peace and prosperity, so that, instead of being shut up, as now they were, they should be at liberty to return to their own possessions; and, instead of being reduced in number, they should multiply and fill the land.

This seems to be the primary meaning of the words; but they undoubtedly contain a promise of spiritual prosperity to that nation in the Apostolic age.

The terms in which the promise is expressed, are taken from the preceding verse; wherein it is declared, for their comfort, that the desolation which Sennacherib's army had occasioned, should not issue in a famine; but that sufficient grain should spring up, from what had been spilled in the fields, to support them this year, and the year following (which was the sabbatic year); and that in the third year they should be supported by the labors of husbandry, as in former times. From thence God takes occasion to say, that *the remnant which should escape the present desolations, should at a future period be a source of comfort and benefit to the whole world*.

That this is the true meaning of the words, appears from similar expressions used by the Prophet Isaiah, and quoted by Paul in the very sense here affixed to them. Compare [Isaiah 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.21-22) with [Romans 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.27). In preserving a remnant, it was God's intention that they should be witnesses for him to every nation under Heaven; and that by the ministration of his Gospel they should "blossom, and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit, [Isaiah 27:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.6)." The events which took place in the Apostolic age, when the Apostles and others went forth to publish the glad tidings of salvation, precisely corresponded with this prophecy; they went from Jerusalem, and diffused the knowledge of the crucified Savior throughout the earth.

Let us attend to,

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from it.~~***

We may particularly learn from hence,

***~~1. The interest which God takes in his redeemed people.~~***

Not only from the time that these words were spoken, but even before the foundation of the world, God had an eye to his chosen people, to deliver them from their spiritual enemies, that they might "walk in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of their life." On his Jewish Church he yet looks, in order to "engraft them yet again on their own olive-tree," when the appointed period for their restoration shall arrive. And on the least and lowest of his people at this day, does he still cast an eye of love and pity; he "has thoughts of love and peace towards them," and "is not willing that one of his little ones should perish." If enemies assault them, he considers himself as struck through them, [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4); he feels as if the apple of his eye were touched, [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8); he regards them as "his first-fruits," which if any dared to alienate and consume, he did it at the peril of his own soul! [Jeremiah 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.3).

***~~2. The efficacy of believing prayer.~~***

Low indeed was the state of the nation at that time; it seemed as if there was no possibility of escape for them from their conquering enemies. But behold, how speedily and effectually prayer prevailed! Isaiah lifted up his voice to God in prayer, verse 4; Hezekiah also spread before the Lord the letter that Rabshakeh had sent him, verse 14-19; and scarcely had the pious monarch finished his prayer, before the prophet was sent to him from the Lord, with assurances of immediate and complete deliverance! verse 20. That very night was an angel sent from Heaven to destroy a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army. Thus shall all God's enemies, and ours, perish, if only we cry unto God for help.

We may even now adopt the exulting language which God ordered Hezekiah to use in reference to the Assyrian monarch, "The virgin, the daughter of Israel, has shaken her head at you." *Only spread all your needs and difficulties before the Lord, and there is no lust, no spiritual enemy, that shall stand before you*; but "Satan himself shall be bruised under your feet shortly."

"The zeal of the Lord Almighty is pledged to perform this" for all his believing people. You may therefore go to him and plead, " Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us! [Isaiah 63:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.15)." And his answer to you shall speedily arrive, "I will rejoice over you to do you good, and I will plant you in the heavenly land with my whole heart and with my whole soul! [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.41)." Only believe in him; and "according to your faith it shall be unto you."

***~~#378~~***

***~~HEZEKIAH'S APPEAL TO GOD~~***

**[2 Kings 20:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.2-3)**

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

As "clouds return after rain," so do troubles follow each other frequently in rapid succession. Great was the affliction of Hezekiah at the time of Sennacherib's invasion; and no sooner was he delivered from that, than he was attacked with a deadly malady, and had a message from the Lord that he must die!

Under this new trouble he betook himself, as he had done also on the former occasion, to fervent prayer; and in this prayer he made a most solemn appeal to God, an appeal which needs to be well considered.

We will notice,

***~~I. The occasion of Hezekiah's prayer.~~***

***~~A message had been sent him from the Lord to set his house in order, and to prepare for speedy death.~~***

Now this would be a solemn warning to any man: "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die! You will not recover."

*There is in every man an instinctive dread of death*; and more especially to those who regard it in its true light. Who can think of going to the tribunal of a just and holy God to give an account of all that he has done in the body, whether good or evil, and to receive from God a sentence of everlasting happiness or misery—and not tremble at such a prospect?

This thought is as crucial to the prince as the peasant; and though many people treat it as fit only to be regarded by the poor, or by the sick and aged—yet, when the hour of death draws near, all feel its momentous importance! Or, if any are hardened enough to disregard it then, their delusion ceases the very instant that death has executed on them its commission!

***~~But it was peculiarly distressing to Hezekiah.~~***

He had begun a great and glorious reformation, and had fondly hoped to see it completed in the land. Besides, he had many plans for the temporal prosperity of his subjects; which now he had no prospect of carrying into execution. To relinquish all these projects was painful in the extreme. It evidently was not the mere fear of death that stimulated him to pray; nor does he appear to have entertained any doubt about the safety of his own soul. It was for God, and for the Jewish nation, that he felt concerned; and doubtless, in proportion to his zeal for God, and the love he bore to man, would be his grief at the tidings of such a premature and unseasonable termination of his life; nor do we wonder that under such circumstances he should "make supplication to his God with strong crying and tears."

Yet, until it is explained, we shall not easily account for,

***~~II. The appeal of Hezekiah's prayer.~~***

It does at first sight appear like the Pharisaic boast, "I thank you, O God, that I am not as other men." But, in truth, it was a plea, with which his prayer was enforced; a plea, like that of David, "Preserve my soul, for I am holy, [Psalm 86:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.2)." In this appeal he humbly declared before God.

***~~1. The use which he had hitherto made of life.~~***

From the first moment of his coming to the throne, he had set himself to suppress idolatry, and to reform the nation. Of this he had the testimony of his own conscience; and this gave him much comfort in his soul, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12); together with confidence in urging his petitions before God, [1 John 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.21-22).

But there was in this plea a reference to an express promise made to David—a promise, the accomplishment of which Hezekiah was now particularly authorized to ask, and to expect God had assured David that "if his children should walk before him in truth, there should not fail to be one of them to sit upon the throne of Israel, [1 Kings 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 2.4)." But Hezekiah had walked before God in truth, and yet was about to die without leaving any child to succeed him in his throne. Manasseh was not born until three years afterwards. Compare [2 Kings 20:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.6) with 21:1. This under any circumstances would have been a great affliction; but it was peculiarly afflictive, now that Hezekiah was in the midst of all his plans for the welfare of the nation, and had no prospect of a successor who would carry them on.

Hence there was a propriety in this appeal, far beyond what has been generally supposed; for if we have complied with any conditions on which a promise is suspended, we may justly urge it with God as a plea for the accomplishment of his promise.

***~~2. The end for which he desired a continuance of life.~~***

His desire was, not that he might have a protracted enjoyment of earthly things, but that he might have further opportunities of serving God. This appears from the thanksgiving which he uttered on his recovery, [Isaiah 38:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.18-19). This was a legitimate ground of desiring life. Paul, though he "desired to depart and to be with Christ, which was far better," yet was willing to stay a longer time here below, because it was "needful for the Church of Christ."

What better plea then could be urged than this? 'O my God, you have put me into a situation wherein I can serve you to great advantage; and you know I have no desire but to advance your glory in the world. O do not take me away, until I have been enabled to render you all the service of which you have made me capable!' Such was David's plea, [Psalm 30:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.8-9); and it may well be urged by all who desire to fulfill the true ends of life.

***~~Address:~~***

***~~1. To those who are in health and strength.~~***

Who can tell, how soon the message may be sent to you, "Put your house in order, because you are going to die! You will not recover." You may be in the prime of life as Hezekiah was, for he was only forty years of age. Or, like him, you may possess great wealth and honor; or may be engaged in pursuits of vast utility to the world. But death will not spare us on any of these accounts, if it has received its commission to cut us down.

What if the message were now delivered unto you: "You are going to die! You will not recover!" Are you ready to face the final judgement? Can you appeal to the heart-searching God that you have walked as in his presence, and endeavored with sincerity of heart to approve yourselves to him? Has the doing of his will in all things been the one object of your life? Above all, inquire whether Christ has been precious to you? And whether you have lived by faith in him? And whether you have truly devoted yourselves to him?

***~~2. Those who have recovered from sickness, or have escaped any particular danger.~~***

Why has God spared or restored you, but that you might live henceforth to his glory? Perhaps under the apprehension of death, you determined with yourselves that you would give yourselves up to God. Now then remember the *vows*that are upon you. God heard your prayer, and the prayers of others for you, that it might be seen whether you would serve him or not. O beware how you abuse his patience towards you; beware how you make use of life only to "add sin to sin," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath."

There is a great work lying before you, and but little time to do it in. To have the text realized in you, to have it realized in all its parts; and to have such an evidence of it in your heart and life, as to be able to appeal to God respecting it—this is no easy matter; nor is it a work that ought to be deferred one single moment.

Consider that you are still as much exposed to death as ever. Though restored, you have no promise of life for fifteen years to come—no, nor for fifteen days or hours. Improve then the present hour, "Walk not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time," that at whatever hour the heavenly Bridegroom may arrive, you may be found ready, and be counted worthy to sit down with him at his marriage-feast in Heaven!

***~~#379~~***

***~~HEZEKIAH'S HUMBLE RESIGNATION~~***

***~~[2 Kings 20:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.19)~~***

"The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied.

If of *active virtues*it may be said, that they are more fascinating and beautiful in the eyes of men; of *passive virtues*it may be said, that an equal degree of divine grace is displayed in them. It is as much an effect of divine grace to suffer patiently the will of God, as it is to perform it diligently. Accordingly we find, that *most of the eminent saints of old were as remarkable for a meek submission to the divine disposals, as for a zealous execution of the divine commands*. Aaron, [Leviticus 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 10.3); Eli, [1 Samuel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.18); Job, [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21); David, [Psalm 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.9); and many others, are recorded as bright examples of the passive graces; and the history of Hezekiah, as contained in the words before us, furnishes us with an admirable specimen of pious resignation.

***~~I. We shall consider Hezekiah's resignation as an act of piety.~~***

***~~The judgments denounced against his family and kingdom were of the most distressing nature.~~***

All the wealth that he possessed, together with the holy city and temple, were to be delivered into the hands of the Chaldeans; and his sons, whom he would beget, should be made eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. To a *monarch*, what could be more distressing than the overthrow of his whole kingdom? To a *pious*monarch, what more grievous than the destruction of God's temple, and the triumph of idolatry over the true religion? And to a monarch that was a *parent*, what more terrible than such degradation and misery as were denounced against his offspring?

Some may think that these judgments were not very afflictive, because they were not to affect the king himself, but only to attach upon his descendants; but we apprehend that any personal affliction whatever would have been esteemed light, in comparison with the calamities here threatened. See [2 Samuel 24:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.17).

***~~Yet the tidings of these judgments were received with the most perfect submission.~~***

What could any man say more? Hezekiah justified in the strongest terms the denunciations that had been delivered. Though he was taken entirely off his guard, and had not the smallest expectation of any such message from the Lord—yet, on the delivery of it, he bowed at once, and "accepted it as the punishment of his iniquity, [Leviticus 26:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.41)." *As grievous as the chastisement was, he approved of it as coming from the hands of a righteous God, and declared it to be not only just, but "good."*

***~~Instead of murmuring against God for the severity of his judgments, he instantly expressed his gratitude for the mercy blended with them.~~***

He was informed that in his days the nation should enjoy "peace;" and that "truth" should triumph over the idolatry and wickedness which had overrun the land. These considerations, independent of his own personal welfare, were consolatory to his mind; because, if God had been "extreme to mark what had been done amiss," he might have justly executed his threatened judgments instantly, without any intervention of grace and mercy. On these mitigated circumstances Hezekiah fixed his mind; and, while he acknowledged the equity of the judgments in their fullest extent, he more especially adored the goodness of God in suspending them for so long a period, "Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?" The prospect of the prevalence of true religion, though but for a season, was cheering to him; and he "accounted the patience of God to be salvation."

If, as an act of piety, we admire his resignation, much more shall we do so,

***~~II. If we consider Hezekiah's resignation as a lesson of instruction.~~***

Truly in this view the history before us is very important. From it we learn many valuable lessons:

***~~1. We learn that pride, however light and venial it may appear in our eyes, is most offensive in the sight of God!~~***

It was pride which led Hezekiah to display before the Babylonish ambassadors all the monuments of his wealth and power; he felt an undue delight in the things themselves, as though they of themselves could make us happy. And next, he relied on them as inducements to the king of Babylon to court his alliance. According to the common estimation of *men*, there would be no great evil in this conduct; but *God*regarded as a very heinous sin, the indulgence of such vain conceits; and marked the extent of his displeasure by the severity of his judgments.

Do not let anyone then imagine that an inordinate attachment to earthly things, or a vain confidence in them, is a light offence before God. *Whatever we are or have that distinguishes us from our fellow-creatures, it is given us by the Lord; and, instead of engrossing our affections, it should lead us to him in thankfulness and praise.* If we take glory to ourselves for our possession of it, we provoke him to jealousy, and excite his indignation against us.

How highly did God resent the pride of Nebuchadnezzar, [Daniel 4:29-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.29-33); and of Herod, [Acts 12:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.22-23). And shall we escape, if we "provoke the Lord to jealousy?" Let us be thankful for what we possess; but let our affections center in God alone!

***~~2. We learn that just views of sin will lead us to justify God in all the judgments that are denounced against sinners.~~***

We are ready to think that the punishment inflicted on Hezekiah was more severe than the occasion required; but he did not think so, because he saw his sin in all its malignity! In like manner, when the everlasting displeasure of God is denounced against sinners, the proud heart of man is ready to rise up against God, and to say, that it would not be just to inflict eternal punishment for the sins of time, especially if those sins have not been of the most flagrant kind.

But *a just view of our demerit silences at once all those rebellious murmurs*. We then say with David, "You are justified in your saying, and will be clear when you judge." It is remarkable, that the man who was cast out for not having on the wedding garment, is represented as not having one word to utter in arrest of judgment, "he was speechless! [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12)." Just so will it be with all at the last day, yes and with all in this life also, who are made sensible of their iniquities. Under the deepest of earthly afflictions they will say, "Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins? [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39)." No, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Under the apprehension of his eternal displeasure also, they will cry, "I have sinned against Heaven, and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son."

"What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved! [Ezra 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.13)."

Let us beg of God then to give us an insight into our own wickedness; that under all circumstances we may approve of God as "doing all things well."

***~~3. We learn that a humble mind will be more thankful for the mitigating circumstances of an affliction, than querulous about the affliction itself.~~***

We greatly admire this in the history before us. And who does not see what sweet composure such conduct is calculated to bring into the mind? The generality of people are ready to fix on every circumstance that can aggravate their affliction; and hence they make themselves far more miserable than they would otherwise be. But if, like Hezekiah, they looked on the brighter side of their troubles, and noticed the mercies with which they were blended, they would be comparatively happy under them. Even self-love might dictate such a line of conduct, if we were actuated by no better motive; for, if once we saw how much more afflictive our circumstances might have been, and how much heavier judgments we have merited—we would feel gratitude rise up in our bosoms, and "bless our God, no less when he takes away, than when he gives!" We should confess it to be "of the Lord's mercies that we are not utterly consumed."

***~~#380~~***

***~~THE BENEFITS ARISING FROM PEACE AND TRUTH~~***

***~~[2 Kings 20:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.19)~~***

"The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "Will there not be peace and truth in my lifetime?"

[Day of Thanksgiving for Peace in 1816.]

By many it is thought that a knowledge of futurity would contribute to their happiness; but we are persuaded that it would prove only a source of misery. The good that would be foreseen would lose more than half its zest, while the evil that was anticipated would embitter the remainder of their days. It was as a *punishment*, and not as a favor, that an insight into futurity was given to King Hezekiah. He had displeased the Lord by his prideful conduct towards the ambassadors of the king of Babylon; and God sent him word what calamities should befall both his family and nation through the instrumentality of that monarch. This judgment however was tempered with mercy; the execution of it being deferred to a generation yet unborn. Hence the judgment was submitted to with pious resignation, "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good. For he thought: Will there not be peace and truth in my lifetime?"

It is not our intention to enter any further into the Jewish history than just to fix the precise import of our text. The text is applicable to all people in every age, and particularly so to this present season. We shall therefore take occasion from it to show,

***~~I. What blessings God is now conferring upon us.~~***

What we are to understand by "peace and truth" will be best seen by a reference to the preceding context.

God had declared that the king of Babylon would invade Judea, and take all the wealth of Hezekiah for a prey, and carry captive his children, and entirely destroy the whole Jewish polity. But, inasmuch as these judgments should be deferred, Hezekiah, instead of beholding the subjugation and captivity of his children, would have "peace;" and, instead of seeing the abolition of the temple worship, would have "truth" continued to him.

Now these are the very blessings for which we are peculiarly called to render thankfulness to God on this day.

"Peace" is now happily once more restored; and such a peace as places our country in a state of greater security than it has ever enjoyed since it became a nation.

"Truth," also, with an undisturbed enjoyment of all religious ordinances, is now secured to us. We are no longer in danger of having the churches of our God converted into barracks for a licentious soldiery, or magazines for the implements of war. No longer have we any reason to fear lest a victorious enemy should deprive us of our religious liberty, or a yoke of superstition be imposed upon us as the only worship tolerated in the land. Blessed be God! we enjoy the Gospel in all its purity; and every man throughout the whole land is permitted to serve his God in the way that seems to him to be most agreeable to the Divine commands.

Such blessings being now insured to us, let us consider,

***~~II. In what light our blessings should be viewed.~~***

The continuance of them to Hezekiah was deemed by him a mercy, a great and undeniable mercy, "Will there not be peace and truth in my lifetime?" To us then is the possession of them,

***~~1. A rich mercy.~~***

How rich a mercy "peace" is, we who have never had our country the seat of war, are but ill qualified to judge. It is our happiness indeed that we cannot judge of it; since it can only be known by an experience of those calamities which war brings in its train.

Nor can we adequately conceive how much we are indebted to God for the possession of "truth." To estimate this aright, we should behold all the degrading superstitions of heathen nations, and see what self-tormenting methods they practice for the obtaining of peace with their senseless deities of wood and stone. We should see also how the far greater part of those who call themselves Christians are blinded by ceremonies of man's invention, and debarred the use of those sacred oracles which are "able to make them wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Before we can rightly estimate the value of the Savior, through whom the vilest of sinners find access to God, and obtain all the blessings of grace and glory—we must go up to Heaven and behold the felicity of the saints made perfect; and go down to Hell to behold the miseries of the damned! "For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins! [Colossians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.13-14)."

***~~2. An undeserved mercy.~~***

Hezekiah felt that he might justly have been deprived of these blessings, and been made to experience in his own person all the calamities which were denounced against him in his posterity. And what was Hezekiah's fault? It was that when the ambassadors came to congratulate him on his recovery from a dangerous illness, he neglected to commend to them the God of Israel, by whom their souls, and the souls of their countrymen, might be saved; and sought rather to aggrandize himself by an ostentatious display of his own wealth and power!

Now we are far from wishing to extenuate his guilt; it was surely exceeding great; and the pride of his heart merited from God the severest chastisement! 2 Chronicles 32:25-26.

But what was Hezekiah's guilt when compared with ours? We scarcely hear on any occasion the glory of our successes ascribed to God; nor do we find one in a thousand who relies truly and simply on God for a continuance of them. Self-glorying, and confidence in an arm of flesh, are the leading features of our whole people; so that we might justly have been left to experience defeats answerable to all our victories.

And how is the "truth" improved among us? As, on the one hand, there is not a nation under Heaven where truth shines with purer luster, so neither, on the other hand, is there a nation under Heaven where truth is treated with greater contempt. And as to those who profess to value it, how little are its fair and beauteous lineaments visible in their hearts and lives! Well indeed might our mis-improvement of the light have long since provoked God to "take away his lampstand from us;" and it is a most unmerited mercy that "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God" is yet continued to us!

***~~3. A mercy that may well reconcile us to all events connected with it.~~***

We are not to suppose that Hezekiah was indifferent about the welfare of his posterity; it was nothing but his sense of the greatness of the mercy given to him, that led him to acquiesce so meekly in the sentence as it was denounced against him. The prospect of the calamities that would come on his posterity was surely a source of bitter anguish to his mind; but it was a great matter that he had obtained a respite, and that the judgment was not inflicted instantly upon him. This favor therefore he acknowledged as a mercy, which might well compose and tranquillize his mind.

Now it is certain that *the blessings which we enjoy are far from coming without alloy*. They will, it is to be feared, prove in the outcome a source of misery to many. The peace, which leads to the disbanding of so many thousand troops, will leave multitudes in a state unfavorable to their best interests. Many will find it difficult to return to the employment of honest industry; yes perhaps may find it difficult even to get employment; and many who in the scenes of war have been accustomed to blood and pillage, may bring home with them a disposition to exercise among their brethren the same evil habits which they deemed allowable among their enemies. Thus our domestic security may be invaded, and the perpetrators of these crimes be subjected to an untimely death by the hands of the public executioner. This is an evil felt at the termination of every war; yet must it by no means indispose us to acknowledge the blessings of peace.

The very truth of God also, even the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, brings on many, through their rejection of it, a heavier condemnation. *It would have been good for many, if they had never heard the Gospel!*Yes good, if Jesus Christ had never come into the world to save our ruined race. It was declared at the very time that he did come, that "he was set for the fall, as well as for the rising again, of many in Israel, [Luke 2:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34)." And that, though he should be "a sanctuary to some, he should prove to others a stumbling stone and a rock offence, [Isaiah 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14).Thus does the Gospel itself, that greatest gift of God to mankind, "become to some a savor of life unto life, but to others a savor of death unto death! [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)."

Still however we must not allow these things to diminish our value for the Gospel. If some abuse their food to intemperance, we must not therefore be unthankful for our food; nor *if men abuse the Gospel, must we impute it to any defect in the Gospel, but to the depravity of their own hearts, which turns the blessing into a curse!*We say then, that whatever evils may be accidentally connected with the blessings we have received, even though those evils should fall upon our own children—it befits us to adore and magnify our God that those blessings are not withheld from us, but that we are privileged to possess them in our days. "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 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.29)."

***~~4. A mercy which should be gratefully and diligently improved.~~***

*A state of peace, and a quiet enjoyment of Gospel ordinances, is extremely favorable for the attainment of vital godliness.*So it proved to the Christian Church in its infant state, [Acts 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.31); and so it will be to us. Do we ask: In what way we should improve the present occasion? We answer: In the way that David and Solomon improved their circumstances, when God had favored them with the blessings which are now conferred on us. David bethought: What can I do for God? I will build him a house that shall be worthy of his divine Majesty, 2 Samuel 7:1-2. Solomon also adopted precisely the same resolution under the same circumstances, [1 Kings 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 5.4-5). The same holy zeal should now inflame our hearts. We are not indeed called to build for the Lord a house of wood and stone, but a house of "living stones," that shall be "a habitation of God through the Spirit" to all eternity!

O see what myriads of stones there are lying in the quarry of corrupt nature, that through your instrumentality may be formed and fashioned to build the temple of the Lord. Look at the blind obdurate sons of Abraham, and see what may be done to bring them to the knowledge of that Savior whom they have crucified. Look at the Gentile world, all lying in darkness and the shadow of death; and see what may be done for the enlightening of their minds, and for the saving of their souls alive. To employ our time, and property, and talents according as God shall give us opportunity—in such works, will be the best return that we can make to God for the light and peace that we enjoy. If we exert ourselves diligently in these labors of love, truly we shall have reason to all eternity to say, "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good. Will there not be peace and truth in my lifetime?"

***~~#381~~***

***~~COVENANTING WITH GOD~~***

***~~[2 Kings 23:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 23.3)~~***

"The king (Josiah) stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD--to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant."

Little do men in general consider the benefit they receive from the sacred oracles, and the stated ordinances of divine worship. Without these, the remembrance of God would soon vanish; whereas by these we are constantly reminded of the obligations we are under to love and serve him.

In the days of King Josiah the inspired volume was altogether lost, and the Temple of Jehovah had been allowed to fall into decay. The pious monarch having ordered the temple to be repaired, the book of God was found. Immediately the contents of it were read to him; and, when he saw what judgments it denounced against his nation, he sought to avert them by turning to the Lord his God. He summoned all the priests, and prophets, and people of Jerusalem, and engaged them to make a solemn covenant with God, that they would henceforth serve him with their whole heart.

This instructive record shows us, that,

***~~I. People in authority should use their influence to promote Scriptural religion.~~***

Many of the Jewish kings were patrons of real piety; but among them all there was not one who equaled Josiah in integrity of heart and devotedness of soul, verse 25. The use which he made of his authority is sufficiently declared in the history before us. But we must not imagine that such exertions belong only to rulers and governors; whether our influence extends over a kingdom, or only to a parish, or a single family—it should be improved for God. Ministers should labor by all possible means to bring their people to God; and every parent of a family, should study to advance the eternal interest of those, who, by the providence of God, are committed to his care.

Nor should any be deterred by the degeneracy of the times; for the state of religion cannot well be reduced to a lower ebb than it was in the days of Josiah; and, if it were, that would only be a reason for our more earnest exertions in the cause of God.

*Nor can we easily conceive how much good might be done by the labors of an individual*. The effects of Josiah's reformation continued throughout all his reign, [2 Chronicles 34:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 34.32-33); and, though people in inferior stations cannot hope to produce the sudden and extensive change that he did—yet their labors may convey incalculable benefit to the latest generations; the good impressions that are made on a few will stimulate them to impart the same benefits to their neighbors, and to seek the welfare of those who are within the sphere of their influence; those again will adopt the same line of conduct towards others; and thus the benefit will be perpetually transmitted from age to age. What might not be hoped for, if magistrates and ministers, parents and masters, would combine in this good work?

To this we may be encouraged by the consideration that,

***~~II. Such exertions will be acceptable to those who feel their need of mercy.~~***

They who are wholly unconcerned about their souls will probably regard such efforts as officious, ostentatious, hypocritical. But if once they become, like the Jews on this occasion, sensible of their guilt and danger—they will no longer consider a reformer as an enemy to the happiness of mankind, but as a blessing to the world. How often is it seen that those who once despised and persecuted a minister for his piety, will send for him in a time of sickness, and be exceedingly thankful for his instructions and his prayers! And many who once joined in condemning him for his zeal, will afterwards go statedly many miles to attend his ministry.

Such is the effect even among strangers and aliens; how much more therefore may we hope to find this acquiescence, when our counsels are enforced with the endearments of affection, or the weight of legitimate authority! Indeed, such interference is expected of us; and we lower ourselves in the estimation even of the ungodly, in proportion as we decline, whether through indolence or fear, these offices of Christian love.

Such exertions, I say, will be acceptable to many.

***~~III. Nor will the strictest commands of God's covenant be deemed harsh by those who are in earnest about their souls.~~***

Men regardless of their eternal state will scarcely hear of any restraint; they will plead for the utmost latitude of indulgence; and when forced by their convictions to concede somewhat of their imagined rights, they will yield only as Pharaoh did, when necessitated by a sense of present judgments, and the fear of more. Pharaoh at first would not allow the Hebrews to sacrifice to their God at all; then he would permit it in the land of Egypt; then it might be in the borders of the wilderness; then the men might go, but they must leave their little ones as a pledge of their return; then the women and children might go, but not the cattle; at last he was glad to get rid of all! [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); [Exodus 12:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.31-33).

Thus sinners will plead for this and that sin as long as they can entertain any hope of safety along with the indulgence of it; but when they feel themselves utterly undone, they will cast out of the vessel the tackle and the wheat itself, rather than perish in the great abyss! [Acts 27:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.38). Yes, let them be really persuaded that the care of their souls is the one thing needful, and they will consent that God shall prescribe his own terms; they will say, with Saul, "Lord, what will you have me to do! [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6)."

The covenant which Josiah proposed was exceedingly strict; they were to "keep God's commandments, and testimonies, and statutes, yes, to keep them with all their heart, and with all their soul;" but they did not object to the terms; on the contrary, we are told "they pledged themselves to the covenant."

Thus it should be with us also; the most self-denying commandment should not appear grievous, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3), but "holy, and just, and good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12);" and we should cordially submit to it without any limitations or reserves.

***~~We shall not dismiss this subject without adding a word,~~***

***~~1. Of reproof.~~***

*How many instead of using all their influence for God, exert it in the service of the devil!* We speak not merely of those who tempt others to drunkenness, lewdness, or any other gross iniquity; but of those who by their vain, worldly, or careless conduct lead others to think lightly of sin, and to live in a neglect of their souls. In this way every person, whatever his station is, exerts, however unintentionally, a very extensive influence, which by a different conduct might be turned to good account.

Do not say, like Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" for all of you are accountable to God for the use which you make of your influence; and you will receive from God, not only according to the good or evil which you have done yourselves, but according to that which you have occasioned in others.

***~~2. Of caution.~~***

We are ready in a time of sickness, and under convictions of sin, to make covenants with God; like the Israelites who said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient, [Exodus 24:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.7)." But when we make them in our own strength, we shall violate them exactly as they did. Do not let any then be hasty in making vows, or think that they can execute them by any power of their own. To give up ourselves to God is certainly right; but in order to do it effectually, we must be strong, not in ourselves, but "in the Lord, and in the power of his might! [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)."

***~~3. Of consolation.~~***

*If we were to be saved by our own faithfulness, who among us would be able to stand before God?* Alas! "our own goodness has often been as the morning dew, and as the early cloud that passes away." But, thanks be to God! there is a covenant made by our great Head and Surety, [Psalm 89:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.3); [Psalm 89:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.28); [Psalm 89:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.34-36); "a covenant ordered in all things and sure! [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5) with [Jeremiah 31:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31-34); [Jeremiah 32:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.38-41)."

Let this then be the real ground of our hope; let us lay hold on it, and cleave unto it. Let not, however, our affiance in this tempt us to violate our own engagements; for negligence in performing our vows to God will infallibly prove us to be strangers to the Gospel-covenant. Let us rather "give ourselves wholly to the Lord;" that while we trust in "the blood of the everlasting covenant," we may approve ourselves to him as "good and faithful servants!"

***~~#382~~***

***~~THE CHARACTER OF JOSIAH~~***

**[2 Kings 23:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 23.25)**

"Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did--with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses."

This is the character given of King Josiah. A similar eulogy had been passed on his progenitor, Hezekiah; of whom it is said, "Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him, [2 Kings 18:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 18.5)." But there is nothing contrary in the two accounts; each of these people had his peculiar excellencies, in which he surpassed all others; Hezekiah was distinguished (as the words cited intimate,) for his confidence in God; and Josiah, as our text informs us, for his zeal and piety.

No person was ever perfect, since the introduction of sin into the world. There have indeed been bright characters, who have reflected with great luster and fidelity some rays of "the Sun of righteousness;" but of Christ alone can it be said, that "He is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

The character here given of Josiah is as exalted as any that was ever ascribed to fallen man; and for the purpose of illustrating it, we propose to mark some of the chief features of which it was composed.

***~~I. Josiah began to serve God at a very early period of life.~~***

At *eight*years old he began to reign; and no sooner did he arrive at years of discretion, than he began seriously and devoutly to serve the Lord, 2 Chronicles 34:3.

At *sixteen*years of age, when it might have been expected that he should be studious only of pleasure, he turned from earthly vanities to seek his happiness in God.

At *twenty*years of age, when it is probable he began to exercise without control his regal office, he set himself to reform the whole nation. Not fearing the face of man, he stemmed the torrent of iniquity which had overwhelmed the land; and devoted to the service of his God all the powers with which he was invested.

This was surely most pleasing to God, who required by the law that the first-fruits of man and beast should be his, and who has given a peculiar promise to those who seek him in early life, "Those who seek me early shall find me."

Happy would it be if all of us began at the early age of sixteen to serve the Lord; and if from that period every talent committed to our care were improved for God! How much better this, than to be wasting our youthful days in sin and vanity! True, we have not all the same authority as he; but all in our respective spheres should exert ourselves to the utmost of our ability; remembering, that if youth labors under some disadvantages in point of influence, it has a tendency to put to shame the indolence of more advanced years, and to impress more forcibly the minds of those who are yet young and tender.

While then we say to all, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," we would exhort all, from the first moment that they feel the value of their own souls—to exert themselves with all diligence to benefit the souls of others.

***~~II. Josiah proceeded in his career with extraordinary zeal and diligence.~~***

It seems almost incredible that this young monarch should effect so much as he did in so short a time. He first began to root out idolatry from those tribes which were under his own dominion; and then set himself (by the connivance or permission of the Assyrian monarch) to effect the same changes among the remnant of the ten tribes. Not choosing to devolve these labors on others, he proceeded himself "throughout all the land of Israel," that he might see his orders carried into execution. The means he used to produce a reformation were of the most extraordinary kind: breaking in pieces all the images that he could find, strewing the dust of them on the graves of those who had sacrificed unto them; and burning on the altars the bones of the priests who had placed their offerings upon them! See [2 Chronicles 34:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 34.3-7).

Here we see how justly he deserved the character given to him in our text; he entered into his work "with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his might."

This is the spirit which we also should manifest in all our services for God. We should never indulge a lukewarm spirit, but "be zealously affected always in a good cause." "Whatever our hand finds to do, we should do with all our might!"

***~~III. Josiah was as zealous in promoting piety as in suppressing vice.~~***

When he had put down the reigning abominations, he endeavored to establish the worship of the true God; he repaired the temple, which had fallen into decay; he convened all his subjects, "the priests and Levites, and all the people both small and great," and he himself read to them the Word of God, and made a covenant with the Lord both for himself and them to serve the Lord God with their whole hearts; and "he caused all the people to pledge themselves to the covenant." After this he kept a Passover, such as had not been kept even from the time of Samuel to that hour; and toward the expenses of it he himself very largely contributed.

Now here was real piety; here was a manifest regard for the honor of God and the good of men. This it is that most exalts a character.

Many there are who will be extremely zealous against open profaneness, who yet have no real concern, for God's honor and glory. But we must combine "godliness with morality." We must labor, each in his sphere, to promote the knowledge and the worship of God; and having given up ourselves to him in a perpetual covenant, we must endeavor to engage others also to a like surrender of themselves to him.

In a peculiar manner we should ourselves respect, and to the utmost of our power cause others also to regard, the wonders of redeeming love. Here is scope for the best energies of our souls. In reference to these things it is not possible to be too earnest, provided we are alike attentive to every duty, and careful "that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus".

***~~IV. In all Josiah did, he adhered strictly to the Word of God.~~***

From the first moment that the Scriptures were found and read to him, he determined to make them the one rule of his conduct. He "humbled himself deeply before God" for the utter disregard of them which had prevailed throughout the whole kingdom; and he himself read them to the ears of his people, and required a conformity to them in every particular. In celebrating the Passover, he was especially mindful of every direction given by Moses relative to that divine ordinance; and indeed in the whole of his conduct he labored to secure a perfect compliance with God's revealed will. This is the thing noticed, both in the text and in many other places; and it forms a very essential part of that goodness, for which he is applauded in the sacred records, [2 Chronicles 35:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 35.26).

It often happens, that men are zealous for their own party and their own opinions; and men in such a state will sometimes "compass sea and land to make one proselyte;" but unless we build according to "the model given to us in the mount," we lose all our labor. *To please our God, we must have a strict regard to his revealed will; and for this end we must study the Holy Scriptures, and "turn from them neither to the right hand nor the left."*

***~~ADDRESS.~~***

Here we may rejoice, that we all have the Scriptures in our hands. They are not hidden, as in the days of Josiah; but are so freely and universally dispersed, that every man in the kingdom who desires to study them, may obtain them. How signally blessed are we in this respect! Nay, we not only have access to the Scriptures, but have them read and expounded to us from Sunday to Sunday. Let us then learn to tremble at the word. Let us remember that every jot and tittle of it will be fulfilled in its season. Let us bear in mind, that our willful deviations from it will be visited with the divine displeasure; and that, if we study to fulfill it "with all our heart, and soul, and might," then God, who knows our hearts, will bear testimony to us in the day of judgment, as here he has done to King Josiah; and will say to us before the assembled universe, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter you into the joy of your Lord!"

**1 CHRONICLES**

***~~#383~~***

***~~THE PRAYER OF JABEZ~~***

**[1 Chronicles 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 4.10)**

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain."

And God granted his request.

Remarkable is the honor which God puts upon prayer, and numberless are the instances which are recorded of its efficacy. Jabez is here mentioned in a long catalogue of names; but while the names only of others are recorded, he is particularly noticed; he is even declared to have been more honorable than all his brethren. This distinction indeed might be given him on account of his the first born, but it was certainly still more due on account of his piety; like the patriarch Jacob, he "wrestled with God, and prevailed".

***~~I. The prayer which Jabez offered,~~***

***~~1. The subject-matter of Jabez' prayer.~~***

In its primary sense Jabez' prayer evidently related to temporal blessings. God had promised his people an inheritance in Canaan, but they were not able of themselves to drive out the inhabitants. Jabez therefore, sensible of his insufficiency, prayed to God for help. He begged for the blessing of God upon his own endeavors; he desired to be preserved from the dangers to which his military exploits would expose him; and to have, through the divine interposition, an enlarged inheritance in the promised land. These requests he urged with a significant and earnest plea.

Almost all Hebrew *names*had some peculiar signification. *Jabez*signifies *pain*or *sorrow*; the name was given him in remembrance of the unusual sorrows his mother endured in childbirth. And it was in reference to this that he deprecated the evils to which he was exposed, "Keep me," etc. lest I be Jabez in my experience, as well as in my name.

But there is reason to think it had also a spiritual meaning. The earthly Canaan was typical of the heavenly kingdom. *The enemies also that were to be driven out, were typical of the enemies with whom the Christian has to contend*. Moreover, the assistance which God rendered to his people, was intended to show us what aid we might expect from him. And*what evil will a child of God deprecate so much as sin?*Surely nothing is so "grievous" to him as the prevalence of corruption, [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24). Well therefore may Jabez be considered as looking beyond this world, and as imploring a secure possession of his heavenly inheritance.

***~~2. The manner in which Jabez' prayer was offered.~~***

It is the sentiment, rather than the expression, that gives excellence to prayer; but in both respects we may admire that before us.

Jabez' prayer was humble. He felt his entire dependence upon the power and grace of God. This is intimated not merely in the petitions offered, but in the very manner in which they were offered, "Oh that," etc. Such *humility is absolutely necessary to render prayer acceptable. The more we abase ourselves, the more will God exalt us.*Let this be remembered in all our addresses at the throne of grace.

Jabez' prayer was importunate. He enforced his request with a very earnest plea. Nor, in reference to sin, could any plea be more proper for him. But we may also properly deprecate sin as "grievous" to our souls. Yes, a disposition to do this is both an evidence of our sincerity, and a pledge of the divine acceptance.

Jabez' prayer was believing. The title, by which he addressed God, argued his faith in God. It expressed a confidence in God as the hearer of prayer, [Genesis 32:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.28). It is in this way that we also should approach God. Without such faith our petitions will have but little effect; but with faith, they shall never go forth in vain! [Mark 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.24).

Prayer possessing such qualities could not fail of success:

***~~II. The success with which it was attended.~~***

We have no detailed account of God's kindness towards him, but we are informed that "God granted him all that he requested," and this speaks loudly to us.

It shows us,

***~~1. That we ought to spread all our needs before God in prayer.~~***

We have seen how comprehensive the prayer of Jabez was. And our prayers also should include our every want, temporal, spiritual, and eternal. *There is nothing so great, but we are at liberty to ask it; nor anything so small, but we must acknowledge our entire dependence on God for it.*In fact, *there is nothing great or small, either before God*, or in reference to ourselves; for, as all things are alike easy to him, who formed the universe by his Word, and watches over the very hairs of our heads—so there is nothing, however *minute*, which may not prove of the utmost possible importance to us, as every part of the inspired volume attests. The direction of God to us is, "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)."

***~~2. We should urge our petitions with an importunity that will take no denial.~~***

So did Jacob, "I will not let you go, except you bless me! [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26)." And so it should be with us. We have, in fact, a better plea than Jabez was able to offer. We may go in the name of Jesus Christ, and plead all that he has done or suffered for us. We may look to him as our Advocate with the Father, and assure ourselves of the acceptance both of our persons and our prayers through his continued mediation and all-prevailing intercession.

The conduct of King Joash should be a warning to us. The Prophet Elisha told him that he should smite the Syrians who had sorely oppressed the whole Jewish people; and he bade him to smite the ground with the arrows which he had in his hand, and thereby to express the desires and expectations which he felt in reference to this great event. The king smote the ground only thrice, when he should have smitten it five or six times; and thus by his own lack of zeal he restrained the exertions of Almighty God in his favor [2 Kings 13:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.29).

And thus it is that we act. If we were more earnest in our desires, and more enlarged in our expectations from God, there would be no bounds to the mercy which God would exercise towards us. "We are not straitened in him, but in our own affections." Were we to "open our mouth ever so wide, he would fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)." We might ask what we would, and it should be done unto us! [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14).

***~~3. We should ask in faith without doubting.~~***

A doubting mind will rob us of all blessings, and make our most urgent prayers of no effect, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7). We must "believe not only that God is, but that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, [Hebrews 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.6)." Yes, we must "believe that we do receive in order that we may receive." And "according to our faith it shall be done unto us." In fact, *there is a kind of omnipotence in the prayer of faith*, and, if I may so speak, God himself cannot, I may surely say, will not, reject it. He speaks as if it had a commanding power, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22). Of course, this idea must not be pressed too far; but we are sure that, as God never did, so he never will, say to any of the seed of Jacob, "Seek my face in vain."

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

Is there then any Jabez, any son of sorrow, here? Go to God, the God of Israel, and say, "Oh that you would bless me indeed! Let me be strengthened by you for all my spiritual conflicts. *Let my enemies, my indwelling corruptions, be slain before me."*And let me be put into full possession of the heavenly Canaan, where I shall rest from my labors, and be forever happy in the bosom of my God." Then, brethren, shall your every request come up with acceptance before God, and return in blessings upon you to the full extent of your necessities!

***~~#384~~***

***~~THE PROPRIETY OF CONSIDERING TIMES AND CIRCUMSTANCES~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 12.32)~~***

"The men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do--200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command"

The doctrine of fitness is of difficult investigation; but it is highly deserving of our attention; because the greater part of our conduct in every situation of life depends upon it. It is a great honor to the tribe of Issachar, that they were distinguished above all the other tribes of Israel in practical acquaintance with this important branch of human knowledge. In the account given of the other tribes who came to David to Hebron, we are merely told how many they brought with them to place David on the throne of Israel; but in relation to the tribe of Issachar we are informed, that they acted from a dispassionate consideration of David's claims, as compared with those of the house of Saul, and from a full conviction, that, in supporting David, they performed an acceptable service to God himself.

From the character here given of them we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. That our conduct must often be affected by times and circumstances.~~***

We are in the midst of a world changing every moment, ourselves also changing with the things around us. Hence arises a necessity of attending to times and circumstances in our concerns, of whatever nature they are:

**1. Civil** **fitness.**

It is the knowing how to judge of the various occurrences that arise, and how to improve them to the good of the state, that constitutes the great science of politics; and it is to this knowledge, that the expression of "understanding the times" primarily refers. See [Esther 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 1.13).

A statesman cannot determine what will be fit to be done a year hence, because circumstances may arise which would render all his plans abortive. He may indeed display much wisdom in the exercise of foresight, and in providing for contingencies; but still he must of necessity follow events which he cannot control, and be himself controlled by existing circumstances. He is the greatest benefactor to the state, who is enabled to judge of contingencies most correctly, and to adapt his measures to them most wisely.

***~~2. Social fitness.~~***

All of us have, as it were, a little world around us, wherein we move; and all experience the same vicissitudes as are found in larger communities.

In our families, innumerable things arise from day to day, which require us to vary our line of conduct. Sometimes ease and gaiety may befit us, and at other times seriousness and reserve; sometimes a yielding spirit will be proper, and sometimes it will be necessary to be firm. It is great wisdom to know how to conduct ourselves towards people of different dispositions and of different habits; but we should labor diligently for the attainment of this wisdom, because the happiness both of ourselves and others most essentially depends upon it.

**3. Personal fitness.**

It is obvious, that a very different deportment befits us in youth and in old age, in prosperity and adversity. Solomon tells us, that "there is to everything a season, and a time to every purpose under Heaven! See [Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 3.1-8)." To discern all these occasions, and to improve them aright, is the grand line of distinction between the thoughtless and considerate, the fool and the wise! [Ecclesiastes 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.14). [Proverbs 22:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.3).

But if our conduct must be influenced by them in temporal matters, there is still reason to inquire,

***~~II. How far it may properly be affected by them in the concerns of religion.~~***

That we may attend to times and circumstances, is certain.

This appears both from the example of Christ and his Apostles, and from many plain directions given us in the Scripture. Our blessed Lord at one time was silent before his accusers, ("insomuch that the governor marveled greatly,") and at another time "witnessed a good confession before many witnesses;" at one time he hid himself from his enemies, and at another delivered himself into their hands; at one time delivered his instructions darkly in parables, and at another spoke "plainly and without a parable." In like manner Paul did not deem "all things expedient that were lawful, [1 Corinthians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.12); [1 Corinthians 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.23);" but would sometimes conform to the ceremonial law, and at other times neglect and even oppose it; at one time sanctioning circumcision, and at another withstanding it with all his might; and in his ministry he would set before his audience milk or strong meat, according as he saw occasion. So all the Apostles were to fast indeed, but not while the bridegroom was with them.

Such conduct is also prescribed to us. We are to recommend religion to the uttermost; but "not to set our pearls before swine;" we are to enforce the practice of it in its utmost extent; but not to put new wine into old bottles; we are to "answer a fool at one time according to his folly;" and, at another, "not according to his folly."

***~~But how far we may attend to them, is not easy to determine.~~***

Every distinct case must be determined by the peculiar circumstances that attend it; it will be in vain therefore to descend to particulars. We may however lay down one general rule, which will be of service in determining most of the cases that can occur. *The consideration of times and circumstances is never to affect our principles, but only the application of them.*

*Our principles must be fixed by the unerring standard of God's Word.* The love of God, and the love of our fellow-creatures, a regard for truth, and honor, and integrity, with all other Christian graces, must be as fixed principles in our minds, from which we are never to swerve on any account. We must not regard life itself in comparison with these principles. But then the peculiar mode in which these principles are to operate, must be a matter of discretion, arising from the circumstances of the case. And herein is the difference between a novice in religion, and one who has been long walking in the ways of God; the love of the more advanced Christian has "grown in knowledge and in all discernment;" "he discerns" more clearly than others "the things that differ;" and is enabled to combine, what we should always study to unite, "the wisdom of the serpent, with the harmlessness of the dove."

It being clear, then, that our conduct may be affected by them, we proceed to show,

***~~III. What there is in the times and circumstances of the present day to affect it.~~***

There is no little resemblance between the times of which our text speaks, and of the times wherein we live. Any circumstances that may have occurred, as sudden deaths, etc. might here be brought toward, as motives to exalt Jesus to the throne of Israel.

The elevation to the throne of Israel was typical of the elevation of Christ to an empire over the souls of men.

Christ is the true David, to whom all the tribes of Israel must bow! [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5). [Isaiah 45:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23-25). A long series of prophecies have foretold his reign; and have given us reason to expect that that reign shall be universal.

Just so, the circumstances of the present day loudly call upon us to install Jesus in our hearts.

Never since the Apostolic age was there such a zeal for the Bible as at the present day. Princes and Nobles, no less than the ministers of religion themselves, are expatiating on its value, and commending to us the Savior, as therein revealed. When all the tribes then are uniting in this blessed object, shall not we concur to the utmost of our power? True indeed the numbers belonging to Issachar bare no proportion to those of other tribes; they were only two hundred, when the others were thirty, forty, and even a hundred thousand men. But we must observe, that these two hundred were the heads and governors of that tribe; and "all the rest were at their command." So let it be among us; let those who are foremost in rank, in learning, in wealth, lead the way, saying, "Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten;" and let all others unite with heart and hand, to seat Jesus on the throne of their hearts, and to glorify him as our Lord and our God.

**In applying to yourselves this subject**, we would suggest a caution or two:

***~~1. Guard against yielding to any corrupt bias.~~***

In consulting times and circumstances, you will be in danger of being warped by your interests or passions. But you must watch and pray against them, and beg help from God that you may not be drawn aside by them.

***~~2. Bear in mind that God will judge you in the last day according to what he knows to have been your true motives.~~***

We cannot deceive him; and should be careful not to deceive ourselves.

***~~3. Beg of God to give you the "wisdom that is profitable to direct".~~***

God has promised to give wisdom, even "sound wisdom and discretion, to all who ask it of him, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5). And let none be discouraged, as though a lack of education or abilities incapacitated them for the due discharge of their duty; for the heart, and not the head, is the seat of this wisdom; and God has promised, that "the meek, he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."

***~~#385~~***

***~~DAVID'S THANKSGIVING AT THE CARRYING UP OF THE ARK~~***

**[1 Chronicles 16:7-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 16.7-15)**

"That day David first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanks to the LORD: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, O descendants of Israel his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations."

If anyone entertains a doubt whether "the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness and peace," he needs only look to the history before us, and his doubts will vanish in an instant. It may be thought indeed, that, because the former attempt of David to carry up the ark was attended with sorrow, that the general effect of God's service is not such as has been represented; but it must be remembered, that, on that occasion, though David meant well, he was criminally negligent respecting the mode of carrying his purposes into effect; and that God on that account had frowned upon him, [1 Chronicles 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 14.10-11) with 15:13. But when he was duly observant of God's commands respecting the ark, his soul was filled with unutterable joy, to which he gave vent in the Psalm before us.

This Psalm was given by David for the use of the Church, on occasion of carrying up the ark to Jerusalem. In the part which we have just read, we behold true religion in its full exercise; we see exhibited in the brightest colors,

***~~I. The general frame of mind that true religion requires.~~***

We have not now to speak of moral actions, but rather of spiritual affections. We are to contemplate the Christian now in the dispositions of his mind and the exercises of his soul towards God. And here we observe:

***~~1. That God should be the supreme object of his regard.~~***

The worldly man rises no higher than the world, "he minds" and savors nothing but what is earthly and carnal, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5). [Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19). But the spiritual man "minds the things of the Spirit," and endeavors to set God, as it were, always before him.

In the Psalm before us, there was evidently but one object in David's mind. The world, and all that is in it, was forgotten; and God was "all in all." Mark every sentence and this will instantly appear. And should not this be the general frame and habit of our minds? Undoubtedly it should.

We need not indeed be always occupied in religious exercises; for there are many other duties to be performed; but we should never for a moment lose the habit of holy and heavenly affections; a sense of God's unbounded love and mercy should be wrought, as it were, into the very constitution and frame of our minds, so that we should no more cease to feel a supreme regard for him, than a worldly man does for the things of this world. In a word, God's perfections, his Word, and his works, should be ever so present to our mind, as it was to David on this occasion, or to Adam in paradise.

This, whatever it may be called by ungodly men, is truly scriptural religion.

A supreme delight in God is by many deemed enthusiasm; and the religion that consists in speculation, and theory, and form, is supposed to be exclusively entitled to the appellation of notional religion. But, if God be so infinitely glorious, that even angels themselves are in comparison with him no more than a glow-worm compared to the sun, he ought to be proportionably elevated in our hearts; and if the wonders he has wrought for us are beyond the powers of language to express, or of imagination to conceive, we should show our sense of them by thinking of them, and speaking of them, and living continually under a sense of our obligations to him on account of them.

Were the Jews required to testify their gratitude in this manner for the mercies given to them? How much more should we labor to express our gratitude for that infinitely greater work of redemption which he has wrought out for us by the blood of his only dear Son!

Again; if Christ our Savior is now in Heaven, should not our affections be there? [Colossians 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-4); and "our conversation be there" also [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20). I say, that, provided we are not led to neglect our worldly duties, (which are in no respect incompatible with heavenly affections,) it is not possible to have our minds too much filled with love to God; on the contrary, the total surrender of all our faculties and powers to him is a "reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

But we shall see yet more clearly the excellency of religion, if we consider,

**II. The particular duties** **that true religion enjoins.**

The apostle Paul gives us a short summary of duties, very similar to those that are enjoined in the text, "Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.16-18)."

***~~1. David exhorts us to thank the Lord for all his past mercies.~~***

Were this exhortation addressed to the most miserable and the most abandoned of the human race, it would be highly reasonable, since the patience which God has exercised towards him is itself a great blessing. But it is addressed to "the children of Israel," even "the chosen ones" of the Lord; and who can ever find cause for praise, if they do not? If they fill not the air with their hosannahs, the very "stones will cry out against them."

Do but reflect on your unnumbered mercies, especially the gift of God's only dear Son for you, and the gift of salvation by him to you. Surely you should sing to him—yes, be singing his praises from day to day; you should be already anticipating the employment of Heaven, and be singing day and night, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb forever and ever!"

***~~2. David exhorts us to pray to God for future blessings.~~***

The ark, as being the symbol of God, was that before which the prayers of the high-priest were to be made, and from whence Jehovah was pleased to communicate his answers. Hence, in our text it is called "his strength." *This ark was a type of Christ*, "in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," and who is the fountain from whence all spiritual blessings must flow! [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16); [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14) with [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23).

To him therefore the Psalmist points, when he says, "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." There is not any occasion wherein it is not our duty and our privilege to seek him. *Nothing should be regarded as too small, nothing too great, to ask at his hands.* The command is, "In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And the promise for our encouragement is, "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." O that we could go thus to God "continually," as children to their parent! Surely, however "wide we opened our mouths, he would fill them!"

**3. David exhorts us to glory in God as ourGod and portion.**

In our text, David observes, "He is the Lord our God;" and elsewhere he says, "O Lord, you are my God." This it is which elevates the soul to the highest state of bliss that it can enjoy on earth. *The man of this world glories not in wealth, or honor, unless he can call them his own.*It is the property which we have in them that produces the feelings of joyous exultation. We should therefore strive to the uttermost to ascertain this point, that we are savingly interested in the Savior, and are authorized on good grounds to say,*"My Beloved is mine, and I am his!"*

As for all other objects of glorying, we should renounce them all, as incompatible with the Savior's honor; and should determinately say with the Apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

***~~4. David exhorts us to be always mindful of God's covenant.~~***

The covenant here spoken of, is the covenant made with Abraham, and confirmed with an oath unto Isaac, verses 16-18. In its *literal*sense it refers to the land of Canaan as the inheritance of Abraham's descendants; but *in its spiritual import it refers to all the spiritual seed of Abraham, who are made partakers of an infinitely nobler inheritance in and through the Lord Jesus Christ!*Indeed the other was a mere shadow; and this is the substance. This was the covenant made with Christ before the foundation of the world! [Galatians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.17) an [Hebrews 6:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.13-14); [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18). [2 Timothy 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.2). This is "a covenant ordered in all things and sure," an everlasting covenant that shall never be annulled.

This covenant should be forever in our minds; we should regard it as the one source of all the blessings we enjoy, and our great security for the continuance of them. This it is that will keep the mind firm and stable amidst all the difficulties and temptations that we have to encounter; since the execution and fulfillment of all its provisions depends on the faithfulness of an unchanging God! [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40). [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6).

We should therefore contemplate this covenant, and trust in it, and plead it before God, and rejoice in an assured hope, that we shall in due time inherit the Kingdom provided for us "before the foundation of the world!"

***~~To improve this subject, we will add a few words:~~***

***~~1. Of reproof.~~***

How little is there of such experiential religion as this in the midst of us! The generality know nothing of it by actual experience; and many, of whom we may hope that they are "God's chosen ones," scarcely ever rise higher than to a state of mourning for their sins, and of trust in God for his mercy. They are occupied so much about themselves, as almost to forget their God; that is, they do not contemplate as they ought, his unbounded excellencies, or delight themselves in him as their God and portion.

O let not any of you rest in a state so unprofitable, and destitute of comfort as this! But *seek to attain a sincere enjoyment of God in this world, as the best preparation for enjoying him in the world to come.*

***~~2. Of encouragement.~~***

That which in our text is an exhortation, "Be mindful always of his covenant," is, in the Psalm from whence it is taken, a declaration respecting God, that "He has remembered his covenant forever, [Psalm 105:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.8)." Yes, he has remembered it, and ever will remember it; nor will he ever allow one jot or tittle of it to fail. In that covenant he has made ample provision for all our necessities; so that, if we are ready to despond, (as if this elevated state of mind could never be attained, nor these duties ever be performed,) we need only look to that covenant, and all our fears will be dispelled. It is, as has been before observed, "ordered in all things, and sure;" and therefore the weakest shall have grace sufficient for him, and the most timid shall find security in the arms of an unchanging God!

***~~#386~~***

***~~DAVID'S ATTENTION TO HIS FAMILY!~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 16:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 16.43)~~***

"And David returned to bless his family."

It is truly delightful to see the operation of true religion on the soul of man; how it transforms him from a carnal and selfish creature, into a spiritual and heavenly being; who, like the sun in the firmament, steadily pursues his course, and shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day! Beautifully was it exemplified by David in the history before us; in illustration of which we shall notice,

***~~I. The work in which David had been engaged.~~***

The bringing up of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem was a *glorious*work.

***~~In itself, it was a work of vast importance.~~***

For many years had the ark lain in obscurity at Kiriath-jearim, without any application being made to it for instruction from God. But, when brought up to Jerusalem, it would be accessible at all times; and, in all difficult emergencies, the will of Jehovah might be learned from it. Indeed, the whole account respecting it shows us clearly, in what light it was viewed by the nation at large.

***~~As a typical act, its importance rises still higher in our estimation.~~***

It was undoubtedly *typical*of Christ's ascension into Heaven; for in that view it is spoken of in a great variety of Psalms, Psalm 24, 47, 68, 132, and in that view the Psalms relating to it are quoted in the New Testament. Compare [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18) with [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8). Let other Psalms, from the 96th to 99th, be read as referring to both of these events, and they will fully illustrate the importance of the work which David had just completed.

***~~It had been performed in a manner most acceptable unto God.~~***

In its *commencement*, it was begun by consulting all the great men in the nation, who were stirred up to concur in it, [1 Chronicles 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 13.1-3). In its *progress*, nothing was left to human invention, as before; but all was conducted with the strictest attention to God's revealed will. Nor did David commit the service altogether to others; no; he himself attended the procession, and played and sang with all his might; yes, and danced also before the ark with such holy ecstasies, as to subject himself to the scorn and censure of his own wife; who being a stranger to those divine raptures, imputed them, not to pious fervor, but to indecent abandon. But his joyous exultation was such as the occasion required, and such as, though condemned by Michal, was most pleasing unto God.

Having seen the service to which he had gone forth, we proceed to notice,

***~~II. The work to which David returned.~~***

Though he might be well supposed at the conclusion of his service to need repose—yet he went home only to protract his labors in another way. He returned to bless his house. That is,

***~~1. To obtain blessings for them by his prayers.~~***

He would not confine his religious exercises to public occasions, but went home to stir up in his family those blessed emotions with which his own soul was filled. He was anxious that all his wives, his children, and his servants should be partakers of his joy; and therefore he would unite with them in fervent supplication to the God of all grace, that they might themselves "know the Lord from the least even to the greatest of them," and all experience the blessedness of his salvation.

Here we behold a bright example, which it behooves us all to follow. Family prayer is, alas! too often neglected, or at best but coldly performed, by many, who profess a high regard for public ordinances. But the true child of Abraham will "command his house and children after him to fear the Lord, [Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19)," and will say with Joshua, "Whatever others may do, I and my house will serve the Lord! [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15)."

If we have family needs, and family mercies, we should unite our prayers and our praises with our families, that God may be acknowledged as the one source from whence all good either has issued, or can be hoped for; and though we can easily imagine circumstances wherein such domestic services are impractical—yet we cannot imagine any real piety to exist where such duties are willfully neglected.

***~~2. To render himself a blessing to them by his conduct.~~***

It was promised to Abraham that he should not only be blessed himself, but be a blessing also to others; and this promise is in fact made to all the believing seed of Abraham. To make others happy was no small part of David's ambition. Hence he went to his house determined to contribute as far as possible to the edification and comfort of all connected with him. He would instruct the ignorant; and teach, not by precept only, but by example also. His determination was to "walk before his house in a perfect way, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)." He would not be proud, or imperious, or passionate, or fretful; but would regulate all his tempers and dispositions by the *golden rule*of doing unto others as he would like others to do unto himself; and "the law of kindness would be ever in his lips."

How different is this from the conduct of many, who from the public ordinances, in which they profess to take delight—go down to their houses to make his family wretched and miserable, rather than to bless them! O let the professors of religion look well to this; for, *as a consistent Christian is a blessing wherever he goes, so an inconsistent Christian is a curse and a stumbling-block to all around him!*.

***~~Learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. How highly we are privileged.~~***

The ark, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, is present in the midst of us. To him we may have access; and of him we may inquire continually; and every blessing which was typically derived from the symbol of his presence, shall be really and spiritually obtained by all who seek him. If then David and the whole kingdom of Israel felt such exalted joy in the possession of that which was mere *shadow*—then let us not be unmindful of our privilege in possessing the *substance*.

***~~2. In what way we should improve our privileges.~~***

Let us not only rejoice in them ourselves, but endeavor to communicate the benefit of them to others. Let all who know us, be the better for us; and all who stand in any relation to us be constrained to say, that "God is truly with us!"

***~~#387~~***

***~~GOD'S RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 17.24)~~***

"The Lord Almighty is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel."

*A sense of God's kindness to us will invariably inspire us with a zeal for his glory.*The more deeply we feel our obligations to him, the more ready we shall be to speak good of his name, and the more desirous that he should be honored by every man.

It was David's happy lot to be eminently favored by his God. He had been taken from the sheep-folds, to feed God's people Israel; and he had received a promise from God, that the kingdom should be perpetuated in his family to very distant generations. Overcome, as it were, with the contemplation of these stupendous mercies, he adores his God with the profoundest gratitude, "Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men, O LORD God. "What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant, O LORD. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises. "There is no one like you, O LORD, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears! [1 Chronicles 17:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 17.16-20)."

Then, looking for the establishment of God's blessed Word in relation to himself and his descendants, he prays that God himself may be glorified by means of it, "Let it even be established, that your name may be magnified forever, saying, The Lord Almighty is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel;" that is, "I have found you a God to me; and I desire that you may be known to Israel, and acknowledged by Israel, under that endearing character, to the last generations."

Let us, for the illustrating of these words, consider:

***~~I. The relation which God bears to his people.~~***

He is here called "The God of Israel." But there seems, at first sight, to be nothing very peculiar in that, since he is "the God of the whole earth, [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5)," yes, and of all his creatures, whether in Heaven or Hell; all being alike subject to him, and all equally under his control.

The title here given to him must evidently import something of a more restricted nature, something that more immediately connects him with Israel as his peculiar charge. Its real signification is:

***~~1. That he has chosen his people out from among the world which lies in wickedness.~~***

This he did, when he called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham was an idolater, in the midst of an idolatrous family and nation. And God, of his own sovereign will and pleasure, chose him, and called him out from his family and nation, and "separated him for himself! [Psalm 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.3)."

It is precisely thus that he calls all his people, whether those who were Abraham's lineal descendants, or those who are heirs of Abraham's faith. What was said to Israel in the wilderness, may be said to *God's Israel*to the very end of time, "You are a holy people unto the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth, [Deuteronomy 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6)."

Nor, in one instance more than another, can any reason for this choice be assigned, but simply God's sovereign will and pleasure, [Deuteronomy 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.7-8). In every instance, He was found by those who did not seek him; and revealed Himself to those who did not ask for Him. [Romans 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.20)."

***~~2. That he has given himself to his chosen people in a special way.~~***

He gave himself to Abraham and the nation of Israel, as their God in a more especial manner; so that he watched over them, and revealed himself to them, and exerted himself for them in a way that he never had done for any other people.

***~~The same he does for his chosen people at this time, only in a less visible manner. He takes them under his special protection; he orders everything for them; and he makes himself known to them, as their Father and their Friend!~~***

***~~3. That he avows that relation to his chosen people before the whole universe.~~***

This he did to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, calling himself their God; and when he would afterwards make himself known to their posterity in Egypt, he particularly commanded Moses to say to them, "The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, has sent me unto you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations, [Exodus 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.15)." And though the names of his redeemed people are not, nor can be, severally mentioned, he is as much their God, as ever he was Abraham's God. Wherever there are any people who have been called out from the world to "seek after a better country, that is, a heavenly country, he is not ashamed to be called their God! [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16)."

But let us inquire more distinctly:

***~~II. What, under that relation, we may expect at his hands.~~***

"The God of Israel, is a God to Israel;" and whatever God can do, that he will do for them. Hence, then, they may assuredly expect from him:

***~~1. The care of his providence.~~***

See what he did for Israel of old.

They needed a deliverer from their bondage—and he delivered them with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm.

They needed guidance through the wilderness—and he himself went before them in the pillar and the cloud.

They needed daily sustenance—and he gave them bread from Heaven to eat, and water from the rock for their refreshment.

And will he not provide for us, Abraham's spiritual seed also whatever we stand in need of? "Is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Is his hand now shortened, that it cannot save?" No, he is the same gracious God as ever, and has pledged himself, that "they who seek his face, shall lack nothing that is good, [Psalm 34:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.10)."

***~~2. The communications of his grace.~~***

Without these, it would be to little purpose that he were called our God; for it would be impossible for us ever to behold his face in peace. "Without him we can do nothing." We would still continue slaves to sin and Satan; and perish forever among the enemies of God! But we need not fear. "He will give us both *grace*here and *glory*hereafter, [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11)." As our necessities increase, "he will give us *more grace*, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6);" and however great our trials may be, he engages that "his grace shall be sufficient for us! [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)." Yes, so effectual shall be his communications, that, "through him strengthening us, we shall be able to do all things! [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

***~~3. The manifestations of his love.~~***

What father would withhold from his child the tokens of his love? And will God, when he promises to be "a God unto us," be so unmindful of us, as never to lift up the light of his countenance upon us? No! He will give us "a Spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry, *Abba, Father!*[Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15)." He will give us also "the witness of the Spirit, as the pledge of our future inheritance! [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16)." And to such a degree will he "shed abroad his love in our hearts, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5)," as to fill us with "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

***~~4. The possession of his glory.~~***

This is particularly declared by our Lord himself, as inseparably connected with the relation we are now considering. When a doubt was entertained, whether there was ever to be a resurrection of the body, our Lord referred to the very name of God, as "the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob," as a demonstration of the point in question. For if he was their God, he was the God of their whole persons—of their bodies as well as of their souls; and if their bodies should not be raised again, he would cease to be their God, as far as their bodies were concerned. But that relation would never cease; and, consequently, their bodies must be raised from the dead, in order that they might participate in the promised bliss! [Matthew 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.31-32).

No doubt, therefore, he will exalt to glory all his chosen people; for can he be a God to any in Hell? There he will be only an avenging Judge. It is in Heaven alone that he can execute all that that relation imports; we may be sure, therefore, that, as he is the God of his people, so "he will be their portion, and the lot of their inheritance" for evermore!

While, however, we contemplate our privileges in consequence of God's relation to us, we must bear in mind,

***~~III. What, under that relation, he is entitled to expect from us?~~***

Beyond a doubt, if he considers himself as bound to us, we also are bound to him; and if he is our God, we must be his people. The one is comprehended in the other; and, wherever one is mentioned, the other, if not absolutely mentioned, is always implied. Just before the text it is said, "Your people Israel did you make your own people forever; and you, Lord, became their God, verse 22." In the Epistle to the Hebrews, not only is the mutual relation specified, but it is stated precisely in our text, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people! [Hebrews 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.10)."

This, then, may God expect from us:

***~~1. That we "be His obedient people".~~***

We are not to be satisfied with *calling*ourselves his—we must be *really*his. A servant considers himself, his time, his talents, his all, as at the disposal of his master; and from day to day he inquires how they can be improved for him. He never, for a moment, considers it sufficient to compliment his master with the *name*of master; but he waits upon him to receive his orders; and he departs from him only to execute them.

Thus, then, we must "be a people to" the Lord. We must inquire what we can do for him. We must diligently learn what is the duty which he has appointed us to perform; and we must strenuously set ourselves to the performance of it.

***~~2. That we give ourselves to him—as he has given himself to us.~~***

We must give ourselves to God freely and cheerfully. There was no constraint on God's part in giving himself to us; he did it of his own desire and will. Thus must we surrender up ourselves to him. We must not wait until we are beset with the terrors of Hell, and then give ourselves to him by compulsion. *We should rather, from a view of his excellency, and from a sense of the unspeakable privilege of serving him—desire to be numbered among his favored people*,[Isaiah 64:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.9).

We must also give ourselves to God wholly and unreservedly. Jehovah is not our God in part; doing some things for us, and not others; there is nothing that he has not done for us; for he has given his only dear Son to die for us; nor is there anything he will not do; for "having given up his own Son for us, we may be assured he will much more do for us everything else that we can need! [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32)." On no consideration, therefore, should we withhold anything from him. "Our whole body, soul, and spirit, should be sanctified to him! 1 Thessalonians 5:23." Nothing should be accounted too much to do or suffer for him; if the sacrifice even of life itself should be called for, it should be freely made; and we should rejoice that we are counted worthy to render him so honorable a service.

We must also give ourselves to God unchangeably and forever. God never repents of what he has done for us, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29); he tells us that he will not forsake his people, "because it has pleased him to make us his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22);" but that, "having loved us, he will love us to the end! [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1)."

Just so should it be with us, "after having once put our hands to the plough, we should never look back again, [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62)." We should "never faint or be weary in well-doing, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9)." We should give our ear to be bored in his service; and never relinquish it, until we are called to serve him in the eternal world! [Exodus 21:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.6).

This, I say, is what God may justly expect from us. I conceive there is not a person upon earth so stupid and brutish, as not to see and acknowledge that it is "a reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." If our *expectations*from God are greater than those of others, our *services*also should be greater. The services of others are no rule for us. The question that will be put to us will be, "What are you doing more than others?"

***~~Let me, then, conclude with two proposals:~~***

***~~1. That we, at this very hour, receive Jehovah as our God.~~***

He offers himself to us under this endearing character. He calls on every man to "lay hold on his covenant;" and in that very covenant he makes over himself to us as our God, [Jeremiah 11:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 11.2-4). Let us from this moment renounce all other gods, and say, "You, O God, shall be my God forever and ever! [Psalm 48:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 48.14)."

In accepting him, however, let us accept him for all the ends for which he gives himself to us. It is not to save us only that he gives himself to us, but to "be a God unto us," to be:

the one *source*of all our joy;

the one *object*of all our love;

the one *end*of our very being.

Let us then, open our hearts to receive him under this character. If there be any other that is more worthy of this place in our regards, or that can better fulfill the office committed to him, then will I consent that you shall take him for your God in preference to Jehovah. But if Jehovah alone can answer all the necessities of your souls, then, I say, accept him now as your God, and proclaim him to be so in the presence of the whole universe! [Deuteronomy 26:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 26.17-18).

***~~2. That we now consecrate ourselves to him as his people.~~***

This, as you have seen, must accompany the former; nor is there any man so blind, as not to see that the two are, and must be, inseparably connected. Let us, then, at this hour, "join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten, [Jeremiah 50:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.5)."

Unite with me now, my brethren, in a solemn surrender of ourselves to God:

O Lord, our God, we are yours by every tie. To you we owe our very being, for you have created us. To you we owe our well-being, for you have upheld us every moment, and supplied us with all things needful for us. Above all, to you we owe our hopes of happiness in the eternal world; for you have redeemed us by the blood of your only dear Son. We are not our own; we are bought with a very high price; and are therefore bound in every view to glorify you with our bodies and our spirits, which are yours. We acknowledge with shame that other lords besides you have had dominion over us; but we will henceforth make mention of your name, even of yours alone. Behold, O Lord, we now dedicate to you all that we are, and all that we have.

We know it to be *our duty*;

we believe it to be *our privilege*;

we are assured that it is *our highest honor and happiness*.

Make us sincere in this, we beg you; and "keep it forever in the imagination of the thoughts of our hearts 1 Chronicles 29:18." Oh, let us never go back from you, nor ever alienate from you any portion of those regards which are due to you alone. Let the measure of our *expectations*from you be the measure of our *dedication*to you; and, as we hope that you will be fully and forever ours, so enable us to be fully and forever yours!"

Beloved brethren, truly add to this your hearty "Amen!"

"Here we offer and present unto you, O Lord—ourselves, our souls and bodies—to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto you!"

***~~#388~~***

***~~SOLOMON A TYPE OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 22:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 22.9-10)~~***

"But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever."

If God has any great work to do, he will raise up instruments for himself, and fit them for executing his will. Nor will he make use of such people only as, of their own minds, covet the employment—but oftentimes such as are either averse to it, or unconcerned about it. Has he ordained to bring his people out of Egypt, or to gather to himself a people from the Gentile world? He raises up a Moses, or converts a Paul, that, as his agents, they may accomplish his gracious purpose.

Thus when David was solicitous to build a house for God, and had made great preparations for it, God forbade him to carry into effect his designs; and conferred that honor on Solomon, his son. While we adore this exercise of his sovereign will, we are led to contemplate a mystery veiled under this dispensation, and to trace the resemblance which was by this means produced between Solomon, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though the words of the text in their literal sense relate to Solomon—yet they have undoubtedly a further reference to Christ, of whom Solomon was a type.

***~~I. Solomon was a type of Christ, in his dearness to God.~~***

***~~Solomon was eminently favored by God.~~***

He was a subject of prophecy before he was born; and was called Jedidiah (which means 'loved by the Lord') by Gods special appointment, in token of the peculiar love which God bore towards him, [2 Samuel 12:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.24-25). His mental endowments were such as never had before been possessed by fallen man. His knowledge of natural philosophy was wonderfully extensive, [1 Kings 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 3.12) and [4:29-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.29-34). His qualifications for administering the affairs of his kingdom were so perfect, as to be the envy and admiration of all who knew him, [1 Kings 3:16-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 3.16-28). He was honored with repeated visions of the Almighty, and with most signal evidences of divine acceptance, [1 Kings 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 9.2).

Throughout his life did God regard him as a beloved child; nor were the judgments inflicted on him toward the close of life for his awful declensions, to be considered in any other light than as paternal chastisements; for though we are not expressly told that he ever was recovered from his lewdness and idolatries, we cannot but hope that he became a real penitent, and died, as once he had lived, "beloved of the Lord." It is most probable that the book of Ecclesiastes was written in consequence of his restoration to the divine favor.

***~~But Jesus was, infinitely beyond all others, the beloved of the Father!~~***

Jesus had been a subject of prophecy, not for a few years merely, but from the foundation of the world. The name, *Emmanuel*, was given him many hundred years before he became incarnate; and He was called Jesus, by the angel, before his conception in the womb! [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14); [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21). Thrice, by an audible voice from Heaven did God proclaim him as his "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." As for the endowments of his mind, he not only had the spirit of wisdom and understanding resting upon him, [Isaiah 11:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.1-3), but all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hidden in him, [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3), so that "he spoke as never man spoke." So perfectly was he qualified for every part of his regal office, that "Righteousness was his belt," with which he was always girt for the discharge of his duty, [Isaiah 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.5).

It is worthy of particular notice, that the very words of the text, which confessedly point out Solomon as a son of God, are quoted, by an inspired Apostle, as referring to Christ, and as declaring his superiority to all both in Heaven and earth! Compare 1 Chronicles 17:13 with [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5). While therefore, with the Apostle, we consider Solomon as a type of Christ, we learn to entertain the most exalted thoughts of Christ, as "the brightness of his Father's glory!"

***~~II. Solomon was also a type of Christ, in the office assigned to him.~~***

**It was to Solomon that God assigned the honor of building a house for his name.**

*David*had shed much blood in the course of the many wars in which he had been engaged; and, though he had done this both by the direction and assistance of God himself—yet it unfitted him in God's estimation, for building the temple.

But *Solomon*, whose very name imported Peace, and who was to have rest on every side, was more fit to represent "the Prince of Peace," and more at leisure to execute so great a work. Him therefore did God prefer; nor could any man prove himself more worthy of the employment. Solomon entered on his work with zeal and piety; and, having finished the noblest edifice that ever the world beheld, and supplied it with most costly furniture in every part, he consecrated it in a solemn and public manner to Jehovah.

***~~But there is a far more glorious house which Christ alone erects.~~***

*The temple of Solomon was only a shadow of another temple, the Church of God, in which God dwells, not by any visible symbol of his presence, but by his quickening, comforting, and sanctifying Spirit.*Of this temple we ourselves are, as it were, the stones, hewn out by the Lord himself; fitted by him for the place we are designed to occupy; and so disposed by him, that "all the building fitly framed together may grow unto a holy temple in the Lord, [Ephesians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.21)." Moreover, Christ is declared, both by Prophets and Apostles, to be the *founder*and *finisher*of his house, [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.9); [Zechariah 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.12-13) with [Hebrews 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.3); [Hebrews 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.6). And how infinitely does Christ's spiritual house exceed, both in beauty and magnificence, the structure by which it was typified! Solomon's temple was composed, like other buildings, of earthly and perishable materials. Christ's spiritual house is composed of living stones, built upon a living foundation-stone, and cemented, in every part, by the Spirit of the living God! [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5). Solomon's temple was enriched with gold and silver; but Christ's temple was enriched with all the gifts and graces of the Spirit, yes, with the "unsearchable riches of Christ" himself!

***~~III. Solomon was also a most glorious type of Christ, in the peacefulness and perpetuity of his kingdom.~~***

***~~Very remarkable were the peace and prosperity of Solomon's reign.~~***

God had either put down all his enemies, or disposed their hearts to peace and amity; so that, until Solomon had departed from the Lord, and thereby provoked his displeasure—his kingdom enjoyed uninterrupted tranquility. And though, for his transgressions, the ten tribes were torn from his immediate successor, and ever afterwards continued separate—yet the kingdom of Judah was transmitted to his posterity, and preserved in his family, as long as the kingly government itself existed.

***~~Solomon's reign however, was a very faint image of what exists in the kingdom of Christ!~~***

It is true, that the Church has never yet enjoyed much outward peace; for though it has often been free from those bloody persecutions, with which it has at some times been harassed—yet it has never ceased for one moment to be an object of reproach, and abhorrence, amidst an ungodly world.

Still, however, may we justly speak of the peacefulness of Christ's kingdom, since all his subjects have peace with God, and in their own consciences—even a peace that passes all understanding! [Isaiah 54:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.13). [Psalm 72:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.7).

And there is a time coming in Christ's kingdom, when the enmity of the carnal heart shall be slain; and all mankind, brought into one blessed family, shall live in harmony with each other, "the wolf lying down with the lamb, and the lion eating straw with the ox; there shall be none to hurt, or destroy, in all God's holy mountain, [Psalm 72:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.10-11). [Isaiah 11:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.6-9)." Of Christ's kingdom there shall be no end; for though the present mode of administering it shall be changed, 1 Corinthians 15:28, (there being no more occasion for a Mediator, when all the saints shall be glorified,) yet shall he, who now sits upon the throne of David, reign over true Israel forever and ever! [Luke 1:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.32-33). [Isaiah 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.7).

***~~Reflections.~~***

***~~1. If we see Solomon's greatness—then how great and glorious a person must Christ himself be!~~***

We justly admire Solomon on account of the singular honor which God put upon him; but what were the endowments of his mind, what were the grandeur of his works, or what were the stability of his kingdom—when compared with the excellencies of Christ, Zion' eternal King! Surely they were but as darkness that renders Emmanuel's light more visible. Let us then fix our eyes on our adorable Savior; and learn from the faint glimmering of the brightest star—to admire the infinitely brighter glories of the Sun of Righteousness.

***~~2. If we Solomon's subjects were blessed on earth—then how exceedingly blessed are the subjects of the Redeemer's heavenly kingdom!~~***

The Queen of Sheba, filled with wonder at what she saw and heard in the court of Solomon, exclaimed, "Happy are your men, happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you, and hear your wisdom, [1 Kings 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.8)."

But how incomparably happier must they be, who stand in the presence of Jesus, and hear his voice; and not only behold, but participate in his glory! Believer, know your privileges, and learn to estimate them aright. And let all earthly glory be despised by you as not worth a thought, in comparison with that which you already possess, and shall possess, when all the kingdoms of this world have vanished away!

***~~3. How inexcusable are those who neglect the ever-blessed Savior and his glorious kingdom!~~***

Our Lord warned his hearers, that the Queen of the South would rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them, because she went from the very ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; whereas they, when they had One greater than Solomon in the midst of them, despised and rejected him! [Matthew 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.42). And will she not in a still greater degree condemn us, who, even while we *profess*ourselves to be the followers of Christ, show:

no love to his person,

no admiration of his glory,

no zeal for his honor?

Shall not we perish under a most aggravated load of guilt, when, under the meridian light of the Gospel, we prefer darkness to light, and the service of sin to the service of our Lord? May God the Spirit come down to convince us of our sin, and effectually subdue us to the obedience of faith!

***~~#389~~***

***~~SEEKING AFTER GOD~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 22:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 22.19)~~***

"Now devote heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God!"

There are many subjects, which, while in themselves they are plain and simple, derive much importance from the occasions on which they arise, or the circumstances with which they are attended. The duty of "seeking after God" is inculcated in the Holy Scriptures, times without number; and the insisting upon it, though interesting and necessary in its place, may seem to promise little that is new, or beyond the bounds of common pastoral instruction. But, if the occasion on which these words were uttered is taken into our consideration, they will be found to possess a very peculiar interest. Let us, then, notice,

**I. The occasion on which this injunction was given.**

David was now at an advanced period of life; and was deeply concerned to improve his power and influence, for the honor of God and the welfare of his people. Time was when both he and all his people were in a very different condition from that which they enjoyed at this time; he being persecuted and driven by Saul, "as a partridge upon the mountains;" and they being overrun and conquered by the Philistine armies, [1 Samuel 31:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 31.7).

But now the whole kingdom being consolidated and enlarged, and all their enemies being subdued, he was desirous of building a temple to the Lord. That honor, however, having been denied to him, and transferred to his son, he in this chapter exhorts his son to prosecute the work with befitting zeal; and, because his son was yet "young and tender," he urges all the princes of the realm to aid him to the utmost of their power. He mentions what preparations he had made for the work, having amassed in gold and silver, at the lowest computation, eighteen million of our money, besides materials of wood and stone and brass and iron to an immense extent; and at the same time having engaged the most skillful artificers in every department; so that nothing remained, but that they should commence the work the very instant that his son should succeed to the throne, verses 1-5, 14-16. But, as they could not hope for the divine blessing unless they would consecrate themselves in the first instance to God, he entreats them now, without delay, to "devote their heart and their soul to seek the Lord their God."

And have not *we*a temple to build—a temple that shall be "exceeding magnificent," not only "of fame and glory throughout all countries," but comprehending within its walls every nation upon earth? And are not glorious preparations made, such as never since the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world were seen before?

Societies without number are on foot among every body of Christians, for the diffusion of light and knowledge, both among Jews and Gentiles, in every quarter of the globe. Who does not see how greatly the face of things is altered, even within a very few years, in the Christian world? Religion, instead of being frowned upon to the extent it once was, is honored; and, instead of being driven into a corner, is spread over the face of Christendom, with a rapidity which but a few years ago could not have been anticipated.

And, as "Tyrians and Zidonians" contributed to David "their cedars and their workmen," so now, Hindus and Heathens are co-operating with us in the good work; and, to change the metaphor, "the fields are already white unto harvest." "Now," then, is the time for all to "seek the Lord." As far as our personal interests are concerned, this duty is equally seasonable at all times; but for the interests of God's Church, the present season is peculiarly propitious; because a union of all Israel, both of "princes" and of people, is in progress; and by such combined efforts we may hope to advance this great and blessed work.

With a special view to these things, we proceed to notice,

**II. The injunction itself,**"Now devote heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God!"

Two things are here pointed out:

***~~1. What is to be the great object of our life.~~***

We must "seek the Lord our God." We must seek his favor; for without that we can do nothing, to any good purpose. But let us seek it in his appointed way, by faith in his dear Son. "Christ is the only way to the Father, nor can any come acceptably to God, but by him, and through him, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)."

We must seek his **direction**also, without which we are sure to err. The Israelites in the wilderness did not need the guidance of the pillar and the cloud more than we! Let us, therefore, watch its motions; and beg of God that we may have at all times that promise fulfilled to us, "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). [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)."

We must seek his **glory**also. We must on no account be acting with a view to our own honor or interest, but simply and entirely to the honor of our God. And this principle we must carry into the minutest actions of our lives, "Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do all to the glory of God! 1 Corinthians 10:31."

In a word, we must seek **God's final approbation**in all things. *To be applauded of men will be of little avail to us, if in the last judgment we are condemned by God.*We must proceed in the way of duty, whatever man may either say or do; and to obtain the plaudit of our God, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" must satisfy us, whatever we may sacrifice for his sake, or whatever we may suffer!

***~~2. In what way we are to prosecute it.~~***

We are not to engage in the Lord's work with indifference; but to embark in it, even as David did, with "our whole heart and our whole soul." It is thus that God interests himself for his people, [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.41); and shall we do less for him, than he for us? The work which we have to do is "our very life! [Deuteronomy 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.18); [Deuteronomy 32:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.46-47);" and on the manner of prosecuting it depends our whole success.

We must "set our heart and our soul to it, [Deuteronomy 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 4.29);" and, like Joshua, determine, that, though all other people should dissent from us, "we will serve the Lord". In this we may learn even from the wicked. They, many of them at least, have "their heart fully set to do evil," and they do it "with both hands earnestly, [Ecclesiastes 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 8.11) and [Micah 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.3)." Just so, must "with full purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord! [Acts 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.23)," and "be steadfast and immovable, and always abounding in the work he has assigned us, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

***~~Application:~~***

***~~1. Avail yourselves of the opportunities afforded you for public usefulness.~~***

Truly, these are days in which it is an inestimable privilege to live. The facilities afforded for the exercise of piety and benevolence are altogether unprecedented. The poorest, as well as the rich, may contribute to the building of God's spiritual temple, and by their prayers may prevail to an unknown extent. Our encouragement is great. There is already a dawn of a very glorious day; and we see the drops that precede an abundant shower. Spread then your sails, now that the wind is favorable; and*in whatever department of God's work you are employed, set your heart to it, and "do it with all your might!"*

***~~2. Begin with a surrender of your whole self to God.~~***

All acceptable service to God must begin within our own bosoms. If our religion does not begin at home, we shall be only like the builders of Noah's ark, who prepared for others a deliverance of which themselves did not partake. The Macedonians were commended by Paul especially for this, that while they exercised benevolence towards others with unrivaled zeal, "they first gave their own selves to the Lord! [2 Corinthians 8:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.3-5)." This is what we also must do; and this we shall do, if our hearts are right with God; we shall, each for himself, and all in concert, determine to "go and seek speedily the Lord Almighty;" and, when we exhort others to that good work, we shall, "every one of us, be forward to say, I will go also! [Zechariah 8:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 8.20-22)."

"Now devote heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God!"

***~~#390~~***

***~~DAVID'S ADVICE TO SOLOMON~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9)~~***

"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for *the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts*. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever."

Whatever may have been their own conduct through life, it is the wish of most men in a dying hour, that their children should walk in the ways of integrity and honor. But men of piety have higher views—they wish their children not merely to pass through this world with honor, but to obtain happiness beyond the grave! The advice of David in the words before us, is precisely such as every religious parent would wish to give to his surviving family. Let us observe,

***~~I. The advice here given.~~***

The occasion was most solemn. David had desired to build a temple for the Lord, but was forbidden; and was directed to devolve that office on his son Solomon. All the princes and great men of the nation were convened to assist at the solemnity; and in the presence of them all did David direct his son,

***~~1. Whom to seek.~~***

The terms here used have surely a peculiar force, David does not say to his son, "acknowledge the God of *Israel*;" but "acknowledge the God of *your father*;" by which expression he evidently called the attention of Solomon to the character of Jehovah as exemplified in all his dealings towards David. It is as though he had said,

"Acknowledge that *sovereign*God, who chose me above all to rule his people Israel.

Acknowledge that *almighty*God who, in all my dangers from Saul or other enemies, has preserved me to the present hour.

Acknowledge that *merciful*God who forgave me all my great transgressions in the matter of Uriah; and that faithful God who has fulfilled to me all his great and precious promises, in raising you up to sit on my throne, and to build a temple to the Lord".

Acknowledge *this*God.

Study his character as displayed in all his conduct towards me.

Acquaint yourself with him in the most intimate and endearing manner.

Seek him as your friend, your portion, your eternal great reward!

But remember that it is in Christ only that this character of God can be fully seen. Seek then to know God as reconciled to you in the Son of his love; and let "this God be your God forever and ever!"

***~~2. How to serve him.~~***

Integrity of heart is indispensable in all who would serve their God aright. Absolute perfection is not to be expected by fallen man; but that measure of perfection which consists in a pure freedom from all deceit, not only may, but must, be attained. To be "Israelites indeed," we must be "without deceit."

There must be no *lust*which we desire to retain.

There must be no *duty*from which we draw back.

There must be no *sacrifice*which we are averse to make.

The will of God, even his whole will, without any limitation or exception, must be that to which we aim to be conformed.

And in our labors to fulfill our duty, we must not be constrained by slavish fear, but by filial love.

We must feel the service of our God to be perfect freedom; and find all our delight in it, like the angels, who "do his will, hearkening to the voice of his Word."

As we are to love our God, so also are we to serve him, "with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength."

The importance of this charge is strongly marked in,

***~~II. The considerations with which it is enforced.~~***

Two arguments are here used to impress the foregoing exhortation the more deeply on Solomon's mind. They are briefly these:

***~~1. That God is privy to our inmost thoughts!~~***

If God could judge only by the outward appearance, we might with less danger be inattentive to our hearts. But the heart of man is as visible to him as the sacrifices when flayed and divided asunder were to the priests of old, [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13). Not the thoughts only, but "every motive behind the thoughts." The very first risings of them before they are formed into a distinct apprehension of the mind, are all seen and marked by Him, so as to ascertain with precision their nature and quality; and to make them infallible grounds of condemnation or acquittal in the day of judgment. Not actions only, but "the thoughts of men are weighed by him," so as to discern how much there is of good or evil in every inclination, affection, appetite, and motion of the soul.

What a reason is this for attending to the frame of our minds in the service of our God! That, and that only which is according to his Word, will be accepted by him. Whatever there is of formality, or hypocrisy, or of any evil principle, will all be separated as chaff from the wheat, to be consumed in the fire, when the wheat is treasured up in his garner.

Alas! how little that is truly good, will be found even in the best of men! Consider this, all you who would find acceptance with God; and endeavor to approve yourselves to Him, "who searches the heart, and tries the thoughts!"

***~~2. That he will deal with us according as we conduct ourselves towards him.~~***

*It is grievous that men should explain away the plainest declarations of God, in order to accommodate them to human systems.*There is nothing clearer in all the inspired volume, than that "God will be found by those who seek him, and that he will cast off those who forsake him." We appeal to the experience of all who are in the slightest degree acquainted with vital godliness. "Did God ever say to any man, Seek my face in vain?" On the other hand, Whoever turned back from him, without suffering loss in his soul? Who has not found that the Spirit of God may be grieved and provoked to withdraw his gracious communications? Most assuredly he will not always strive with man, but will give us up to our own hearts' lusts, if we willfully harbor those dispositions or affections which are hateful in his sight.

Moreover, in the eternal world, he will recompense every man exactly according to his works; adjudging to his diligent servants a *reward*proportioned to their diligence in improving their talents, and to the disobedient servants a *punishment*proportioned to their guilt.

Who can reflect on this, and not feel the force of the advice given in our text? *Our happiness both in time and in eternity depends on our present diligence and fidelity.*Let us therefore implore help from God, that we may so devote ourselves to him now, as to be approved by him in the day of judgment.

***~~ADDRESS.~~***

***~~1. To parents.~~***

You see in David, what your chief desire should be for your children. We say not that you should be indifferent about their worldly advancement; for that also is important in its place; but your great concern should be to have them truly pious and devoted to God. Labor then, by every possible means, to attain this point. Call them to you, and address them each by name with all tenderness and fidelity; remembering that you yourselves must answer unto God for the influence with which he has invested you for their good; and that, if they perish through your neglect, their blood will be required at your hands!

***~~2. To the young.~~***

Such advice as that which is given in our text, you are ready to judge premature, or at least to think you have good reason for delaying your attention to it. But are you young, and moving in an elevated sphere, and engaging in concerns of vast importance? So was Solomon; yet were these no reasons for David to withhold the advice, or for Solomon to reject it.*Remember, it is for eternity, and not for time alone, that you should live!* If you disregard the admonitions of your parents who now so long for your welfare—it will be swift witnesses against you at the day of judgment!

***~~3. To all who are here present.~~***

It is not unfitting a minister of Christ to regard his flock with parental solicitude, or to address them in the language of our text. Let me then address each of you, as it were, in the presence of the whole collective body, and urge you to seek after God with your whole hearts.

Do not rest in a formal routine of duties, or in a partial conformity to his revealed will. See that your "hearts are right with him;" and never rest until you have "the witness of his Spirit," and "the testimony of your own conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity you have your conduct in the world." Such a state of mind is most desirable for every one of us; and it is the best preparative, no less for the duties of this life, than for the enjoyments of the life to come!

***~~#391~~***

***~~DAVID'S PREPARATION FOR THE TEMPLE~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 29:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.2)~~***

"With all my might I have provided for the temple of my God--gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble--all of these in large quantities."

There is no end to the benefits which we may derive from Scripture history. What if our situation and circumstances are different from those which are there adverted to? The advantage to be received from the relation of them is not a whit the less; on the contrary, it often happens that the voice of God in them is on that very account the more powerful.

Take, for instance, the example before us. David, of his own mind, desired to build a temple for the Lord; and he was forbidden to do it; yet "with all his might he prepared for it;" though it was never to be done until he was removed to the eternal world. It may be said, and with truth, that we are not, nor are at all likely to be, in circumstances like his; yet will his example be found of very peculiar use, while I set before you,

***~~I. The zeal which David manifested for the building of a material temple to the Lord.~~***

Though forbidden to execute his wishes, he was not forbidden to prepare for the execution of them by his son and successor on the throne of Israel. He, therefore, availed himself of the wealth and influence which God had given him, himself to contribute, out of his own personal property; and to promote a similar liberality among his subjects.

Now, it may be asked, On what principle did he proceed? And why should he so strip both himself and his people of their possessions, for the purpose of raising a structure to the Lord? I answer, he did it:

***~~1. To honor God.~~***

David had built for himself a noble palace; and he could not endure to live in a house of cedar himself, while the ark, which was the symbol of the divine presence, dwelt in a tent. True, no earthly house could be a fit habitation for Him who fills Heaven and earth; but still it was more fitting that there should be for God a fixed abode; and by making it "exceeding magnificent," it would become an object of admiration to all the surrounding nations. It would also fill all his own people with reverence; and thus be the means of honoring God among them, and of exalting in their esteem its Divine Inhabitant. And was not this an object worthy to be promoted, whatever might be the trouble, or whatever the expense?

***~~2. To bring down a blessing upon his whole land.~~***

Greatly would it facilitate the access of all the people to their God, especially when they should come up annually, at the three appointed seasons, to worship there. And much would they see that would afford them abundant edification. Indeed, the lampstands and lavers that were used in the tabernacle were multiplied ten-fold in the temple; and the accommodations for the worshipers would be enlarged, perhaps a hundred-fold. While, therefore, the very sight of that magnificent structure would fill them with reverential awe, they would derive exceeding great comfort and encouragement from the increased facilities of social worship.

Beyond a doubt, in proportion as they delighted in drawing near to God, God would delight in drawing near to them; and in proportion as they sought him, he would be found by them, and pour out his benefits upon them.

And could a monarch improve his wealth and influence better than in such a work? No, surely; no labor, however great, nor any sacrifice, however costly, would be ill bestowed in the advancement of so blessed and desirable an end. Millions of gold and silver were well appropriated to a cause like this.

But greater far is,

***~~II. The zeal that befits us in raising a spiritual temple in his name.~~***

In reference to this work, no prohibition is issued to any living soul; but, on the contrary, a commandment is given to all. And infinitely more does it deserve our utmost exertions; we all are called to aid in raising this nobler edifice.

Yes, a nobler edifice it is indeed!

Its **foundation**is more solid.

The material temple, doubtless, was built on a foundation well fitted for its support. But Jesus Christ is, "the foundation laid in Zion;" on him must we raise the edifice, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16); or rather "on the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, [Ephesians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20)."

Its **materials**are more precious.

Doubtless of timber and stone, there was the most careful selection that could be made. But our temple consists of "living stones, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5)," every one of them possessing the Spirit of God, and animated with the very life that is in Christ Jesus, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4).

Its **architect**is more honorable.

Bezalel and Aholiab are immortalized by their unrivaled skill. But of the Temple in which our assistance is required, it must be said, "Its Builder and Maker is God! [Hebrews 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.10)." There is not a stone belonging to it which has not been hewn out of the quarry by God himself, and formed and fashioned by Him who built the universe! So true is that declaration of the Apostle, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10)."

Far nobler **sacrifices**, too, are offered in it.

All the cattle upon a thousand hills were not worthy to be compared with the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit. "With every such offering God is well pleased;" and the temple itself is infinitely more raised in his esteem, on account of the offerings presented there, [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1-2). Not one is ever inflamed with his heavenly fire, but the fragrances of it ascend up before him with acceptance, and are "well pleasing to him through Jesus Christ! [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17)."

The manifestations of God in this spiritual temple are also more bright.

True, in the material temple, God so filled it, that the priests could no longer stop to minister there, 1 Kings 8:10-11. But in his spiritual temple he dwells, not by a bright cloud, the symbol of his presence, but by his own immediate presence; making it "his habitation through the Spirit, [Ephesians 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.22)," and displaying to the view of every faithful worshiper "all the glory of the Godhead in the face of Jesus Christ! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

The whole system of this spiritual temple is more lasting.

The material temple has been so entirely destroyed, that not even its site can now be accurately ascertained. But the spiritual Temple shall endure forever, as we are told by the beloved Apostle, "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away! [Revelation 21:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.3-4)."

The Romans utterly destroyed the earthly temple; but not all the power and policy of Hell shall ever prevail against the other.

What zeal, then, can be too great, in promoting such a work as this?

Did David prepare with all his might for the house which he was forbidden to construct? Then surely we should spare no labor and no cost in advancing the work to which we are called. We should devote to it both ourselves and our property; ourselves surely in the first instance, [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5); for without that sacrifice, all the wealth of kingdoms would be a vain and empty, yes, a hateful and detestable offering! [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3). [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). Along with that, we must present also our gold and our silver, to the utmost extent of our power, verses 13, 14. It cannot be that men should go forth to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, all over the world, at their own cost; nor can the Holy Scriptures be translated into all languages, and be dispersed over all countries, without great and liberal contributions from the people of God.

David and his subjects gave so richly of their substance to raise a temple of wood and stone, and even adored God for giving them the inclination and ability to contribute.

Much more should we be willing to give all that we can spare. I had almost said, all that we possess—for the advancing of God's kingdom over the face of the whole earth. 2 Corinthians 8:3-4.

If anyone says, "I can do nothing towards that great work;" let him know, that he has at least one Temple to prepare, even his own soul, which must, before it can be happy, become "a Temple of the living God! [1 Corinthians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.16); [1 Corinthians 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19)." That you must prepare, by penitence and faith, to be the habitation of Almighty God! [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16).

But take care that "Christ be the foundation on which you build; for there neither is, nor can be, any other, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11)."

Take care, also, what your superstructure is, "If it is hay, straw, stubble, it will be burnt up. It must be of gold, and silver, and precious stones," in order to be approved of the Lord, [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.12-15).

Take care, also, not to retain in your bosom any evil disposition. God could not endure that his temple of old should be defiled; much less will he allow any lusts to be harbored in the soul of man with impunity, "If any man defiles the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy; which Temple you are, 1 Corinthians 3:17." I call on every one of you, then, to be "workers together with God" in this sacred cause [2 Corinthians 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.1); and, "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might! [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

***~~#392~~***

***~~SAINTS PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS ON EARTH~~***

**[1 Chronicles 29:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.15)**

"We are pilgrims and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding."

*The more truly pious we are, the more shall we be clothed with humility.* On no occasion had David evinced more exalted piety, than in his preparations for the building and furnishing the temple, which he was not permitted in his lifetime to erect. "He had prepared for it with all his might," "because he had set his affection to the house of his, God verse 2, 3." And what reflections did these efforts generate in his mind? Was he filled with self-delight? Did he assume any merit to himself? No! he gave to God the glory of all that had been done, acknowledging that the power to do it was the effect of God's bounty, and the disposition to do it the fruit of his grace.

A more sublime ascription of praise will scarcely be found in all the Book of God, than that which he uttered on this occasion. He bore in mind, that, as his continuance here was but of short duration, itbefit him to exert himself with all possible zeal, while any opportunity to serve God remained. The expressions which he made use of in my test will lead me to show you,

***~~I. The present state of believers as it is here represented.~~***

***~~Christians are but "strangers and pilgrims" upon earth.~~***

This world is not our home. If we are saints indeed, then we are children of a heavenly Father; and Heaven itself is our true home. [1 Peter 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-4).

*This world is but a wilderness through which we are passing to our Father's house!*We are mere pilgrims here. The people among whom we sojourn are governed by different laws, and speak a different language, and are strangers to us, even as we are to them.

We are only like travelers at an inn. If our accommodations are good, we are thankful for them; but we are not overly elated, because we regard them as merely momentary, and have our minds intent on far higher joys to come.

On the other hand, if our accommodations at our earthly inn are of a less comfortable nature, we feel no great disappointment. We consider that as connected to our state as pilgrims. We are consoled with the thought that in due season we shall reach our eternal home, where there is fullness of joy for evermore!

This has been the state of all the saints from the beginning. They gloried in the thought that they were "seeking a better country," which they would inhabit forever!

[Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13) "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth!"

***~~This representation is confirmed by actual experience.~~***

"Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding." Behold the shadow of a cloud passing over the fields—how rapidly does it proceed! How speedily does it vanish, not leaving the slightest trace of it behind! Thus generations pass away, and "the places where they have lived know them no more." "No one has found here any continuing city." The antediluvians lived for eight or nine hundred years; yet they died at last. How short, then, is our continuance, now that the term of life is reduced to seventy or eighty years! Let the oldest of us look back:

Our life seems to have been but "a mere span."

It has "declined as a shadow, [Psalm 102:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 102.11)."

It has come to an end, "as a tale that is told, [Psalm 90:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.9)."

It has been "as a vapor, that appears for a moment, and then vanishes away! [James 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.14)."

Thus it has been with all, however great or however good. The kings of the earth, that have made all the world to stand in awe of them, have passed away; yes, and their very empires have vanished with them! Where are now the Assyrian, Babylonish, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires? They have been swallowed up, as it were, and lost; together with the monarchs by whom they were established.

In like manner, "the Prophets and Apostles—where are they?" They filled but an appointed time, and then were taken to their eternal rest. But, in truth, the very place where we are assembled gives us a convincing evidence, that, whether by choice or not, the same character pertains to every one of us: we are but pilgrims upon earth, hastening every moment to our destined home.

Let us, then, mark,

***~~II. The conduct which the consideration of that future blessed state is calculated to inspire.~~***

Frequently is the consideration of that future blessed state urged upon us, as a motive to that habit of mind which the state itself demands. "I beseech you, then, as strangers and pilgrims, [1 Peter 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.11)."

***~~1. Be moderate in your regards for earthly things.~~***

A man intent on reaching his destined home, would not think of making any place his final rest, because of its beautiful prospects or its comfortable accommodations. He would be pleased with them, and thankful for them as refreshments by the way; but he would not think of resting in them as his eternal portion. So must we look beyond these transient things, and rest in nothing short of our destined glorious home. To this effect is the counsel of the Apostle Paul, "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away! 1 Corinthians 7:29-31." "Let your moderation, then, be known unto all men;" and "set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth!"

***~~2. Be diligent in the prosecution of your journey heaven-ward.~~***

You have no time to lose. Whether your stay in this wilderness is more or less protracted, you will find every hour short enough for the making of such a progress as will ensure a happy termination of your labors. You are not merely in a *journey*; but in a *race*, which requires the most strenuous and unremitted exertions! Whatever advance you may have made, you are to "forget what is behind, and to press forward to that which is ahead, so that you may attain the prize of your high calling." Never are you to be weary of well-doing; for "then only will you reap, if you faint not."

***~~3. Avail yourselves of the helps which God has provided for you along the way.~~***

To his people in the wilderness, God gave a daily supply of manna from the clouds, and of water from the rock that followed them. And similar provision has he made for us also, in our way to the promised land; and, in the strength of it, we may prosecute our journey without fear. If we are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might"—then what may we not undertake, with a full assurance of success? We need not draw back from any labor; for "the grace of Christ shall surely be sufficient for us!" Nor need we fear any enemy; for we shall be "more than conquerors, through Him who loved us!"

***~~4. Keep your eye fixed on Heaven, as your eternal glorious home.~~***

What would ever divert your steps, or retard them for an instant, if you contemplated as you ought, the blessedness that awaits you at the close of your short earthly journey? To be in your Father's house, in the very mansion prepared for you; yes, and in the very bosom of that Savior, who went, as your forerunner, to prepare it: to have all your trials forever terminated, and all your dangers forever past, and all your labors forever ended; and to have nothing but an eternity of bliss, such as no words can express, no imagination can conceive. What joy will you feel in the retrospect, what exultation in the prospect, and, above all, what recollections as arising from the stupendous mystery of redemption, whereby the whole has been accomplished for you!

Set before you this prize; and then tell me whether you will ever need anything to carry you forward in your heavenly course. Truly, the contemplation of that eternal glory will swallow up everything else, even as the stars of Heaven are eclipsed by the meridian sun. Joys will be no joys, and sorrows no sorrows—I mean, not worth being so accounted; if only you keep Heaven in your view; for neither the comforts "nor the sufferings of this present life are worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)."

Moses, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26),

and Paul, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24),

and all the saints, [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35),

yes, and even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)—were animated by this thought; and, if it fully possesses your mind, you can never faint, nor ever come short of that glorious rest which remains for you! [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11).

***~~#393~~***

***~~INTEGRITY OF HEART REQUIRED~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 29:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.17)~~***

"I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity."

*The true way to form a correct estimate of our actions, is to consider the principles from which they flow;* for it is very possible that an act which may be highly esteemed among men, may be an utter "abomination in the sight of God! [Luke 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.15)," on account of the motives by which we have been actuated in the performance of it.

Jehu obeyed an express command of God in destroying the house of Ahab; and was even rewarded by God for it; while yet he was also punished for it, because, in what he did, he was impelled only by his own pride and vanity, instead of consulting, as he should have done, the glory of his God. Compare [2 Kings 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.30) with [Hosea 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 1.4).

"Man looks only on the outward appearance; but God looks at the heart! [1 Samuel 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.7)."

The efforts which *David*made in preparing for the erection of the Temple were amazing; yet, if they had proceeded from a desire of man's applause, they would have been of no value before God. But David sought only to glorify his God; and for his integrity in this respect, he could appeal, yes, and did appeal, to the heart-searching God, "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity;" and I can affirm, as in your presence, that "in the integrity of my heart I have willingly offered all these things."

From this striking and confident declaration, I shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. What is here affirmed about God.~~***

Two things are here asserted respecting God:

***~~1. God's knowledge of the human heart.~~***

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good! [Proverbs 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.3)." Nor is it a mere cursory view which he takes of the things that are passing in the world; he inspects them all; he marks the most hidden actions of mankind; he observes with accuracy the principles from which they flow. Not so much as a thought escapes his notice; no, nor the most fleeting "imagination of a thought! [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5). [1 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9)." "He searches the heart, and tries the thoughts! [Psalm 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.9)," in order that not the slightest motion of the soul may escape him. He so "ponders the ways of men, [Proverbs 21:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.2)," that not a turn in them is unobserved; and so "weighs their spirits [Proverbs 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.2)," as infallibly to ascertain the precise measure of every principle contained in them.

Producing medicines is done with a great degree of accuracy by chemists; but no chemist can subject the heart of man to this process. *Heart-searching is the work of God alone*, [Revelation 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.23); but it is a work which he is executing every day, and every hour, over the face of the whole earth; and in his book of remembrance he records the result of his observations on every man's heart, [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.8). In truth, if he did not thus search the heart, he would not be able to judge the world. But, seeing that "all things are naked and opened before him, and that he is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)," and that the darkest recesses of it are to him as clear as the light of day, [Psalm 139:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.11-12)—we may, without hesitation, say with Job, "I know that no thought can be withheld from you! [Job 42:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.2)."

***~~2. God's love of integrity.~~***

God requires truth in the inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6); and whatever is contrary to it, he utterly abhors. "He made man upright" in the first instance, [Ecclesiastes 7:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.29), and pronounced his work to be "very good, [Genesis 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.26); [Genesis 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.31)." In his works of grace he seeks to restore to man that integrity; and never will he look with delight on any child of man, until that change is wrought. By integrity, however, we are not to understand sinless perfection; for, if none but those who have attained sinless perfection were objects of his love, there would not be found one upon the face of the whole earth; seeing that "there is no man that lives, and sins not, [1 Kings 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.46)."*But, in desire and purpose, we must be perfect. There must be in us no allowed sin.*"Our heart must be right with God, [Psalm 78:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.37)." He will not endure "a divided heart, [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2)." There must be in us a simplicity of aim and intention; no leaning to self; no corrupt bias; no undue mixture of carnal motives or principles; we must be "without deceit in our spirit, [Psalm 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.2)," if we would approve ourselves to him. Where a person of this character is, God views him with pleasure, [Proverbs 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8-9), and listens to him with delight, [Proverbs 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.20).

The testimony borne to *Nathanael*is a clear evidence of this. No human eye saw him "under the fig-tree;" nor could any person, who had seen him, have ventured to pronounce upon his character in such decided terms. But God had searched his heart, and "found it perfect before him, [2 Kings 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.3)."

That his delight in such characters might be fully known, he has recorded it in his Word; and, for the encouragement of all future generations, he has borne witness to Nathanael, saying, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)."

Know, then, that "God has pleasure in integrity." He has pleasure in it as a conformity to his Law, a correspondence with his own image, the very end and consummation of all his works.

Such being the mind of Almighty God, let us consider,

***~~II. What effect the consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy, should produce upon us.~~***

No subject whatever has a wider scope, or needs more to be seen in all its diversified bearings, than that before us. The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy, should operate forcibly on every man.

***~~1. The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy—should operate to make us humble in our review of our past lives.~~***

Who among us could stand, if God were to enter into judgment with us? Who, if God should "lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet," would be found to have been upright before him?

Let us take even the best day of our whole lives, and test ourselves by the holy Word of God!

Let us take even our own standard of duty to God and man, and say whether we have fulfilled, whether we have even striven to fulfill it, whether we have labored as men in earnest, to get our views of duty rectified and enlarged, in order that we might not, through ignorance, come short of it in anything?

Let us think whether we can appeal to the omniscient and heart-searching God, that we have studied his blessed Word in order to learn his will, and cried to him for grace to enable us for the performance of it?

In short, let us see, whether for one day or hour we have been truly upright before God, so as to have not a wish of our hearts comparable to that of pleasing, serving, glorifying him?

If, then, we cannot stand this test even for the best day of our whole lives, what must have been our state taken in the aggregate, from the first moment of our existence to the present hour? Tell me whether it is possible for us to abase ourselves too much? Job, with all his perfection, "abhorred himself in dust and ashes! [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)." Tell me, then, what should be the posture of our souls before God? Truly, there should not be a day or an hour, throughout all our future lives, wherein we should not "put our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, crying, Unclean! Unclean! [Leviticus 13:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.49). [Lamentations 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.29)."

***~~2. The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy—should operate to make us earnest in our desires to be truly saved.~~***

Where should such guilty creatures flee, but to the Savior? to Him who has expiated our guilt, and wrought out a righteousness wherein we may stand accepted before God? To think of procuring remission of our sins by any obedience of our own, is madness. Satan himself might attempt it as reasonably as we. O! with what joy should we hear:

of the provision made for us in the Gospel;

of an incarnate God;

of a substitutionary sacrifice for sin;

of a sacrifice commensurate with the necessities of a ruined world;

of a free access to the Father through that sacrifice;

of acceptance with Him, simply through faith in it as an atoning sacrifice for our sins;

of everything being treasured up in Christ for us, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19), so that it may be secured against a possibility of being lost, [Colossians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3), and may "be received at all times, out of his fullness," through the exercise of faith and prayer, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16).

Let us but see in what light we stand before God, as viewed in ourselves, and we shall most cordially unite with the Apostle Paul, in "desiring to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, which is of the Law—but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)."

***~~3. The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy—should operate to make us watchful against the assaults of our great adversary.~~***

Even in Paradise, while yet our first parents retained their integrity, did Satan prevail to beguile them. What, then, will he not do with us, if we are not constantly on our guard against him? He can assume "the appearance of an angel of light! 2 Corinthians 11:14." How, then, can we hope to stand against his wiles, if Almighty God does not interpose to preserve us? It is not necessary for Satan's purpose, that he should draw us into gross sin; he effects our destruction no less certainly, if he only "beguiles us from the simplicity that is in Christ! [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3)." If he succeeds only so far as to keep us from being upright before God, he needs no more to ruin us forever!

Beloved brethren, reflect on this, and cry mightily to God to arm you against him on every side, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11); that, whether he assumes the violence of a lion, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8), or the subtlety of a serpent, [Revelation 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.9), he may never be able to prevail against you.

***~~4. The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy—should operate to make us faithful in examining every motion of our hearts.~~***

If Satan were less active, we would still be in continual danger, from the deceitfulness and depravity of our own hearts. We are ever ready to "put evil for good, and darkness for light, [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)." Self-love is so predominant in the best of us, that we rarely can discern, and never without the most careful observation, the true motives by which we are actuated. We give ourselves credit for a purity which we but rarely attain; and hence, in ten thousand instances, we deceive our own souls! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26). But we cannot deceive God. When he searches our heart and tries our thoughts, we cannot deceive him. The least obliquity of mind or principle is as obvious to him, as the greatest and most open sin. We should therefore carefully examine ourselves as to the *motives*and *principles*from which we act. Yes, and we should beg of God, also, to "search and test us, and to see if there is any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting! [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)."

**5.** **The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy, should make us constant in prayer for more abundant grace.**

It is by the grace of Christ alone that we can do anything that is good, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). Without that, we would be "carried captive by the devil at his will." But it is not by grace *once*received, that we are to stand; *we must have daily supplies of grace*; and in seasons of temptation we must have a greater measure of grace imparted to us, according to the augmented measure of our temptations. But this can only be brought in by prayer.

*Paul*, under the buffetings of Satan, cried earnestly to the Lord Jesus Christ for aid and support. Yet he did not at first succeed. Therefore he renewed his supplications again and again; until at last the Lord Jesus Christ answered him, "My grace is sufficient for you;" and assured him, that "Jehovah's strength should be made perfect in his weakness! [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)." This enabled the Apostle to "glory in his infirmities;" and to acquiesce cheerfully in the trial, from a confidence that "the power of Christ should rest upon him."

So should we also, under a sense of our constant liability to fall, commit ourselves entirely to God; crying with eager and constant importunity, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe! Psalm 199:117."

**6. The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy, should make us careful in our endeavors to approve ourselves to God.**

*We should act as under God's eye, and have little concern for the eye of man.* Through a sweet consciousness that he was doing this, David could rejoice in his own uprightness; as Paul also did, when he said, "Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace! [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12)." Our wisdom is, to "set the Lord always before us, [Psalm 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.8)," and to walk as in his immediate presence!

We know what an influence the eye of a fellow-creature has over us, in things which are seen by him. But if we could realize the idea of God's presence, and see inscribed on every place, "You O God, see us! [Genesis 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 16.13)"—then we should walk far more holily than we do, particularly in our private fellowship with God. Endeavor, then, to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)," rest in no attainment short of that. "Let all deceit be put away from you." Determine, through grace, that God himself shall discern no *allowed*evil within you; so shall you "walk holily and unblamably before God," and be pure and blameless until the day of Christ! [Philippians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.10)."

***~~#394~~***

***~~LIBERALITY IN GOD'S SERVICE COMMENDED~~***

***~~[1 Chronicles 29:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.17-18)~~***

"I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you."

True religion, in whoever it is seen, is exceedingly beautiful; and all its exercises and operations deserve our most attentive regard. But when it shines forth in people of high station, or is exhibited in the united efforts of a multitude—it excites our highest admiration. Who can behold the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost, "all of one heart and one soul," all living together in the devoutest fellowship with God and each other, [Acts 2:41-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41-47), and dividing with each other their possessions, that, being supported out of one common stock. [Acts 4:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32-34), they might be entirely freed from all care about the things of this world; who can behold this and not admire "the exceeding grace of God in them?"

In the chapter before us we have a powerful monarch at the head of all the chief men in his kingdom, devoting their property to God, for the purpose of erecting a stately edifice to his honor. The prayer which *David*offered on the occasion, in the hearing of them all, expressed, doubtless, their opinions as well as his own, and shows that they were actuated, not by warm affections only, but by a just and heavenly principle; for, while they were performing a most exalted act of piety towards God, they were not elated with pride, but filled with gratitude to him for enabling and inclining them to render him this service.

***~~I. We shall consider the above Scriptures, in reference to the history before us.~~***

*David*had purposed to build a house unto the Lord; but his intention, though approved and applauded by his God, was not allowed to be carried into execution, "because he had been a man of war, and had shed much blood." Nevertheless he made great preparations for it, in order that he might at least testify the sincerity of his wishes, and facilitate the accomplishment of them in God's appointed time. The princes and people heartily concurred with him in this good work; and thereby filled his soul with joy and gratitude. We may notice in the text,

***~~1. The grounds of David's joy.~~***

His subjects manifested on this occasion an extraordinary zeal for God's honor, and liberality in his service. Had they been disposed to excuse themselves from engaging in this expensive work, they might have urged many specious reasons for declining it. They might have said: "God has not required this at our hands; why then should we do it? His "ark has abode within the tent" for five hundred years; why then should it not continue to do so? Must not any building which we can raise, be altogether unworthy of his notice? Have we not other, and more imperious, calls for our money? Have we not many poor, whom we might relieve; and many ignorant, for whom we might provide instruction? Besides, have not our families a claim upon us, that we should not so prodigally lavish the wealth by which we are enabled to provide for them?"

But no such objections were made. A desire to glorify God swallowed up every selfish and worldly consideration; and the people vied with each other in contributing to the utmost of their power, insomuch that millions in gold and silver were dedicated by them to this service.

And was not this a proper ground of joy to the pious monarch? It was at least a presumptive proof that their souls were penetrated with true religion. Some indeed might have been influenced by baser motives; but the greater part were surely animated by love to God; for they had been long amassing riches for this particular end; and, if their principle had not been good, it would scarcely have operated so uniformly and to such an extent. What then could afford a more just occasion of joy than such a sight, whether to a prince among his subjects, or a minister among his people, or a parent among his children? Every one in whom true piety exists, must of necessity rejoice in beholding such a testimony of piety in others.

But the people's conduct was also a pledge that the temple should in due time be completed. David had set his heart on having the work accomplished, though it was not to be performed by him, or even during his life. As large as his own donations had been, they would not have been sufficient without the aid of others; and if his own example had not been followed while he was present to exert his influence, then he could have but little hope that any attention would be paid to it after his death. But no room for such fears was left. The people's zeal and liberality ensured success; and nothing remained, but that the plan which God himself had given him for every part of the work, should be executed by Solomon his son. Well might he rejoice in such a prospect. Well might he exult in the thought that in this amazing undertaking he had not labored in vain, or run in vain.

***~~2. The expressions of David's love.~~***

*Good impressions, especially when our temporal interests are likely to be affected by them, are very apt to languish and decay.* As the gratitude of the Israelites, promising as it appeared at the first moment when their enemies were overwhelmed in the sea, vanished within the space of a few days, so the zeal and liberality which are called forth on some particular occasions are too often found to yield after a time to the suggestions of prudence and economy.

*None but God can "put a good desire into the heart, [2 Corinthians 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.16);" nor can any but God preserve it there.* Under a full conviction of this truth, David entreated God to "keep these good dispositions in the hearts of his people," and to "prepare more fully and entirely their hearts unto him." The accumulation of words which he uses on this occasion suggests, that, if there is not a living principle of piety in the heart, the actings of it will be of short continuance; if there is no spring or fountain, the channel will soon cease to flow.

Now this devout application to God on their behalf was the strongest possible expression of his love towards them; for what other thing could tend so much either to their present or eternal felicity, as a continuance of these liberal and devout affections?

It conduced exceedingly to their *present*happiness. From the joy which they manifested on the occasion, it might be supposed rather that they had unexpectedly acquired some large property. This would have been a more common and natural source of joy. But they felt happiness in parting with their wealth; they found it "more blessed to give than to receive;" they experienced a more refined and elevated pleasure than the largest acquisitions could possibly have conveyed, [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9).

And, instead of thinking that they conferred any obligation upon God by these sacrifices, they felt themselves indebted to him, in exact proportion to the cheerfulness and liberality with which they were enabled to offer to him, verse 14. Moreover it tended also to their eternal happiness. Their gifts could not purchase Heaven, it is true; nor could their liberality merit anything at God's hands; but God has been graciously pleased to say, that even "a cup of cold water, if given to him, or for his sake, in a befitting manner, shall never lose its reward;" nay, he would consider himself as "unrighteous, if he were to forget our works and labors of love which we have shown towards his name, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10)."

Without arrogating any merit to ourselves therefore, we may say, that "the fruits of generosity shall abound to our account, [Philippians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.17);" that "what we lay out for the Lord shall be repaid us again, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17);" and that in being ready to distribute our wealth in his service, we "lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life, 1 Timothy 6:18-19."

On these accounts David prayed that these holy dispositions might be kept alive in their hearts; and in this prayer he expressed in the most effectual manner his love towards them.*If he had flattered them, he might have gratified their pride; but in praying for them he consulted their best interests.*

***~~II. We shall consider the above Scriptures, in reference to that which is typically represented by it.~~***

If David disposed of his wealth so liberally for the constructing of an edifice of stone for God, much more should we disregard the acquiring of wealth in comparison with making our souls a temple for him.

The material temple was a type of the Christian Church, even of that temple which is "built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone!"

This temple we are now called upon to build.

God has of late years stirred up an almost unprecedented zeal to erect this temple in heathen lands. Every denomination of Christians has stood forth on this occasion. The Moravians, with unrivaled perseverance, led the way. Independents and Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, have followed, according to their respective abilities. The Church of England has long had two Societies engaged in this glorious cause: that for promoting Christian Knowledge; and that for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts; and of late a third society has arisen, whose attention is principally directed to Africa and the East.

None of these interfere with each other; there is room for all; and there is need of all. It might be thought better perhaps if all were combined in one; but, considering what human nature is, we cannot expect that all should so perfectly coalesce, as to prosecute their plans with sufficient unanimity; and it is certain that far greater efforts are likely to be made, when all can exert themselves in a way congenial with their own opinions, than if they were called upon to support a plan which they did not wholly approve.

That such a spirit should be so generally diffused, must surely be a matter of rejoicing to everyone who has the interests of true religion at heart. And we trust that, in reference to this assembly, we may adopt the words of the text, "Now have I seen with joy your people which are present here to offer willingly unto you."

***~~Let us then imitate the example now set before us:~~***

***~~1. Let us give willingly.~~***

Difficulties and objections are very apt to arise in the mind, especially when we desire a plea for withholding or limiting our contributions. But what objection can be urged, which would not have had incomparably greater force on the foregoing occasion? Indeed the reasons that should animate us to exertion, are ten-fold stronger than any which David could have urged in support of his measure. God might have been known and worshiped, even though that costly edifice had not been reared; but how shall God be known among the heathen, if none be sent to instruct them? How could God have been savingly known by us when in our heathen state, if none had pitied our ignorance, and labored for our relief? Since then "we have freely received, should we not freely give?" Though we have too much ignorance at home—yet all have some means of instruction; and there are none so far from God, but that the sound of the Gospel may reach their ears, and convert their souls.

But this is not the case with the heathens. If we do not send them the light of divine truth, they must abide in darkness and the shadow of death. Let us therefore discard from our minds every thought, except that of zeal for God and compassion for our fellow-creatures. And "let us give not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."

***~~2. Let us give bountifully.~~***

If we had been asked, what would be proper for David to give towards the building of the temple, we would probably have thought ten thousand pounds a large sum; we should scarcely have judged it reasonable to require of him so large a subscription as a hundred thousand pounds. Yet he not only gave as much as that, but ten times as much; yes, a hundred times as much; yes, almost two hundred times as much. Independent of the immense treasures dedicated as spoils taken from his enemies, he gave, out of his own purse, gold and silver to the amount of above eighteen millions of money. And what was it that prompted him to such astonishing liberality? He himself tells us in the preceding context, "I have prepared with all my might …. because I have set my affection to the house of my God, verse 2, 3."

Let the same principle operate in us; let us set our affection to the work of Christ, and the salvation of our fellow-creatures, and then our ability alone will determine the measure of our contributions. Instead of waiting for arguments to overcome a parsimonious and reluctant spirit—we shall be "willing of our own selves to give, not only according to our ability, but even beyond our proper ability; and with much entreaty we shall urge and compel, as it were, the acceptance of our gifts" for the furthering of this blessed cause! [2 Corinthians 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.3-4). The *rich*will give largely out of their abundance; and the *poor*will be casting in their not less acceptable mite—and all will unite in adoring God for the opportunity afforded them to show their love to him.

***~~3. Let us give in due order.~~***

There is an offering which God requires, previous to his acceptance of any other; it is this, "My son, give me your heart! [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26)." Here then we must put to you the question which David put to his subjects on that glorious occasion, "Who among you is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord? verse 5."

Who will consecrate himself to God as a Christian? It would be a blessed day indeed, if you were all as unanimous in this, as that assembly were in devoting their treasures unto God. Could we but see you offering to him your hearts, we need not add a word respecting your property; for you would feel that it is not possible to dispose of that in any other way so happily for yourselves, so beneficially for the world, or so honorably to God! Give then, I say, like the Macedonians; of whom Paul says, that "out of their deep poverty they abounded unto the riches of liberality;" but, like them, "*first*give your own selves unto the Lord! [2 Corinthians 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.2); [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5). See also [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5)." Then you will know, that all which you have is his; and make no account of your property, but as it may be subservient to his glory, verse 14, 16.

Permit me to ask further: Who will consecrate himself to God as a Missionary? It is in vain that materials are collected for a building, if there are none found to construct the edifice. And alas! here is the difficulty, here is the need! Of those who are destined to the service of their God, how few are found willing to sacrifice their earthly prospects, and their carnal ease! When God calls them to an arduous and self-denying service, how do they, like Moses, multiply their excuses, when they are actuated only by a fear of the cross! God has been for many years saying to us of the Established Church, "Who will go for us?" but there have been few Isaiahs found to answer, "Here am I, send me! [Isaiah 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.8)." O that there were less reason for that complaint, "All men seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. [Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.21)." If we even knew that the fruits of our labors would not appear to any great extent in our day, it were no reason for declining the service to which we are called. David sowed, that others might reap; our blessed Lord did the same; I pray God there may be some found among us inclined and qualified to follow their examples.

***~~To CONCLUDE.~~***

If there are any, whether in the ministry or out of it, who desire to be the Lord's, we pray that "our Covenant-God would keep this in the thoughts of their hearts forever." And if the raising of God's spiritual temple among the heathen is an object worthy of our regard, let us now vie with each other in our endeavors to promote it, and show our sense of its importance by the cheerfulness and extent of our donations.

**2 CHRONICLES**

***~~#395~~***

***~~USE OF CHURCH MUSIC~~***

**[2 Chronicles 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 5.13-14)**

"The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God!"

Every duty which we owe to God is excellent in its season; nor is there any duty which is not peculiarly suitable for particular people, and under particular circumstances. Repentance, prayer, attendance on the preached Gospel, are eminently proper, not for the ungodly alone, but for the saints also, whenever a sense of ignorance, guilt, or helplessness, call for such exercises.

But the duty of *praise*seems to claim a just preference before all others, not only because it is more pleasant, and more lovely for the upright, but because in all others we receive from God; whereas in praise we give to God. Indeed God himself declares, that he is more especially honored by the due performance of this duty, "Whoever offers me praise, glorifies me!" and in my text, he has given the most abundant testimony of its acceptableness to him.

Solomon having finished the temple, had now brought up the ark of the Lord, and placed it in the holy of holies; he had also offered innumerable sacrifices on this glorious occasion; and, while he was praising God in concert with the priests and Levites, and an immense band of vocal and instrumental music, God came down into the temple, and filled it with his glory, "The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God."

In discoursing upon these words, we shall consider:

I. The manner in which they praised God;

II. The subject-matter of their praise;

III. The token which God gave them of his approbation.

**I. Let us consider the manner in which they praised God.**

Never since the creation of the world was there a more glorious display of religious zeal than at the dedication of Solomon's temple. Solomon had assembled "the elders of Israel, even the heads of all the tribes, and the chief men in all the families of Israel, to Jerusalem." He had collected also, not the priests of one particular course, but all the priests and all the Levites, to assist in this solemnity; and this vast concourse of people, after having deposited the ark in the place prepared for it, joined in praises and thanksgivings to God.

They praised God, unitedly.

We are told that "The trumpeters and singers joined in unison." It is much to be regretted, that, in our worshiping assemblies, the greater part of the congregation never join in this part of the service; they seem to think that they are not interested in it, and that it may well be left to those few who may have studied music as a science.

But would it not appear absurd in the highest degree, if the prayers also were left to a few select people, and the bulk of the congregation were to sit still, as though they had no need to join in the devotions? And if this would be so evidently absurd in the one part of the service, why should it not be so in the other? All indeed are not alike qualified to join aloud; but there are very few who might not, by a little attention, easily qualify themselves to join in this act of worship; nor can there be anyone who is not bound at least to exercise his mind, and "make melody in his heart to the Lord."

Indeed this is one great use of musical instruments in the public worship; they are serviceable to unite voices which might otherwise be discordant, and to help forward those, who through ignorance or diffidence might otherwise be silent. Therefore David, in the last Psalm, exhorts us to praise the Lord with stringed instruments and with organs; and well knowing how easy it would be with such helps to sing, he adds, "Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord!"

We must not however imagine, that the mere lifting up of the voice is a sacrifice pleasing to God. No, he requires the service of the heart!

Therefore we observe, in the next place, that they praised God devoutly.

It is said, in my text, that "the trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD." We know, that *the uttering of a prayer without any sense of our need, or any desire for the things we ask for, is no other than a solemn mockery, which is in the highest degree displeasing to God*. *Just so, the singing of psalms and hymns without any sense of joy and gratitude, is a hypocritical service, and wholly unacceptable to God.*We may indeed please the congregation, and establish our own reputation for skill; but these are very unworthy motives to be influenced by, when we are solemnly addressing the Most High God. People actuated by such considerations sing to their own praise and glory, rather than to God's; and therefore they must rest satisfied with their reward, that is, the reward they seek after; for it is certain that they will never receive any testimony of God's approbation.

Let me therefore remind you all, that the end of singing is to thank and praise the Lord; and that, whenever we join in psalms and hymns, we must be especially careful that we "make melody in our hearts *to the Lord*."

In this we shall be greatly assisted by a judicious use of instrumental music; which leads me to observe further, that the Jewish assembly praised God with instruments of music.

Many are prejudiced against church music; and it is certain that it is capable of very great abuse; but it may also be employed to great advantage. It is said in my text, that "Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang!" Who can doubt that the devotion of the congregation was greatly aided by these? Who can doubt that if Solomon, the wisest of men, at the most solemn season imaginable, not only used these instruments, but (as we shall have occasion presently to observe) was approved of God in the use of them—then who can doubt, I say, but that they may be used to great advantage?

As far indeed as they contributed to the pomp and grandeur of the temple worship, *they may well be dispensed with under the Christian dispensation*; since the excellence of the Gospel worship consists in its *simplicity*, in which respect it is directly opposite to the Jewish worship. But, inasmuch as it aided the devotion, its utility remains; and, I trust, that in a little time we shall find that effect arising from it.

In order to this, however, we must learn to distinguish between the natural effect of music on the organs of sense, and the spiritual effect of divine truths upon the soul. Those who attend only to the sound may experience the former; but to experience the latter, we must attend simply to the words we sing. We shall sing to little purpose "with the *voice*, if we do not sing with our *understanding*also." To promote this, I proceed to set before you,

**II. The subject-matter of their praise.**

*A sense of the divine goodness and mercy was that which inflamed their souls.*David had before recorded, in Psalm 136, the goodness of God, in his works of creation, providence, and redemption; and no less than twenty-six times in as many verses had he repeated that delightful truth, that "the mercy of the Lord endures forever." In all probability that Psalm was now used by Solomon's appointment; so that with the commemoration of every fresh act of mercy, the whole band united in singing, "For the Lord is good; for his mercy endures forever!"

*The grand subject therefore of their praise was the goodness and mercy of God*. And what abundant ground was here for praise!

Who that surveys the wonders of CREATION, must not see the goodness of God stamped indelibly on every part of the universe?

Who that sees the sun, ruling by day, and the moon and stars, ruling by night; who that sees this terrestrial globe furnished with everything which can contribute to the happiness both of the rational and irrational creation; who that observes the variety and the beauty of God's works, *the fitness of every creature for its use*, the subordination of one creature to another, and the joint concurrence of all to one common end.

Who that observes the fabric of the human body, that is so fearfully and wonderfully made, or reflects on the powers of the soul, which can in an instant soar from earth to Heaven, and there contemplate not the heavenly bodies only, but even the Maker of them.

Who, I say, can view any part of the creation, and not exclaim with the Psalmist, "The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all his works!"

Nor does his goodness less appear in the works of PROVIDENCE; David, in the Psalm we have referred to, recounts most of the gracious acts which God had performed towards the Jewish nation from the first bringing of them out of Egypt to the time he penned that Psalm; those were no doubt recited with joy and gladness.

And may not *we*also look back through the annals of our history, and see how often God has preserved *us*from our enemies, how he has prospered our nation in ten thousand instances, and how he is yet protecting us from foreign invasion and domestic tumults?

Do we not see how good he is to us in making the earth to bring forth plenteously, and in providing for all our returning needs?

May not every individual among us too trace God's peculiar kindness of Providence to himself, in averting evils, or overruling them for good?

Surely we have all experienced enough of God's goodness to make us joyfully unite in songs of praise.

But most of all is the goodness of God conspicuous in the work of REDEMPTION; this the Psalmist notices particularly, though indeed in but few words. The Jews fixed their attention more on the *typical*redemptions. But now that the shadows are removed, and the substance is set before us, we should survey the redemption of Christ with incessant wonder!

Behold the goodness of God in giving us his only Son; in laying our iniquities on him; and in opening the kingdom of Heaven to all believers!

Behold him satisfying his own justice by the sufferings of his Son, and opening a way for the exercise of his mercy towards us consistently with his other perfections! This is the wonder! This is the bright display of divine goodness! This is the subject-matter of thanksgiving, to all the saints on earth, and all the saints in Heaven!

O that every tongue might pay its tribute of praise! and that we might all with united hearts and voices proclaim, that "the Lord is good!"

A further subject of their praise was the MERCY of God, "His mercy endures forever." How eminently did this appear in God's dealings with the Jewish nation! For, notwithstanding all their murmurings and rebellions in the wilderness, he brought them into the land which he had promised them; and in due time he raised up his servant David, to whom he had confirmed all the promises which he had made unto the patriarchs. And now at last he had in a figure taken possession of *the temple of Solomon, as a typical representation of his future dwelling in the temple of Christ's body*. These were proofs of the perpetuity of God's mercy, and that he would not withdraw it from those to whom he had promised it.

But here again we survey his mercy in far brighter colors! We see indeed that God's mercy endures forever. We have seen the mercy promised to our fathers long since performed. We have seen the Son of God, the Savior of the world. We have seen him living, dying, rising, and resuming his throne of glory. We have seen him making an end of sin, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness. And now we behold him pouring out all the blessings of redemption on his redeemed people.

At this moment is his mercy as full and free as at the time he died upon the cross; at this instant do his affections yearn over sinners; he invites them all, and importunes them to accept his offered salvation.

To those who have tasted of his saving mercy, he still continues to be gracious. He keeps mercy for thousands, when they would cast it utterly away. He does not in anger shut up his tender mercies. He will chastise, but not cast off. He will "hide his face for a little moment; but with everlasting kindness he will have mercy upon us."

Such was the subject-matter of their praise; and shall our tongues be silent? Have we not incomparably greater cause for thanksgiving than the Jews were even able to conceive! Let the praises of God then be in our lips; and let us unite our hearts and voices in declaring the goodness and mercy of our God!

Were this more the frame of our hearts, surely we would find God more frequently present in our worshiping assemblies; for he would certainly never leave us without "witness that we pleased him."

This brings us to consider,

***~~III. The testimony which God gave to them of his approbation of their worship.~~***

God had often given to appear in a visible manner to his people; he went before them in a cloud through the wilderness, and conducted them in all their journeys. And when Moses had finished the tabernacle according to the direction given him by God, it pleased God to give him a signal token of his presence and approbation. In [Exodus 40:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 40.34-35), it is said, "Then (when Moses had finished the work) a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle; and Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Exactly similar to this was the testimony which God now gave of his approbation, both to Solomon and all the assembly, "Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God!" This cloud was the Shechinah, or symbol of the divine presence; and its coming down, and filling the place at that time, was a signal manifestation of the divine favor.

This shadowy representation of God was suited to that dispensation, wherein everything was wrapped up in obscure types and shadows; it was calculated to strike their senses, and impress them with reverence for God; while, at the same time, the effect which it produced upon the priests served to intimate that when Christ should come, and God truly appear in the temple of Christ's body, the priests should cease to minister in their former manner, and the whole of that dispensation should be done away.

It is particularly proper on this occasion to notice the exact time when God was pleased to grant this remarkable testimony of his approbation. If we look to the text, we shall see that it was not when the sacrifices were offered, nor even when the ark was deposited in its place; but it was when the singers and the players on the musical instruments joined in one grand chorus of praise and thanksgiving, "The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God!" We cannot doubt but that God approved of every part of this grand ceremony; but that which crowned the whole was, the tribute of praise offered by the chorus of vocal and instrumental music.

We have before observed, that this, without the heart, would be a vain offering indeed; but, with the heart, no doubt it is pleasing and acceptable to God in the highest degree; it comes as near as possible to the worship of Heaven, where, in one grand concert, they strike their golden harps, and sing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb forever!" In [Revelation 14:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.1-3), John beheld in a vision the glorious company of Heaven; and he says, "I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from Heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne!"

Shall not we therefore endeavor to anticipate that blessed employment? Shall not we strive to bring down Heaven upon earth? shall not we from henceforth lift up our voices unto God, and every one be ambitious to join as in one general chorus? Yes, my brethren, let me hope that many of you will:  
unite your endeavors;  
call to mind the goodness of your God;  
think of his manifold and never-ending mercies;  
think of Jesus the fountain and foundation of all your blessings;  
stir up your hearts to gratitude;  
let not one be silent!

And while we are united in singing the high praises of our God, may God himself come down in the midst of us, and fill the house with his glory! Amen, and Amen!

***~~#396~~***

***~~GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF DAVID'S GOOD DESIRES~~***

**[2 Chronicles 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.7-8)**

"My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a temple for my Name, you did well to have this in your heart.'"

From our general notions of God, we should be ready to imagine, that he would not only permit, but encourage, the execution of every good thought that could come into our minds. But "his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." *He appoints unto men their work according to his sovereign will, and uses what instruments he pleases for the accomplishment of his own designs.*

*Moses*, who had brought the people of Israel out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness, was not permitted to conduct them into Canaan; he must devolve that office on Joshua, and die without seeing the completion of the work he had begun.

Thus *David*had conceived a noble idea of building a temple unto the Lord, and had made preparations for it to a most astonishing extent; yet God did not allow him execute the work, but ordered him to leave it to Solomon his son. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon brought this fact to the remembrance of the people, partly perhaps with a view to honor the memory of David his father, but principally to display the *sovereignty*of God who had appointed him to that office, and the *faithfulness*of God in having enabled him to complete the work.

But at the same time that he mentions the prohibition given to David his father, respecting the execution of his design—he declares God's gracious acceptance of the *intention*just as much as if it had been carried into effect, since it argued and evinced that state of mind which alone could have rendered the act itself acceptable in the sight of God.

In this incident, as related in our text, we notice,

***~~I. The characteristic marks of true piety.~~***

From the example before us, we see:

***~~1. The aims of true piety are high.~~***

David sought to honor and exalt Jehovah's name. Just so, wherever real piety exists, it will inspire us with similar views and opinions. *To act merely with a view to the gaining of this world, or for the promoting of our own interests, are unworthy of a rational and immortal being.*We shall "look (that is, aim) not at the things which are visible and temporal, but at the things which are invisible and eternal!" We shall carry this spirit into all the common acts and offices of life, "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we shall endeavor to do it all to the glory of God!"

In speaking on this subject, *Paul*uses an expression of peculiar force; he says, that "as Christ had been, so he should continue to be, magnified in his body, whether by life or death, [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20)." Perhaps it may be thought, that such an aim was proper in an Apostle, but would be presumptuous in us. But it is equally proper for all; and indeed is necessary for all; for, "being not our own, but bought with a price, we should 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)."

**2.** **The efforts of true piety are earnest.**

David not only desired to build the temple, but collected materials for it, and contributed towards it to an incredible amount. *Thus true piety is always operative, and regards all earthly possessions as talents to be improved for God.*The more those talents are multiplied to us, the greater obligation we shall feel to honor God with them. Every service which we are enabled to render him, we shall consider only as a step to further services.

If we had attained the eminence even of Paul himself, and, like him, had labored more than all the other Apostles, we should not be satisfied with anything we had done, while anything yet remained for us to do. We should "forget all that was behind, of the course we had already run, and stretch forth unto that which was before, and press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus! [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14)." Yes, "as many of us as are perfect and upright in the sight of God, will certainly be thus minded, [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12)."

**3.** **The desires of true piety are** **unbounded**.

Had David's means been augmented a hundred-fold, his desire to use them for God would have proportionably increased; his ability would still have been the measure of his exertions.

True piety regards, not the opinion of the world, but the will of God. It looks at the *precepts*, the *promises*, the *examples*, set before us in the Scriptures; and makes them the standard of its aims and efforts.

The preceptsrequire us to "love and serve God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength." The promises give us reason to hope that we shall be "cleansed from all unrighteousness," and "be renewed after the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness."

God proposes himself to us as our example, that we should "be *holy*, as he is holy," and "be *perfect*, even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

However short of these things the Christian falls in point of practice, he desires, if it were possible, to fulfill all that is required of him, and to attain "the full measure of the stature of Christ himself, [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13)." In a word, he realizes in his experience, the prayer of Epaphras, and "labors fervently and incessantly to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)."

Whoever possesses such piety in his heart, shall assuredly be honored with,

***~~II. God's approbation and acceptance of his piety.~~***

*Without the heart, no services that we can render to the Lord are pleasing to him.* God says to every one of us, "My son, give me your heart!" *If we withhold our hearts, then he regards nothing else that we can give him; our very prayers and our praises are only an abomination to him!*[Matthew 15:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-9). [Isaiah 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11); [Isaiah 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.13). [Amos 5:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 5.21-23).

But, where the heart is, even the smallest services are pleasing in his sight!

God does not judge of our services by their magnitude in the eyes of men, but by the measure of love and zeal with which they are performed. The widow's mite was on this account considered as "more" than all the offerings of the rich. In itself, it was nothing; but, as indicating the state of her mind, it was above all price!

It is worthy of observation, that the most encouraging promises in Scripture are given to such expressions of our feelings and desires, as most indicate the sincerity of our hearts. *A sigh, a groan, a look, a wish, a silent tear stealing down the cheek—are among the most acceptable offerings that we can present to God!*[Psalm 79:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 79.11); [Psalm 38:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.9); [Psalm 34:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.5); [Psalm 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.17); [Psalm 145:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.19); [Psalm 56:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 56.8). And when his Holy Spirit operates most powerfully upon our hearts, it is "with groanings which cannot be uttered, [Romans 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.23); [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26)." If God looked at the outward services merely, the poor would labor under the greatest disadvantages; but we are assured, that he forms no such partial estimate of men's conduct; but that, "if there is first a willing mind, he accepts us according to what we have, and not according to what we have not, 2 Corinthians 8:12;" so that, provided our exertions be proportioned to our ability, the poorest and weakest among us shall be approved and rewarded equally with those whose abilities and opportunities have been most enlarged. Yes, if through the good providence of God we are incapacitated for any service whatever—yet, if we desire to serve God, he will bear testimony to us before all, saying, "You have done well, in that it was in your heart to serve me!"

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

That we may obtain such a testimony from the Lord,

***~~1. Let the advancement of Christ's spiritual temple be dear unto us.~~***

There is a temple which we are called to build, and of which the temple of Solomon was but a type and shadow. I mean, the Church of Christ, which to all eternity shall be "the habitation of God through the Spirit, [Ephesians 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20-22). [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5)." For the advancement of that spiritual temple, we should long, and pray, and strive; and never cease from our exertions, until God himself "shall bring forth the head-stone, and the whole universe shall shout: Grace, grace unto it! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)."

***~~2. Let us, in all that we do, be particularly attentive to our own hearts.~~***

Many sinister motives are apt to arise and to pollute our best actions. Our *liberality*is apt to savor of ostentation. Our religious acts are apt to savor of pride and vanity ([Matthew 6:1-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.1-18)). But God, "to whom all things are naked and open," will judge according to what he sees in the inmost recesses of the heart—approving of the good that was there, though never carried into effect; and disapproving of our latent hypocrisy, by whatever specious appearances it had been concealed from mortal eyes! Only take care that the heart is right with God, and then all will be well with us, both in time and eternity.

***~~3. Let us be contented with doing what we can for God, though we do not succeed according to our wishes.~~***

If our labors are crowned with present success, we receive, as it were, a present recompense. But if our labor appears to be in vain, we may expect a suitable recompense hereafter. God will reward us, not according to our *success*—but according to our *desires*and *labors*,1 Corinthians 3:8. The very consciousness of endeavoring to honor God is itself an ample reward for all that we can do. Whether we ourselves reap, or leave others to enter into our labors—we should be equally well pleased to serve our God. Let this thought animate us all in our respective stations; and whether our abilities be more or less, let us all endeavor to obtain this testimony from the Lord, "He has done what he could! [Mark 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.8)."

***~~#397~~***

***~~THE CONDESCENSION OF GOD IN BECOMING INCARNATE~~***

**[2 Chronicles 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.18)**

"Will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

*It is nothing but a lack of reflection, that keeps us from being filled with incessant wonder and astonishment.*The things which God has done for us in the works of creation and providence, if duly searched out, would furnish abundant matter for our profoundest adoration. But the provision which he has made for our redemptionexceeds all the bounds of believability!

Even those manifestations of his mercy whereby he shadowed forth the mystery of his incarnation, were so stupendous, that Solomon, who beheld them, could scarcely believe his own eyes. He had erected a temple which was to be a type of Christ's human body. He had just seen God coming down in a cloud to take possession of that temple, and filling it with his glory. He was in the act of dedicating it to God, and of praying that it might be, as it were, a habitation for him; but struck with astonishment at the requests which he was presuming to offer, he pauses, and breaks forth into this hesitating, admiring, adoring exclamation, "But will God really dwell on earth with men?" This was an inconceivable act of condescension as it respected his symbolic presence in a temple of stone; but it was infinitely more so, as it respected his real presence in a body of flesh. To illustrate this we shall,

***~~I. Contrast the characters of God and man.~~***

We can be at no loss for matter to illustrate this subject, since light and darkness, or Christ and Belial, are not more opposite. But that we may not exceed the limits proper for this part of our discourse, we shall draw the contrast in two particulars only:

***~~1. The majesty of God—and the baseness of man.~~***

We have no higher ideas of majesty than those which are conveyed under the terms appropriate to royalty. **God** therefore, in order to suit himself to our feeble apprehensions, adopts those terms in reference to himself. He assumes the title of a king—he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords! [Revelation 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 17.14)." He has moreover all the ensigns of royalty, "Heaven is his throne, and earth is his footstool! [Isaiah 66:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1)." Unnumbered hosts of angels are his retinue, "thousands of thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him! [Daniel 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.10)." Instead of the equipage of an earthly monarch, he "makes the clouds his chariot, and rides on the heavens as upon a horse, [Psalm 104:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 104.3); [Psalm 68:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.4)." So great is his majesty, that "all the nations of the earth are before him only "as the drop of a bucket, or as the small dust upon the balance;" yes, "they are less than nothing and vanity! [Isaiah 40:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.15); [Isaiah 40:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.17)." And so "awesome is his majesty," that, "if he touches the mountains, they smoke; and, if he but looks upon the earth, it trembles! [Psalm 104:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 104.32)." But in attempting to speak of his majesty, we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge." Suffice it therefore to add, that "the Heaven of heavens cannot contain him, verse 18;" and that "his greatness is unsearchable, [Psalm 145:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.3)."

But what is **man**? An atom insect of an atom world! If we compare him with the globe on which we stand, he is a mere worm; but if we compare him with the visible creation; and still more, if we view the universe with the eye of a philosopher, if we compute the distances of the fixed stars, if we suppose that multitudes of them are, like our sun, the center of different and independent systems; if we then compare man with these, what an insignificant being will he appear! The smallest grain of sand is not so diminutive in comparison with the whole terrestrial globe, as the whole human race would be when compared with the other works of God's hands!

But unworthy as man is of God's notice in this view, *he has rendered himself incomparably more unworthy by the commission of sin! By this man has become not merely worthless, but odious and abominable!*In this respect the whole human race are involved in one common lot; and so contemptible are they in his eyes, that there is scarcely an animal among the brute creation to whom he does not liken them, and that too in reference to their most hateful qualities; from whence we may understand, that *man is a compound of everything that is noxious and hateful*.

And can we conceive, that so great and glorious a Being as God should ever deign to notice man; and not only to notice him, but to dwell with him! Simply astonishing!

***~~2. The purity of God—and the sinfulness of man.~~***

Holiness is that attribute of God which is most eminently glorified by the heavenly choir; they cry day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty! [Isaiah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.3)." On earth too, this perfection is peculiarly admired by the saints, who "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness, [Psalm 30:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.4)." Such was God's abhorrence of iniquity, that he cast the *fallen angels*out of Heaven. Nor can he behold sin in *man*, without feeling the utmost indignation against it! [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13).

But why do we mention these things? Such is the holiness of God, that "he charges even his angels with folly, [Job 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 4.18);" and "the very heavens are not clean in his sight, [Job 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.15)."

As for man, he is, unhappily, a total contrast to God in these respects. He is polluted in every member of his *body*, and in every faculty of his *soul*. The inspired writers seem to have labored, as it were, to mark the extreme depravity of man, by specifying that:  
his *members*are altogether instruments of unrighteousness, [Romans 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.13);  
his "*eyes*are full of adultery, [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14),"  
his "*ears*are as deaf as an adder, [Psalm 58:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 58.4);"  
his "*mouth*and *lips*full of cursing and bitterness, [Romans 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.14);"  
his "*tongue*is a world of iniquity, set on fire by Hell, [James 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.6),"  
"his *throat*an open sepulcher, [Romans 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.13);"  
"his *hands*are employed to work iniquity, [Micah 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.3);"  
his "*feet*are swift to shed blood, [Romans 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.15);"  
and, to complete the whole, "his heart is wickedness itself! [Psalm 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.9)."

His **soul**is, if possible—yet more depraved!

His understandingis blinded, so that it "puts evil for good, and darkness for light, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4). [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)."

His willis rebellious, so that it cannot bow to the commands of God, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7).

His affectionsare earthly and sensual.

His memoryis retentive of what is evil, while it lets slip every holy admonition.

His conscienceis partial, excusing where it should condemn; and, in too many, it is "seared as with a hot iron!"

Contrast this character of man, with that of God; and then say, whether it be possible for God to dwell with man.

Having thus prepared the way, we will,

***~~II. Give an answer to the question proposed in the text.~~***

Our answer is short: He not only *will*dwell with man on the earth, but he *has*already done it.

***~~1. God has dwelt with man Symbolically.~~***

When Israel came out of Egypt, God went before them in all their way, and guided them by a *pillar*and a *cloud*; and even to the time of the Babylonish captivity, did he continue by that symbol of his presence to dwell in the midst of his people. This alone was sufficient to show the condescension and grace of God; and to prove that he will make his abode with those who are the objects of his special favor.

***~~2. God has dwelt with man, Personally.~~***

Wonderful as it may appear, God has taken upon him our nature and dwelt among us. In the fullness of time, he appeared on earth; and, though formed, without the intervention of man, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, he came into the world like other infants, passed through the helpless years of childhood, wrought at a base trade until the age of thirty; and then continued nearly four years longer in the exercise of his ministerial office, as the instructor of men, and the Savior of the world. While he was despised and rejected by men, and accounted a worm and no man—he was "God over all blessed for evermore;" "in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily! [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)."

It was in order to prepare the world for this, that he so often appeared to the patriarchal saints, and that he for so many centuries abode in the tabernacle and the temple. By manifesting himself in our flesh, he has clearly shown, that "as his majesty is, so is his mercy."

***~~3. God has dwelt with man, Mystically.~~***

There is yet another temple in which God delights to dwell—even in the broken and contrite heart! [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15). He has repeatedly promised, that he will thus distinguish those who seek him in spirit and in truth. "He will come to them, and make his abode with them, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." "He will dwell in their hearts by faith, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17)." "He will manifest himself unto them as he does not unto the world, [John 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.22)." It was in this way that he enabled all the primitive Christians to shine as lights in a dark world, and to maintain their steadfastness in the midst of the most cruel persecutions. It is in the same way that he still upholds and sanctifies his chosen people, "Such honor have all his saints."

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

Has God in very deed dwelt with man on the earth? Then let us:

***~~1. Marvel at our own ingratitude.~~***

Who would imagine that God should have become a man for us, and should offer moreover to dwell in our hearts—and that we should be so unmindful of him? Is it a light thing that he has done:

to assume our nature, when he passed by the fallen angels;

to assume it in its fallen debased state, as far as he could consistently with his own unspotted holiness;

to assume it for the express purpose of bearing our sins and expiating them by his own death?

Is it a light thing that he offers to do, when he begs us to open our hearts to him, that he may make them his habitation? Yet what are the returns we make to him? We do indeed commemorate both his incarnation, and the descent of the Holy Spirit; but how? with holy feasting, and with spiritual joy?

Do we not rather act, as if he came to liberate us from all restraints, and to give us a licence to forget him, and to abandon ourselves to carnal pleasure? Let us only reflect on the manner in which these holy seasons have been spent by all around us, and how little our own spirit and conduct have accorded with the mercies given unto us—and we shall see reason to blush and be confounded; yes rather, to weep in dust and ashes.

***~~2. Seek to dwell with him in Heaven.~~***

For what purpose has God revealed himself to us in this diversified and astonishing manner? Has it not been to display the exceeding riches of his grace, and to encourage our application to him for a saving interest in his favor? Yes; he would not that we should "dwell with everlasting burnings;" but rather that we should be made partakers of his glory. It was for this end that he became incarnate, and died upon the cross. It is for this end that he yet daily strives with us by his Spirit. In very deed *Jesus dwelt with man on earth, that we might dwell with God in Heaven*. Let us then make a suitable improvement of his unbounded mercy; and secure that exaltation, which he, by his own humiliation, has prepared for us!

***~~#398~~***

***~~DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE~~***

**[2 Chronicles 6:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.41)**

"Now arise, O LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, may your saints rejoice in your goodness!"

The fuller account of the dedication of Solomon's Temple is given us in the 8th chapter of the First Book of Kings. But in this place we have a most interesting part of Solomon's prayer, which in the former place is omitted. The piety and the pathos of these concluding sentences are worthy of the highest admiration. If we were to confine our notice of them to that particular occasion, they would be found replete with instruction; but, knowing as we do *the figurative nature of that whole dispensation*, we must of necessity point out the bearing of these words upon our own times, and upon the Christian Church; and for that purpose we will show:

***~~I. What Solomon desired as the crown of all his labors.~~***

He had built the temple, which in grandeur and beauty exceeded any structure that ever existed upon earth; and he had deposited the ark in the place prepared for it. But he was not satisfied with having executed the office which God had so graciously assigned him; he desired that God would grant his presence in the temple, and render it the means of manifesting his own glory, and of dispensing his blessings to his favored people; and, therefore, in this concluding prayer he implored:

***~~1. The special presence of God in the temple, as His fixed abode.~~***

The ark had hitherto dwelt only in a tabernacle which was moved from place to place. Henceforth it was to have an abiding resting-place in the temple. But in vain would the temple have been built, and in vain the ark fixed in its place—if God himself did not accompany the ark with his special presence. It had been hitherto "the ark of God's strength; because God had, on many occasions, wrought as it were in concert with it, exerting his almighty power wherever it went; but if he should detach himself from it, the people had already seen how incapable the ark itself was of affording them protection, when it had not been able even to protect itself from the Philistine army. Therefore Solomon prayed that God himself would, by that symbol of his presence, the cloud of fire, abide upon it; and thereby give a public testimony of his approbation of the measures which had been adopted, and a visible pledge of his continued favor to his people.

***~~2. An abundant effusion of his promised blessings on all who would frequent it.~~***

Without this, no good end would be attained. Without this, God would not be glorified, nor sinners saved. Hence Solomon prayed for all, both priests and people, that the one might "be clothed with salvation," and the other "rejoice in goodness." That temporal prosperity was included in his petition is probable enough, [Nehemiah 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.25); but, doubtless, spiritual blessings were chiefly solicited, as the portion of them all. A holy priesthood is an inestimable blessing to any people; for, if "those who handle the Law transgress it, [Jeremiah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.8)," and "those who should be a light to others are themselves in darkness, [Romans 2:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.19-21)," what can be expected, but that a general declension should ensue? Hence he desired that the priests should be, not merely clothed in white garments, but clothed with righteousness and salvation; so that they might be examples to the flock, and edify the people to whom they ministered.

In behalf of the people, too, he desired that they should find a rich feast in all God's ordinances, "being abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house, and drinking there of the rivers of his pleasures, [Psalm 36:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.8) with [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6)." In a word, *he desired that universal piety might prevail, and that the happiness attendant on it might be universally dispensed*.

But we hasten to show,

***~~II. What infinitely richer blessings we may expect under our more perfect dispensation.~~***

The temple, with everything pertaining to it, was "a figure for the time then present," a "shadow of good things to come."

Here we must view the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true Ark, in which the tablets of the Law were deposited, and on which the mercy-seat was placed, and into which the angels desired with incessant scrutiny to search, [Hebrews 9:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.4-5). [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12). Yes, in the verse following my text, Solomon clearly refers to him, "O Lord God, turn not away the face of your anointed; remember the mercies of David your servant!" What was the mercy here pre-eminently referred to? It was, that God in due time would raise up unto David that august progeny, "who should sit upon his throne; and of whose kingdom there should be no end! [Luke 1:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.32-33)." The very words of Solomon are so applied by the Prophet Isaiah, [Isaiah 55:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.3), and so explained by Peter, who both cites them, and comments on them to this precise effect, [Acts 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.34). But that which throws the fullest light upon this passage, is the 132nd Psalm, (probably composed by Solomon himself on this very occasion,) wherein all the same expressions are twice used: first, in a way of prayer; and next, in a way of promise; and their prophetic reference to Christ is plainly and incontrovertibly declared, "Arise, O Lord, into your rest; you, and the ark of your strength. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness; and let your saints shout for joy; for your servant David's sake turn not away the face of your anointed. The Lord has sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it. Of the fruit of your body, I will set upon your throne [Psalm 132:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.8-11); [Psalm 132:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.13-16). In this Psalm the Incarnation of Christ is specified; in the two preceding passages, the Resurrection.

What, then, in this sense of the passage, is the desire here expressed? It is simply this, "Come, O blessed Lord, and dwell in your house, as you have promised!" You have said, "Wherever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" and again, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Let it now be seen that you are with us, "manifest yourself unto us, as you do not unto the world;" and let it be clearly shown by the mighty working of your power upon our souls, that we are indeed your people!

***~~The blessings we may expect are great, in proportion to the excellency of the dispensation under which we now live.~~***

What ministers may we not hope to find in the Christian Church, instructed us they are in the great mystery of redemption, and commissioned as they are to proclaim salvation to men through the sacrifice of their incarnate God! If "they who bare the vessels of the Lord," under the Jewish dispensation, were required to "be clean;" then much more should they be holy, and "clothed with righteousness," who go forth as ambassadors from God, and stand in the very place of Christ, to preach the word of reconciliation to a guilty world! 2 Corinthians 5:20.

And what ought our persons to be? What may we not expect from them who are thus divinely taught, and who have all "the unsearchable riches of Christ imparted to them?" We are told, that, "by comprehending with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of Christ, we are to be filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19);" and therefore we may well expect that those who, through the ministry of the Gospel, are led into the knowledge of these incomprehensible mysteries, will "rejoice in all this goodness," yes, "rejoice in it with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!"

Certainly, the fruit of the Gospel should exceed that of the Law; for so are we taught in Scripture to expect, that "the light of the moon in our day should be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, [Isaiah 30:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.26)." "Behold," says God, "I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be glad, and rejoice forever, in that which I create; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying! [Isaiah 65:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.17-19)." This, then, brethren, is the blessedness I desire for you; and I pray God that all of us, both priest and people, may so walk, as to approve ourselves to Him, who assumed our nature, and tabernacled among us [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14), and laid down his life for us.

***~~To improve this subject, I would add,~~***

***~~1. Let us consecrate our souls to God, as his temple.~~***

As glorious as the Temple of Solomon was, and as greatly as God honored it by his presence, I hesitate not to say that it was contemptible, in comparison with an abode which you may offer him in a broken and contrite spirit! [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15); [Isaiah 56:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 56.1-2). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will come and take up their residence within you, brethren, if you will but open the door of your hearts, and implore of them this high honor! [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23). And what holiness and happiness you shall then possess, I need not say. Let every one of you seek this honor; and not one of you shall be disappointed of his hope.

***~~2. Let us plead with him his great and precious promises.~~***

Solomon entreats of God to "remember the mercies promised to David." Thus take every promise contained in God's blessed word; and spread it before him. He bids you to "put him in remembrance, and declare your affiance in him, [Isaiah 43:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.26)." And if you do this, you shall be constrained to acknowledge, as Joshua after an experience of fourscore years acknowledged, that not one of all the things which God has promised to you has ever failed! [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14).

***~~#399~~***

***~~GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS OWN HOUSE~~***

**[2 Chronicles 7:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 7.15-16)**

"My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there!"

Never, from the foundation of the world, was there so magnificent a structure as Solomon's Temple, or so imposing a scene as that which took place at the dedication of it. The prayer which Solomon offered on that occasion was no less remarkable; in point of humility and fervor and propriety, nothing could exceed it. The answer also that was given to it was singularly encouraging. Compare the petition to which my text refers, with the answer given to it in the text itself, "Now, my God, let, I beseech you, your eyes be open, and let your ears be intent unto the prayer that is made in this place, [2 Chronicles 6:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.40)."

These very words does God repeat to him in a way of promise, and with great additional force, "My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there!"

These words will afford me a fit occasion to show,

***~~I. The regard which God bears to his house.~~***

We marvel at the condescension of Almighty God, when he says, "My eyes and my heart will always be there!" But he regarded that structure, and he regards every place that is built for his more immediate service,

***~~1. As the house where he will more especially reside.~~***

The whole land of Israel was dear to him in this view. Moses says of it, "It is a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year, [Deuteronomy 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.12)." But this house was his more peculiar residence, "his name was put there, [Deuteronomy 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.11) with [2 Chronicles 6:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.5-6)." He was invited by Solomon to come and take possession of it, "Arise, O Lord, into your resting-place, you, and the ark of your strength, [2 Chronicles 6:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.41)."

And, in answer to Solomon's request, he came down visibly and abode within it, "Now, when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from Heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house! verse 1, 2." To this event the Psalmist refers, when he says, "The Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation; This is my rest forever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it, [Psalm 132:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.14-15)." Hence it may well be said, that "God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob, [Psalm 87:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.2)."

***~~2. As the theater where he will display his glory.~~***

In the *temple*were displayed, under types and shadows—all the wonders of redeeming love. The sacrifices that were offered, the consuming of them upon the altar, the carrying of their blood within the veil to sprinkle the mercy-seat of the Most High, the offering of incense also before the mercy-seat—all prefigured the atoning sacrifice, and the prevailing intercession of the Lord Jesus, through which every sinner in the universe may find acceptance with God. The whole of the services there offered were "a shadow of good things to come, [Hebrews 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1);" and in the temple alone were they allowed to exist.

But now are the same things declared plainly and explicitly by every servant of the Most High that is called to preach the Gospel of Christ. Yes, every minister that is taught of God proclaims this truth, "It 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)." And though this message may be greatly diversified in the mode of its delivery, it is in substance the same with all; for every faithful minister "determines, with the Apostle, to know nothing among his people except Jesus Christ and him crucified [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2)." And where is this mystery unfolded, but in the house of God? True, the house of God is pre-eminently "the house of prayer;" but it is also the place where "the glory of God is displayed as shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ," and a free salvation is proclaimed to all the sinners of mankind.

***~~3. As the throne from whence he will dispense his blessings.~~***

To the temple of old, every sinner brought his offering; and from thence he departed with a comfortable hope that he was accepted by his God. And say, brethren, whether you have not found God in this place, ready to hear and answer your most enlarged petitions? Have you not found the word that was delivered in the Savior's name, "quick, and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword?" Has it not brought conviction to your minds; and been effectual, also, to administer consolation to your souls? Has not grace been administered by means of it? and have you not found it a channel of communication to your souls, insomuch that you have here "drunk as of rivers of water," and "feasted, as it were, upon fat things," that have nourished your souls unto life eternal?

Yes truly, God has said that he would "beautify the place of his sanctuary, and make the place of his feet glorious, [Isaiah 60:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.13);" and in these divine communications his own soul, no less than the souls of his people, has been refreshed, and filled with joy! [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.41). [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17).

From the regard which God bears to his house, we see,

**II. The feeling which we also should have towards it.**

Are God's "eyes and heart upon his house perpetually?" Then *we*also should regard it,

***~~1. With a reverential sense of its sanctity.~~***

I readily grant, that there is not the same measure of sanctity in holy buildings and in holy vessels now, that there was under the Mosaic economy, where "Touch not, taste not, handle not," constituted so great a part of the divine Law.

But, on the other hand, there is an immense distance between things sacred and things common; nor is there any person of real piety who would willingly break down this distinction. It is possible, I grant, for this idea to be carried to an extreme of superstition; but it is equally possible for it to be spurned at in a way of grievous impiety.

Different usages may prevail in different places, in perfect consistency with a befitting reverence for the house of God; but what our blessed Lord did in driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, may serve to show us that what has been consecrated to God ought not to be turned to a profane use; and more especially, while it is acknowledged as the place which God delights to honor with his peculiar presence, it should be approached with reverence; and, in the spirit of our minds at least, we should "put off our shoes, when we tread on such holy ground;" for God has expressly and most authoritatively said, "You shall reverence my sanctuary; I am the Lord! [Leviticus 19:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.30)."

***~~2. With gratitude for mercies there received.~~***

Methinks, of some of you it may be said, that "you were born there, [Psalm 87:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.4)." And what a blessing is this! In comparison with it, the whole world is lighter than the dust upon the balance. Call to mind how ignorant you once were of those things which belong to your everlasting peace. *Once you knew not what guilt you had contracted in the sight of God, and to what tremendous judgments you were exposed.*You knew not:  
what provision God had made for you in his Gospel;  
the necessity of an atonement;  
the suitableness and sufficiency of the atonement which Christ has made;  
the nature of a life of faith on Christ;  
the work and offices of the Holy Spirit;  
the beauty and excellency of holiness.

These, and a variety of other things, were altogether unknown to you, until you heard them in this place, and God "opened the eyes of your understanding to understand them." Only call to mind:  
what a load of guilt has been removed from your souls;  
what peace and joy have flowed in upon you through the preached Word;  
what strength has been imparted to you to resist temptations, and to fulfill your duties to the Lord;  
and, finally, what anticipations and foretastes of your heavenly inheritance you have here enjoyed—and you will not regard with indifference the very spot where such mercies have been given unto you; but will be ready to say, "If I do not remember you, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy, [Psalm 137:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 137.6)."

***~~3. With desire for yet further blessings.~~***

To our last hour shall we need yet further blessings from the Lord. As all the males of the land came up to the temple thrice every year to offer their accustomed offerings, so we must still come up to the house of God, to renew our supplications at the throne of his grace, and to receive from him such communications as our necessities require. Even when at a distance from the temple, the Jews looked towards it with a view to express more fully their faith and hope in the God of Israel; and so should we, not indeed to any individual edifice, but to the house of God where his people are assembled, "panting after it as the deer after the water-brooks, and saying; When shall I come and appear before God! [Psalm 42:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1-2)."

It should be a comfort to us to reflect how often we have in past times "gone up with the multitude to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, [Psalm 42:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.4);" and we should long to have those opportunities renewed, that God may yet again be glorified in us, and that the whole work of his grace may be perfected within us.

**Improvement.**

**1. As members of the great community, let your expectations be enlarged.**

"When did God ever say to any, Seek my face in vain?" No indeed, "God delights in the prayer of the upright;" not a sigh shall pass unnoticed by him, [Psalm 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.5), or a look be directed towards him, without some special token of his regard, [Psalm 34:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.5). "Only draw near to him, and you never need fear but that he will draw near to you, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8)."

***~~2. As individual believers, assure yourselves that God will not overlook you.~~***

Did God so regard the Temple of Solomon? Know that you who have believe in Christ are far more acceptable temples than that. While that was yet standing in all its glory, God poured contempt upon it in comparison with "a poor and contrite spirit, [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1-2)." Yes, "to a contrite sinner he will look" with delight, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15); and "in him will he dwell, as in his temple, 2 Corinthians 6:16." Towards him "his ears shall be intent;" and on him shall be fixed "his eyes and his heart perpetually." Know, then, your privilege, my beloved brethren; and value as you ought the honor thus accorded to you.

***~~#400~~***

***~~THE DUTY OF PROTESTANTS~~***

**[2 Chronicles 11:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 11.13-16)**

"The priests and Levites from all their districts throughout Israel (the idolatrous Northern Kingdom) sided with him (Rehoboam, king of Judah, the Southern Kingdom). The Levites even abandoned their pasturelands and property, and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the LORD. And he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat and calf idols he had made. Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the LORD, the God of their fathers."

[Explanatory note: In Simeon's comments below, he likens the pious people who left the idolatrous Northern Kingdom to come to the Southern Kingdom of Judah where the true God was worshiped—to those pious Protestants who came out of the idolatrous Catholic Church to worship the true God.]

In this age of revolutions, it may be well to turn our attention to perhaps the greatest, speediest, completest and least bloody revolution that is recorded in the annals of the whole world. The empire of Solomon, if not large in extent, was exceedingly powerful; but no sooner was he removed from it, than his son, instead of conciliating the regards of his subjects, disgusted them with the most insulting threats, and drove them, in utter desperation, to revolt. Far the larger half of his people, even ten tribes out of twelve, formed themselves into a separate and independent state; and continued, throughout all successive periods of their existence, not only as an independent, but a hostile nation. To enter into any discussion about the rights of the different parties, would be altogether foreign to our purpose, and to the occasion for which we are assembled; though we cannot refrain from expressing our most unqualified reprobation of Rehoboam's folly, in listening to the extravagant counsels of his young friends, instead of following the sage advice of the elders.

But in a religious view, this revolution was pregnant with consequences of the most important nature. Jeroboam, in order to keep his new subjects from going up to Jerusalem to worship according to the Law of Moses, set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel, that the people might worship them, or, perhaps, that they might worship Jehovah in and through them. Having appointed a new worship, he appointed new priests to officiate in it, excluding of course from that service all the ministers of Jehovah.

What now must be done throughout all his dominions? Shall the godly conform to this idolatry? No; a schism was instantly created; and all the godly in the land forsook their country, and united themselves to the worshipers of Jehovah in Jerusalem; entering thus their solemn protest against the abominations which had been introduced.

Now this will lead me to set before you,

***~~I. The conduct of Protestants in that day.~~***

It was not on account of some trifling regulations about non-essential matters, that they withdrew themselves, but on account of the utter subversion of their religion, and the establishment of idolatry in its stead. Nor did they rise up in rebellion against the government, or attempt to maintain their religion with the sword. They peaceably withdrew; and sought to enjoy in another country the blessings of which they were deprived in their own. Their conduct was altogether such as befit the servants of the Most High:

***~~1. They bore their testimony against the reigning abominations.~~***

Of all the Levites of the land, we read not of so much as one who consented to renounce his principles for filthy lucre sake. A noble example this! and nobly followed, too, by all the godly of the land! for it is said, "Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the LORD, the God of their fathers." It is probable that they had no hope of effecting anything by remonstrance; but here was a testimony far more decisive than any mere remonstrance could be. It was open and visible to all; and could not but produce a very great sensation through the land. It spoke, in fact, so loudly and intelligibly, as to leave the whole nation without excuse.

***~~2. They adhered steadfastly to the service of their God.~~***

It is said, "they followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the LORD, the God of their fathers." It was by sacrifice only that they could approach their God; and it was in the temple only that the sacrifices could be offered. There, then, they would go. Nothing should detain them from thence. They would not willingly offend man; but they were determined not to neglect their God. His honor and his authority were, in their minds, considerations of paramount importance; and, if enjoined to worship any other God, or to refrain from serving him, their answer was, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge."

***~~3. They renounced all for conscience sake.~~***

The priests left their cities, their suburbs, their possessions, and abandoned all for conscience sake. The people, too, even all the godly of the land, forsook their all, that they might approve themselves faithful to their God. This was a severe test of their integrity; but their piety was equal to the occasion. And though, in individual instances, we may certainly find much greater sacrifices for conscience sake—yet perhaps, on so large a scale, this was never equaled in any country under Heaven.

But let us pass on to what more immediately concerns ourselves, namely,

***~~II. Our duty as Protestants, at the present day.~~***

The abominations of Popery are scarcely more tolerable than those which Jeroboam established. And it is a mercy to us that our forefathers had courage and piety enough to protest against them. But we have our duties also to perform.

***~~1. We should realize our own Protestant principles.~~***

To what purpose do we renounce the superstitions of the Romish Church, while we hold fast the greatest and most fundamental error of all—the doctrine of human merit! I grant that we do not maintain this error in the same open, gross, and avowed way in which it is held by the Papists; but on the subject of salvation by faith alone, we have all the same jealousies as the Papists. Yes, though Protestants by profession, the great mass of us are looking for salvation by our own repentances or reformations, rather than by the simple exercise of faith in Christ.

In the ministry of the Word, instead of bringing forward the great doctrine of justification by faith alone, as that which is universally admitted, approved, and gloried in—we are forced to make a thousand apologies, in order to ward off from ourselves the imputation of being Antinomians and heretics.

O brethren! it should not be thus. We ought all to rejoice that we are emancipated from the bonds in which Popery holds its deluded votaries, and to glory in the Lord Jesus Christ as all our salvation and all our desire.

***~~2. We should show the superior efficacy of Protestant doctrines to sanctify the heart and life.~~***

There have been surely many eminently pious men in the Church of Rome; but they were pious in despite of their errors. So far as they were influenced by superstition, their piety was debased, rather than advanced.

Christianity gives liberty to the soul, instead of reducing it to a state of bondage; and, if we possess that liberty, it should elevate us to a higher and nobler course than can be attained by the servile principles of Popery.

Papists withdraw altogether from the world. We Protestants, while in the world, should show ourselves above it, "dead to" its cares, and "crucified to" its allurements.

Papists, in order to mortify the flesh, have recourse to absurd and self-tormenting usages, which, while they lacerate the body, puff up the soul with pride and self-applause. We Protestants must seek the elevation of the soul in high and holy affections, "having our conversation in Heaven," and delighting ourselves in God.

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who are conforming to this vain world.~~***

Behold the conduct of the pious Israelites, and blush! They, for the honor of their God, forsook all that they possessed. Just so, if you, either from the love of the world, or from the fear of man, are averse to make this sacrifice for your Lord and Savior, glory not in being Protestants; but seek to become Christians; for on no other terms than these will Christ ever acknowledge you as his disciples, [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33).

***~~2. Those who, like the pious Israelites, are "setting their hearts fully to seek the Lord their God".~~***

No man ever repented of "following the Lord fully." Such people may have less of this world; and may at times be reduced to great necessities, even as the Apostle Paul was on different occasions. But the presence of God with their souls, and the testimony of a good conscience, will amply compensate for all the losses they can sustain, and for all the evils they can suffer, in so good a cause. Even in this present life will those who give up their all for Christ, "receive in return a hundred-fold, [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30)." But what they shall reap in the eternal world, who can tell? Ask those who are now in Heaven, "where they came out of great tribulations, [Revelation 7:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-17)," whether they have ever for one instant regretted the sacrifices they made for the Lord; and take for your own comfort the testimony which you feel well assured you would, without one single exception, receive from them.

***~~#401~~***

***~~HUMILIATION THE MEANS OF DELIVERANCE~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 12.7)~~***

"When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, this word of the LORD came to Shemaiah: "Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance. My wrath will not be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak."

Repentance is so plain and acknowledged a duty, that it is never unseasonable to call men to the performance of it; while, on the other hand, so great are our encouragements to it, that we rather account it a *privilege*than a duty. The instances wherein God has recorded his condescension to penitents of old time, are almost numberless; the one before us, even if there were no other, would of itself be sufficient to encourage all, whether nations or individuals, to abase themselves before him, and to seek his favor with an assurance that they would not seek it in vain.

For the space of three years Rehoboam continued to walk in the ways of David and of Solomon, [2 Chronicles 11:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 11.17). But having, as he thought, strengthened himself against all assault from foreign enemies, "he forsook the law of the Lord, as did all Israel together with him, verse 1." For this great defection God stirred up Shishak king of Egypt to come forth against him with a large army. Shishak surely was of himself willing enough to invade a country which offered the prospect of such abundant spoil as Jerusalem did at that time; but, though unconscious of any foreign agency, he was only an instrument in God's hands, sent forth to punish the transgressions of revolted Israel, verse 2. Success attended the invading army in all their movements; the fenced cities all successively fell into their hands; and at last Jerusalem itself became their prey. In less than five short years all the wealth which David and Solomon had treasured up in the temple and in the king's house, was swept away, and delivered over as a spoil to a victorious enemy.

And now would Jerusalem itself also have been utterly destroyed, if the arm of justice had not been arrested by the penitential cries of Rehoboam and his nobles. God had sent a prophet to declare to them the grounds and reasons of the judgments that were now inflicted on them; and they, seeing that all other hope had failed them, betook themselves to repentance. To this God had respect, as our text informs us; and, on seeing their repentance, he sent the same prophet to assure them, that he would suspend his uplifted arm, and forbear to execute upon them his judgments according to the full measure of their deserts.

Now from the message which was sent to them from the Lord we may properly observe,

***~~I. That sin will surely bring the judgments of God upon us!~~***

It matters not by whom sin is committed; for all are equally amenable to the laws of God, and must stand on an equal footing at the bar of judgment. Kings and princes are in this respect on a level with the lowest of mankind; for "God is not a respecter of persons."

Nor must we imagine that those sins only which are of greater enormity in our eyes will be noticed by God; for he notices the violations of the first table, as well as of the second; and those of defect as well as those of actual transgression. The sum of the two tablets is, that "we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; and our neighbor as ourselves." It will be to little purpose, that we have not bowed down to strange gods, if we have withheld from Jehovah the entire devotion of our souls; or that we have not injured our neighbor by the open crimes of adultery and murder, if we have withheld from him those holy exercises of brotherly affection which God has made his due. Sins of *omission*must be accounted for, as well as those of *commission*; and not one escapes the notice of the heart-searching God.

Our iniquities, because committed long ago, may be forgotten by us; but not one of them is forgotten by God! They are all recorded in the book of his remembrance; and the precise measure of "wrath" that is due to each "is treasured up," against the day that the vials of God's wrath shall be poured out. *Every sin leaves a stain behind it;*and as the hunted stag, though far removed from the sight or hearing of his pursuers, is traced by them until he is overtaken and destroyed—so will the sinner be by the judgments of the Most High; according as it is said, "Evil shall hunt the wicked man, to overthrow him!" Yes, to every sinner under Heaven must it be said, "Be sure your sin will find you out!"

Nor is there any possibility of escape, but by sincere repentance; since God has ordained,

***~~II. That sin, in order to its being forgiven, must be repented of.~~***

"God has commanded all men everywhere to repent!" He has declared, that, "except we repent, we must all perish."

But let it not be thought that repentance is a mere light and transient emotion. No indeed; repentance is a far different thing from what is generally supposed. It must be general, not relating to some few particular acts, but to the state and habit of our souls throughout our whole lives. It must also be *deep*, like that of the publican, leading us to smite on our bosoms with deep contrition, and to cry for mercy as the most unworthy of mankind.

One thing in particular we notice in Rehoboam and the princes; they acknowledged, that "God was righteous" in all that he had brought upon them, verse 6. And until we also are brought sincerely and from our inmost souls to acknowledge, that he may justly enter into judgment with us, and consign our souls over to everlasting perdition, we are not truly penitent. We see not our own demerit; we virtually deny God's right to punish us; we are proud, unhumbled, unsubdued.

*Our penitence must also lead us to cast ourselves altogether upon God's promised mercy in Christ Jesus.*This it is which constitutes the difference between that "repentance which is unto salvation," and which is "never to be repented of"—and that repentance which will fall short of salvation, and leave room for everlasting sorrow in the world to come. If our hope terminate on anything short of the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have not yet learned the extent of our fall, or the impossibility of being saved by any name but his.

It is, however, no little consolation to know,

***~~III. That sin, truly repented of, shall assuredly be forgiven.~~***

How delightful the evidence of this in the passage before us! God sends his servant to announce to his penitent people his compassion towards them, and his readiness to forgive; expressly grounding his forgiveness on the penitence which they had evinced. And where shall we find any instance of penitence despised, or of judgments inflicted on one who with sincerity of heart implored mercy at God's hands?

We will take an instance of one whose crimes perhaps exceeded those of any other individual from the foundation of the world—the idolatrous, and murderous *Manasseh*. He, like Rehoboam and his courtiers, thought not of repentance, until he was reduced, as it were, to the lowest ebb of misery; but even then his cry was heard; and his supplication entered into the ears of this Lord Almighty! [2 Chronicles 33:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.11-13).

Just so, if we are truly penitent, whatever may have been the extent of our iniquity, it shall be forgiven. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon, [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7)." Only let us "repent and turn ourselves from all our transgressions, and then iniquity shall not be our ruin, [Ezekiel 18:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.30)," Though "our sins have been many, they shall be forgiven, [Luke 7:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47);" and "where sin has abounded, the grace of our God shall much more abound! [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20)."

***~~And now permit me to institute a most important inquiry.~~***

Respecting Rehoboam and the princes, it is said, "God saw that they humbled themselves;" and of this God testified, saying, "They have humbled themselves." Now then I ask, Can he bear the same testimony respecting you? Has he seen you weeping in secret on account of your multiplied iniquities? Can he say of you as he does of Ephraim, "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself;" and can he, as he did in Ephraim's case, rehearse the very language of your lips and hearts, and attest your every motion, whether of body or mind, as indicating the depth and sincerity of your repentance, [Jeremiah 31:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18-19). Call to mind the time, the place, the occasion; aay whether it arose only out of some particular circumstances, or whether it be the stated habit of your mind? Were this indeed the general frame of your souls, we would be hopeful for you, assured that God has already said concerning you, "Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the LORD, [Jeremiah 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.20)." There can be no doubt respecting anyone "who thus sows in tears, that he shall soon reap in joy! [Psalm 126:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5)."

But respecting too many of you, must not the testimony of God be the very reverse of this? Must not the heart-searching God say respecting the generality: "I have seen in them no repentance at all. I have seen them agitated times without number on account of earthly things; I have seen them angry, when offended; and grieved, when they have suffered loss; but I have never seen them angry at themselves for offending Me, nor bemoaning, as they should have done, the loss of their own souls. If you were to form your estimate from what has been seen in them, you must conclude, that sin is no great evil; that repentance on account of it is of no urgent necessity; and that acceptance with me is not worth the trouble of it."

Must he not further testify respecting some, "I have seen their parents, yes, and their minister too, weeping over them; but I have never seen them weeping for themselves."

Now, brethren, it is to little purpose for you to say, "I have repented," unless "your sorrow has been of a godly sort;" for you will not be judged by what you are pleased to call repentance, but by the standard of God's blessed word; it is by that that God forms his estimate of you now; and by that will you be judged in the last day. "Judge yourselves therefore now, that you may not be judged by the Lord."

If it were only such a destruction as impended over Jerusalem, that were about to come upon you, methinks I would be content to let you "sleep on and take your rest;" but, when I reflect that it is an "*everlasting*destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," I tremble at the thought of your exposure to it, and of its being the doom to which you are so soon to be consigned!

Begin then this necessary work, before it be too late! Consider God as now calling you to it by me, as he called his people of old by the Prophet Shemaiah. Never cease to abase yourselves before him, until he shall have said concerning you, "I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, [Isaiah 57:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.18)." You may be assured, that, if now you, "Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up! [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.9-10)." He will say, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; for I have found and accepted a ransom for him! [Job 33:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.27-28)."

***~~#402~~***

***~~THE EVIL OF NEGLECTING PRAYER~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 12.14)~~***

"He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD."

If we were to judge by the conduct of all around us, we would suppose that religion required no effort; and that eternal happiness was to be acquired in a neglect of all the means which God has appointed for the attainment of it. But "the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force!" The *means*are closely connected with the *end.*

Even in earthly things, wealth is, for the most part, the fruit of diligence; and poverty the result of idleness. But in spiritual things it may be invariably said that, "he who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly, and that he who sows bountifully shall reap bountifully."

Of King Rehoboam we are informed that there were hopeful appearances at the beginning, since "for *three years*he and his people walked in the way of David and Solomon, [2 Chronicles 11:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 11.17);" but "when he was established in his kingdom, he forsook the Law of the Lord, and all Israel with him, verse 1." From that period "he did evil;" which melancholy change is here accounted for, "He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD."

From this conduct of his I will take occasion to show,

***~~I. How man can alone be preserved from evil.~~***

It is "by seeking after God;" yet not simply by that, but by "*setting his heart*on seeking the LORD." Now this implies,

***~~1. Meditation.~~***

A man can never prevail against sin, if he does not give himself to serious meditation upon the concerns of his soul. He must consider:

the end for which he has been sent into the world;

the responsibility of his soul for the use of those means which God has appointed for his happiness;

and, above all, the great wonders of redemption, whereby alone a fallen creature can ever obtain mercy with an offended God.

It is in this way alone that he can get his mind into a proper frame for prosecuting the work which God has given him to do.

***~~2. Self-examination.~~***

It is necessary that we obtain correct views of our own state before God. And for this end we must compare ourselves, not with those around us, but with God's revealed will, which alone will bring us to a just estimate of our own character. People of different ages, and under different circumstances, have peculiar temptations, and peculiar failing's; and it is by searching out, each his own peculiar weaknesses and faults, that any real humiliation can be produced, or any clear perception of the evils to which we are most exposed. *Without such a knowledge of our own hearts, we cannot "seek God" with effect.*Only as we know our own sins, can we deplore them as we ought, or plead for mercy as we ought from our offended God.

***~~3. Fixedness of heart to follow the dictates of our conscience.~~***

The words "set his heart" are, in the marginal translation, "fixed his heart." *There must be in us a fixed purpose to renounce sin, and a determination, through grace, to surrender up ourselves entirely to God*in newness of heart and life. Without this fixedness of purpose, we shall vacillate between sin and duty, and never become steadfast in the ways of God.

We may therefore easily foresee,

***~~II. The certain consequence of neglecting the appointed means.~~***

***~~1. As long as we neglect to set our heart on seeking the LORD, our corruptions will rage.~~***

"The heart of every man is full of evil." Our corruptions may vary according to our age or condition in life, but our besetting sins, whatever they may are, will gather strength.

A fire, if not checked, will produce a conflagration, as long as there are any materials to burn. Just so, our corruptions, if allowed to remain unmortified, will burn even to the lowest Hell.

There is in every man "a spiritual, as well us a fleshly, filthiness;" and both the one and the other will overspread the whole man, even like a leprosy, though under different forms, according to the dispositions and habits of every different individual.

**2.** **As long as we neglect to set our heart on seeking the LORD, our temptations will multiply.**

Men, if they turn not to God, will frequent those scenes which most amuse them, and that company which is most in accordance with their taste. Their pursuits will all be of such a nature as shall tend rather to confirm, than to eradicate, the corruptions of their hearts; and thus they will be working out their own damnation from day to day—even as a child of God is daily "working out his salvation." What but ruin can proceed from such a course?

***~~3. As long as we neglect to set our heart on seeking the LORD, our enemies will prevail.~~***

Satan is a great adversary, whom we are commanded to oppose; and a divine panoply is provided for us, that we may be able to withstand him. But if we do not put our armor on—then how can we hope to vanquish him? He will "lead us captive at his will," yes, "he will devour us as a roaring lion!"

***~~Get then your minds deeply imbued with,~~***

***~~1. A sense of your weakness.~~***

It is impossible to have too deep a sense of our incapacity for what is good. To be "as a little child" is almost the summit of spiritual attainment. And, strange as it may appear, you "never are so truly strong, as when you are thus weak;" for then will God interpose for you, and "perfect his own strength in your weakness."

***~~2. A persuasion of the efficacy of prayer.~~***

If we really believed that our prayers would be answered, methinks we would be urging our requests all the day long. Observe, in the Scriptures, God's answers to prayer: how marked! how speedy! how effectual! Truly, "however wide we might open our mouths, God would fill them." And all that he did for the Lord Jesus Christ corporeally, in raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand above all the principalities and powers of Heaven, he would do mystically and spiritually in us, [Ephesians 1:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-22) with 2:4-7, and "make us more than conquerors through Him who loved us!"

***~~3. A conviction of the necessity of holiness in order to your happiness in the eternal world.~~***

To "do evil," and continue in it, can outcome in nothing but destruction. "Christ came to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Let, I beg you, the end of his grace be answered in this way; and never cease to plead with him, until he has "delivered you from all evil," and "bruised Satan himself under your exulting and triumphant feet!"

***~~#403~~***

***~~ABIJAH'S REMONSTRANCE WITH JEROBOAM~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 13.12)~~***

"God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you. Men of Israel, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed!"

[For a Fast-Day in war]

*Good advice should be attended to, by whoever it may be given.* Our blessed Lord particularly inculcated this on his disciples, commanding them to do whatever those who sat in Moses' chair required of them, without regarding the moral character of the people themselves, or refusing compliance with what was good, because it was not exemplified in the conduct of their instructors.

The words before us were not spoken by a godly man; for Abijah was on the whole a wicked king, [1 Kings 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 15.3); but they contain very sound instruction, and have a semblance even of piety itself. The whole address indeed was well fitted for the occasion, though it certainly savors much of that partiality which is found in almost all who plead their own cause. There is undoubtedly a good deal of false coloring in what he speaks, to the disparagement of his enemies, though there is ground for his assertions, if they had been more carefully expressed and more duly qualified. Notwithstanding Abijah had invaded Jeroboam's country, in order to make that, rather than his own country, the seat of war, we think it probable that Jeroboam was the aggressor; because the address of Abijah was altogether of a peaceable nature. It seems from the words of our text that he labored hard to prevent the war; and if his adversary had been like-minded with himself, the dispute might perhaps have been amicably adjusted.

We shall consider the words of our text,

***~~I. In reference to the contest then pending between Judah and Israel.~~***

***~~Abijah's address was certainly striking and judicious.~~***

Abijah contrasts the usurpation and idolatry of Jeroboam with the legitimate claims of his own family, and their continued adherence to the God of their fathers, verse 4-11; and surely these were just grounds for hope, that God would espouse his cause; for though it may please God for a season to let the ungodly triumph over his people—yet we believe, that, as a righteous Governor, he will ultimately favor the cause of righteousness and truth.

Well did the Israelites know that there could be no effectual resistance to the Lord Almighty, especially when those who were under his command were observant of the laws appointed for them. Hence, when Abijah told his adversaries, that he had come forth in dependence on God's aid, and in a strict observance of his commands, [Numbers 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 10.9). This passage reflects much light on the text, they had reason to tremble for themselves, and to refrain from prosecuting the contest any further. True indeed, a hypocrite may make all these pretensions, even as Rabshakeh did in his address to Hezekiah's servants, [Isaiah 36:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 36.10); but where the dependence is real, and the obedience true, a successful outcome may justly be expected.

***~~The outcome justified Abijah's expectations.~~***

While Abijah was endeavoring to avert the conflict, Jeroboam sought by stratagem to overwhelm him and all his followers. He placed in ambush a considerable portion of his army, and attacked Abijah both in front and rear. But Abijah "cried unto the Lord; and the priests sounded with their trumpets; and the men of Judah gave a shout," expressive of their confidence in God; and immediately the hosts of Israel turned their backs; and, though they were twice as numerous as their enemies, no less than five hundred thousand of them fell down slain before the victorious army of Judah. Never was there such a slaughter in one single battle, either before or since; and the outcome of that day fully proves that those who fight for God have nothing to fear; nor those who fight against him, have anything to hope, [Ezekiel 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 22.14) with [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31).

Taking the text in somewhat of an accommodated sense, we will proceed to consider it,

***~~II. In reference to the contest now pending between God and His enemies.~~***

***~~There is a contest now existing between God and His enemies.~~***

By every sin that men commit, they do indeed "fight against God." What shall we say of:  
those who cast off their allegiance to the God of Israel;  
those who bow down to idols of their own creation;  
those who disregard the word and ordinances of their God;  
and those who seek only to wound and destroy those who warn them of their guilt and danger?

Are not they avowed enemies to God? They are! Their own reason may tell them so. The Scriptures universally declare it. Justify themselves as they may, their excuses are all vain; and they only deceive their own souls.

***~~"Allow then the word of exhortation."~~***

"O children of Israel, do not fight against the Lord God of your fathers!" We are appointed of God to "blow the trumpet of alarm against you;" and we must blow it, at the peril of our own souls; we must "lift up our voice as a trumpet, and show you both your sin" and danger! [Isaiah 58:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.1). It is against God, even "the Captain of our salvation" himself, that you are fighting.

It is his majesty that you oppose.

It is his law that you trample on.

It is his mercy that you despise.

It is his salvation that you reject!

O think with yourselves, Can you prosper? "Did ever any harden themselves against him and prosper? [Job 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.4)." No indeed, "it is in vain to kick against the goads;" "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished! [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21)."

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

***~~1. From the first view of this subject, we may learn how to obtain the blessing of God upon our weaponry.~~***

It is not by confidence in an arm of flesh that we can hope to prevail, but by a humble trust in God. It is said, "The children of Israel prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers, verse 18." Notwithstanding the numbers and the stratagems of their enemies, they prevailed because God himself fought for them. Let us then by prayer and supplication call God to our aid, and rest assured that he will interpose for us in the hour of necessity.

While indeed we trust in him for success, we must use every effort for the attainment of peace; but if our adversary will not listen to reasonable terms, then may we go forth with confidence against him, knowing that "with God it is alike easy to save by many or by few."

***~~2. From the second view of this subject, we may learn how to escape the eternal destruction to which God's enemies are exposed.~~***

Our God "has made ready his glittering spear;" and he has already said, "Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies! [Isaiah 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.24)." What then shall we do? Shall we continue the contest? What would this be, but to "set briers and thorns in battle against the devouring fire, which would go through them, and burn them up together, [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.4)." No! let us throw down our weapons of rebellion against him, and cast ourselves on the multitude of his tender mercies; let us go, like Benhadad, "with ropes round our necks, and sackcloth on our loins," and confess our desert of his heavier judgments, Then he will "turn from his fierce anger," and be reconciled towards us; yes, "he will be merciful to our transgressions, and our sins and iniquities will he remember no more!"

***~~#404~~***

***~~THE EQUITY OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE~~***

**[2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2)**

The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin.The LORD is with you, when you are with him.  
If you seek him—he will be found by you;  
but if you forsake him—he will forsake you."

As in a season of affliction it may be sometimes necessary to blend reproof with consolation; so in a season of joy and triumph it may sometimes be proper to temper our blessings with prudential advice.

When Asa was returning with his victorious army after the destruction of his Ethiopian enemies, the prophet Oded was sent forth to meet him, and was directed by God himself not to greet him with compliments, but to impress upon his mind a beneficial admonition.

In this concise and pointed address, we see,

**I. The rule of God's procedure.**

"The LORD is with you, when you are with him.  
 If you seek him—he will be found by you;  
 but if you forsake him—he will forsake you."

God is not necessarily bound by any rules; for he both may do, and actually "does, according to his own will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." Yet he has been pleased to prescribe rules to himself:

***~~1. In the dispensations of his providence.~~***

The Jews, as God's peculiar people, were governed by him according to the strictest rules of equity. They were taught to look for temporal rewards or punishments according as they were obedient or disobedient to his Word; and their whole history may serve to illustrate the correspondence there was between their dealings towards him, and his towards them. See this exemplified:  
in *Asa*, [2 Chronicles 14:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 14.5-7); [2 Chronicles 14:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 14.11-12); [2 Chronicles 15:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.10-15); [2 Chronicles 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.19); [2 Chronicles 16:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.7-9);  
in *Jehoshaphat*, [2 Chronicles 17:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 17.3-6), [10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chronicles 17.10) and [2 Chronicles 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.3), [30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chronicles 20.30); 2 Chronicles 19:2 and [2 Chronicles 20:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.35-37);  
in *Joash*, 24:20.

Indeed, God himself expresses peculiar jealousy on this head; and appeals to them whether the punishments which there were in his providence, did not originate in themselves; and whether it was not perfectly agreeable to the rules which he had established for his conduct towards them. Compare [Ezekiel 18:24-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24-29) with [Leviticus 26:3-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.3-45) and [Deuteronomy 31:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.16-17).

Somewhat of the same procedure is yet visible in the dispensations of God towards us. *Nations*at this time are often prospered or punished, according as they pay due allegiance to God, or revolt from him. And *individuals*frequently experience even here in this life, a recompense suited to their conduct.

But as, under the law, God sometimes deviated from this rule, in order to direct the views of men to a future day of retribution, [Psalm 73:3-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3-14), so now he has laid it aside in a great degree, in order that our motives to action may be more spiritual, and that we may look forward to the day of judgment as the period fixed for the display of his righteousness, and for the rewarding of our actions.

***~~2. In the communications of his grace.~~***

God's conduct towards the Jews in respect of temporal things was intended to shadow forth his dealings with us in respect of spiritual things. In relation to these we may see that the rule which God has laid down to himself is almost invariably observed. It is true that he is often "found or them that sought him not;" but when once he has revealed himself to any man, he regulates himself towards him according to a principle of perfect equity, rewarding him for his fidelity—or punishing him for his neglect. Who among his people ever sought his face in vain? Who ever diligently walked with him in a state of humble dependence, and did not find God with him in the tokens of his love, and the supports of his grace?

God indeed reserves in his own power the times and the seasons when he shall reveal himself more fully to the soul; and he apportions to every one such trials as he in his wisdom knows will be productive of good; but he never did, nor ever will, forsake those who seek him, [Psalm 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.10).

On the other hand, who is there that has not experienced the hidings of God's face, when fresh contracted guilt, or repeated neglect of duty, has given him offence? Who has not found on such occasions that God has withdrawn the aids of his Spirit both in public and private ordinances; and perhaps left him for a season to the power and influence of his own corruptions? We know indeed that God has said that he will not finally cast off his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22). [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5). [Isaiah 54:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.7-10). And we believe he will not; we believe he will "visit them with the rod" until he has brought them back to him with deep contrition, [Psalm 89:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-35). But as long as they forsake him, he will, as far as respects any manifestations of his favor, forsake them; and if any who have thought themselves his people, forsake him utterly, they shall also be utterly abandoned by him. Nor can any be assured that they themselves shall not suffer eternal dereliction, any longer than their adherence to God justifies the hope that they are his children.

To impress this rule the more deeply on our minds, let us consider,

***~~II. The universal importance of the rule of God's procedure.~~***

"The LORD is with you, when you are with him.  
 If you seek him—he will be found by you;  
 but if you forsake him—he will forsake you."

The prophet in a most solemn manner called the attention both of the king and all his army to the subject before us; intimating thereby, that there were none who were not interested in it, nor any occasion when the consideration of it would not be useful to their souls.

***~~1. The rule of God's procedure is suited to us in times of prosperity.~~***

Of this there can be no doubt, since it was in a season of peculiar triumph that the prophet was sent to give this admonition. Indeed we are never more apt to forget ourselves, yes, to forget God also—than when we are elated with great prosperity. "Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food, [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.16)." When "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior!" [Deuteronomy 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.15)." When "Uzziah was made strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, [2 Chronicles 26:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.5); [2 Chronicles 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.16)." As strange as it may seem, even the manifestations of God's love to the soul are calculated to puff us up with pride, if we have not some *thorn in the flesh*given us to counteract this evil tendency, and to keep us from abusing the divine mercies! 2 Corinthians 12:7. The more *sail*a ship carries, the more *ballast*it requires.

The very deliverance that Asa had experienced was likely to render him careless and secure, as though he were now beyond the reach of harm. But by this admonition he was taught that his security was in God alone, and that he must continue to "walk humbly with God," if he would have the divine protection continued to him.

Similar admonitions are also given to us to counteract the pride of our hearts. "Be not high-minded, but fear, [Romans 11:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20-21)." "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls, [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12)," "Blessed is the man that fears always, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14)." Even the great Apostle himself, though he knew himself to be a chosen vessel unto God—yet he felt the necessity of "keeping his body under control, and bringing it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)." Let us therefore exercise the same caution; and, whether we rejoice on account of national or personal mercies—may we "rejoice with trembling, [Psalm 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.11)."

***~~2. The rule of God's procedure is suited to us in times of is suited to us in times of adversity.~~***

As in prosperous circumstances we need to be guarded against *presumption*, so in heavy trials we need to be cautioned against *despondency*. If we appear to be forsaken by our God, we are apt to think that he has altogether "shut up his tender mercies, and will be favorable to us no more, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9)." But in the words before us we see that no nation or individual can be in so low a state, but that their recovery is certain if only they wait patiently upon God. He will assuredly be found of those who seek him; yes, at the very time that they perhaps are bewailing his absence, he "is actually present with them," working in them that very contrition, and enabling them to wait upon him, when their unassisted nature would have fainted in despair.

Let every one then apply to himself the text in this view.

Are we ignorant? Let us look to God for the teachings of his Spirit.

Are we guilty? Let us cry to him for forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

Are we in any strait or difficulty whatever? Let us wait upon God in assured expectation of aid and support.

This promise shall never fail us, [Hebrews 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.6). Though we had a million devils to encounter, we are "more than conquerors, [2 Chronicles 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 14.9). [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)." "Believe in the Lord; so shall you be established; believe his prophets; so shall you prosper, [2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20)."

***~~The subject may be further improved:~~***

**1. For caution**—to guard against any secret evil in the heart, or any remissness of duty in the life, which may offend God. See [1 Chronicles 28:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.9-10). Mark this passage carefully.

**2. For encouragement**—since, if God is for us, we need not fear, however many there may are against us!

***~~#405~~***

***~~ENCOURAGEMENT TO EXERTION~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 15:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.7-8)~~***

"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." When Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded the prophet, he took courage. He removed the detestable idols from the whole land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hills of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of the LORD that was in front of the portico of the LORD's temple.

There are two extremes to which mankind are prone:  
The ungodly are inclined to *presumption*.  
The righteous are inclined to *despondency*.

King Asa was a man who "did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God, [2 Chronicles 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 14.2)," and "his heart was perfect all his days, verse 17." Yet he needed encouragement from a prophet of the Lord, to sustain his fainting mind.

In the passage before us, we have,

***~~I. A historic record.~~***

Asa had been enabled to vanquish a host of not less than a million of Ethiopians, with an army of little more than one half their number. But in his own kingdom there was a great work to perform, a work which he despaired of ever being able to accomplish. God, however, mercifully sent him a prophet, to raise his drooping spirits, and to animate him to his appointed work. Hear the message delivered to him.

"Be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." Think nothing too arduous to be attempted, provided the Lord calls you to it, [Joshua 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.6-7); [Joshua 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.9). [1 Chronicles 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 28.20). Never doubt of success in anything that you undertake for Him.

Mark, too, the effect produced upon his mind.

"He took courage." And how did he evince the power of that grace which had been bestowed upon him? He put down idolatry throughout his dominions, verse 8. He summoned all his people to enter into a solemn "covenant with God, to serve Him with all their heart, verse 12." "King Asa also deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down, broke it up and burned it in the Kidron Valley! verse 16".

In this noble conduct Asa has left to us,

***~~II. An encouraging example.~~***

**Every one of us also has difficulties to encounter.**

Great are the corruptions by which we are assailed; and fierce will be the opposition which will be made to us, if we exert ourselves for the reformation of others.

But to *us*, no less than to Asa, are the prophet's words addressed, "With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts: Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you! [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4)."

We should "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10);" and if we "hold fast our confidence in him, we shall have a great recompense of reward, [Hebrews 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.35)." We are assured that "our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord! [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

***~~In us, also, God's encouragements should produce a similar effect.~~***

They should encourage us to serve the Lord alone; to serve him with our whole hearts; to serve him "without partiality, and without hypocrisy, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17). 1 Timothy 5:21." The nearest friends must be withstood, and *our most endeared lust must be mortified!*. Not a right hand, or right eye, must be retained; everything that is offensive to God must be sacrificed without reserve.

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

If *Asa*acted thus on one single word of encouragement, then what may be expected of *you*who have had all the promises of God set before you from week to week, through many successive years? If Asa, under that dark dispensation, acted so noble and consistent a part—then what may be expected of you, who live under the full light of the Gospel, and are instructed in all the wonders of redeeming love?

***~~#406~~***

***~~ASA'S COVENANT WITH GOD~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 15:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.12-15)~~***

"They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul. All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. They took an oath to the LORD with loud acclamation, with shouting and with trumpets and horns. All Judah rejoiced about the oath because they had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them. So the LORD gave them rest on every side."

Few people have any just idea of the use and efficacy of ministerial exertions, when accompanied with power from on high. In the context, we see one man, Azariah, a prophet of the Lord, standing up in Jehovah's name, and by one single address turning a whole nation to the Lord their God. Doubtless the prophet Azariah had a peculiar commission, and was honored with a far greater measure of success than any minister in this day is authorized to expect. Nevertheless every servant of the Lord, to whoever he may be sent, whether to kings or subjects, should deliver his message with fidelity; and in so doing, may expect that God will render his Word effectual for great and extensive good.

In the hope that our message shall not be altogether in vain, we come to you now in Jehovah's name, and call upon you to covenant with him as Asa and his subjects did; and, that we may prevail with you to comply with our injunctions, we will distinctly consider:

***~~I. What covenant they made.~~***

Here we shall separately notice:

**1. The covenant itself.**

This related to nothing which they were not previously bound to fulfill. To "seek the Lord God of their fathers" was their duty; the law of Moses, yes, the law of nature, bound them to it. And reason, no less than revelation, told them, not only that they should seek after God, but that they should seek him with their whole hearts.

***~~2. The manner in which they made this covenant.~~***

Their *zeal*was very remarkable; yet it was precisely what the occasion called for. That they should all solemnly swear to this covenant, and devote to death every soul that should refuse to concur in it, seems an instance of unparalleled harshness and intolerance; yet were both the oath which they took, [Deuteronomy 29:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.10-15), and the proscription which they agreed to, [Deuteronomy 17:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.2-5), expressly required in the law of Moses; if a husband or a wife were to propose a departure from God, it was the duty of the party who was so tempted to give information to the magistrate, and, on conviction of the offender, to take the lead in executing the sentence of death upon him.

But it will be asked, Would you propose this covenant as a pattern for us? We answer, Yes! we would propose it as a pattern, both in the *matter*and the *manner*of it:

***~~1. In the matter of it.~~***

Let us covenant "to seek the Lord God of our fathers with our whole heart, and with our whole soul." To seek him thus is our duty, independently of any covenant; it is due to God as our Creator; it is due to him also as our Redeemer. Did our God come down from Heaven to seek us—and shall not we seek him? Did he give up himself to the accursed death of the cross for us—and shall we content ourselves with offering him a divided heart? What is the thing that deserves to be put in competition with him? What has done so much for us—or what can? Have the vanities of this world, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," any pretension to be his rivals? O let a sense of his unbounded love and mercy lend us to consecrate ourselves altogether to his service!

If the Jews, on account of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage by the exertions of Omnipotence, were bound to seek and serve God with their whole hearts, much more are we, who have been redeemed from sin and Satan, death and Hell, by the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son!

***~~2. In the manner of it.~~***

If it is thought that we are not called to covenant, we answer, that we all have covenanted already in our baptism; and, as often as we have attended at the table of the Lord, we have again repeated our oath to renounce the devil and all his works, and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ as our only Lord.

With respect to the proscription, we acknowledge that we are not at this time to enforce Christianity by an appeal to the civil power; and that to inflict the penalty of death on any people on account of their neglect of Christ, would be to oppose the plainest dictates of his religion. But yet we may and must declare, that the judgments of God shall overtake all who either reject him altogether, or seek him with a divided heart. Yes, the sentence of eternal misery denounced against them in the Scriptures must receive our most unqualified approbation. We must say with Paul, "If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema! [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22)." That is, let him be accursed; and God will surely come before long to inflict that curse upon him. Thus, notwithstanding the abrogation of penalties to be inflicted by the civil arm, under the Christian dispensation, we do in fact proceed even further than the Jews did in the covenant before us; for the judgments denounced by them related to overt acts only, whereas ours relate to the heart; and the penalties inflicted by them extended only to the body, whereas ours relate to the soul! And that too of every creature to whom the Gospel is sent, "whether small or great, whether man or woman."

If it is thought that such covenants are needless, we reply, that they are of the greatest possible utility—if solemnly entered into in our secret chamber before God; for, they contain a solemn recognition of our duty, and a deliberate vindication of God's justice in punishing all who will not seek him in his appointed way; they moreover tend exceedingly to impress our own minds with a sense of the heinousness of departing from God, and to fortify us against all the temptations to which at any time we may be exposed. It is owing to the low state of religious attainments among us, that such covenants are so rarely made.

As to the idea of legality, it is no better than an excuse for our own sloth and lukewarmness. For nothing can be more suited to the spirit of the Gospel than such covenant-transactions are; they are a strict compliance with the Apostle's exhortation "to yield our bodies unto God a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, as our reasonable service! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

That we may be stirred up to enter into this covenant, let us contemplate,

**II. The benefits resulting from entering into this covenant.**For the discovery of these, we need go no further than the passage before us:

[2 Chronicles 15:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.14-15), "They shouted out their oath of loyalty to the LORD with trumpets blaring and rams' horns sounding. All in Judah were happy about this covenant, for they had entered into it with all their heart. They earnestly sought after God, and they found him. And the LORD gave them rest from their enemies on every side!"

***~~In the very act of covenanting:~~***

They were filled with great and exalted joy, "They shouted out their oath of loyalty to the LORD with trumpets blaring and rams' horns sounding. All in Judah were happy about this covenant, for they had entered into it with all their heart." This mode of testifying their joy was suited to the dispensation under which they lived.

The joy which Christianity inspires is of a more refined nature; it is less tumultuous, but more spiritual, and more abiding; and we will venture to appeal to all who have ever solemnly devoted themselves to God in their secret chamber, embracing the Lord Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior, and surrendering up themselves to him as his redeemed people, whether they did not find in that transaction a peace and a joy which nothing else in the whole universe could impart? Do they not at this moment look back to such seasons as the happiest periods of their lives? We have no fear of contradiction upon this point; we are well assured, that "All who sow in tears do reap in joy," Compare [Psalm 126:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5-6) with [Jeremiah 29:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.12-13);" and, for the most part, "the reaper treads upon the very heels of the sower, [Amos 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.13);" so speedily do they enjoy the reward of their labors.

***~~After the act of covenanting was performed:~~***

God gave them undoubted testimonies of his acceptance. How he manifested it to them on this occasion, we know not; there was a great variety of ways in which he was accustomed to give his people an evidence of his approbation:  
at one time, by a lamp passing between the divided pieces of the sacrifice, [Genesis 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.10); [Genesis 15:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.17);  
at another time, by a special messenger from Heaven, [Daniel 9:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.21);  
at another time, by a voice from Heaven, [John 12:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.28-29);  
and frequently by sending fire from Heaven to consume their sacrifice, [Leviticus 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.24).

But whatever means God used, we are well assured, that he left them no room to doubt of his approbation of the act they had performed; for we are told, "They earnestly sought after God, and they found him."

And will he not be found of us also? Has he not still many ways of manifesting himself to us? Yes! By the secret operation of his Spirit he will reveal himself to our souls, and shed abroad his love in our hearts, and "say unto our souls: I am your salvation!"

***~~For a long period after of covenanting:~~***

There was peace to the land, "So the LORD gave them rest on every side." By comparing different dates in this chapter, we find that the land had rest twenty years, verse 10 with verse 19. It is true, in another part of the inspired volume, we are told that "there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days 1 Kings 15:16;" but this, for the space mentioned in our text, was only in small contentions or skirmishes on the borders; there was no serious assault upon him from any quarter.

This exhibits in a most striking point of view the *rest*which God will give to his believing and obedient people. Our spiritual enemies will not be so put down as to leave us no occasion for vigilance; their enmity will remain the same as ever; and there will still be occasional skirmishes on the borders, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17); but they shall not so come against us as to overwhelm us, or even to destroy our happiness. We shall "know in whom we have believed;" and feel safety in his protection. "Weapons may be formed against us; but they shall not prosper;" and "men may fight against us; but they shall not prevail against us."

It is surprising to what an extent some are delivered from painful conflicts for a considerable time after they have devoted themselves in a solemn covenant to the Lord; their very lusts which once led them captive seem almost to be slain, and "Satan himself to be bruised under their feet." It is true that this rest will not always continue; but the more frequently and cordially we devote ourselves to God, the more abundantly will he fill us with grace and peace, and give us a foretaste of that rest which remains for us in the eternal world!

**We shall conclude with two proposals**, in reference to the covenant we have been considering; and we shall make these proposals to two distinct classes:

***~~1. To those who think that such an entire devotion of themselves to God is unnecessary.~~***

If God does not require this service at our hands, we need not render it to him; and, if we need not render it to him, we may resolve, and even covenant to withhold it from him.

We propose then to those who think there is no necessity to seek after God with their whole hearts: "Let us make a covenant together, that we never will seek him thus; let us confirm it with an oath; and let us swear aloud that Heaven and earth may hear. Let us go further still, and covenant to prevent every one to the utmost of our power from seeking him in this way. let us hate, and revile, and persecute them, and, by every means that the law of the land will admit of, let us deter them from such unnecessary, fanatical, and injurious proceedings. The law will not allow us to put them to death; but let us at least show, that we would do it if we could; and by the whole of our conduct towards them let us say, "Away with such fellows from the earth, for it is not fit that they should live!"

Or, if any of you think that we ought to leave others at liberty, then we will wave this part of our proposal, and only covenant that we will never seek after God ourselves. Now then let us begin: "Let us address ourselves to the sacred Majesty of Heaven; let us tell him that he has no such claim upon us as he pretends to in his Word, and that we are determined never to render him the service he requires!"

What! Do you hold back? Do you shudder at the proposal? Do you tremble at the thought of entering into such a covenant? Yes, methinks, there is not one person present that is bold enough to give it his sanction. Yet there are many who act agreeably to the tenor of that wicked covenant; *many who seek God in a mere formal way, or at best with a divided heart*.

Know then, all you who violate your duties to your God, that you stand condemned in your own consciences; and, "if your own hearts condemn you, God is greater than your hearts," and will condemn you also. Attend then with befitting reverence to the proposal which we next make,

***~~2. To those who desire to committing themselves to God in the way that he requires in His word.~~***

The making of covenants in our own strength is in no respect advisable; but in humble dependence on the grace of Christ we may make them, and ought to make them. We read of the Christians in Macedonia, that, previous to serving God with their properly, "they gave their own selves to the Lord, [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5)." And this is what the Prophet Jeremiah foretells as characterizing the godly under the Christian dispensation, "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten, [Jeremiah 50:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.4-5)."

Now then let us do it; let us all be of one heart and one mind in this particular. Let us look up to God for his grace, that we may be enabled to keep the vow which we are about to make; and may "God be found of us," while we are thus seeking him; and "give us rest" in our souls, even that rest which our blessed Lord has promised unto all that come to him in truth! [Matthew 11:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28-29).

O gracious and ever-blessed God, who has formed us for yourself, and has moreover redeemed us by the blood of your only dear Son—we are yours by every tie. We are conscious that "we are not our own; and that, having been bought with a price, we are bound to glorify you with our bodies and our spirits, which are yours." We desire then now to consecrate ourselves to you; and engage, as in your immediate presence, "no longer to live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again."

May we never forget this vow, or act for a moment inconsistent with it!

We avow you this day to be our God; and we give up ourselves to you as your people; and we desire, that "you would sanctify us wholly; and that our whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)."

***~~#407~~***

***~~GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS PEOPLE~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9)~~***

"For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are perfect towards God."

***~~In estimating the characters of men, God looks not so much at their actions, as at their motives and principles. It is by them that the quality of our actions must be determined; for though no motives, however good, can sanctify a bad action; no action however good can be acceptable to God, if its motives and principles are not pure.~~***

There were, it is true, several things which were blameworthy in the conduct of Asa, which was here reproved. He ought not to have made a treaty at all with a heathen prince; but certainly not to have induced him to violate the treaty which he had already made with Israel. But that which rendered his conduct so displeasing to God, was, the *distrust*from which it sprang. He had not long before been delivered by God from far greater danger; and yet now, instead of applying to God for help again, he placed his dependence on an arm of flesh.

In the reproof administered to him on this occasion, the general providence of God, and his tender care of all who trust in him, is strongly asserted; and it is a subject well worthy of the most attentive consideration.

Let us consider,

***~~I. When the heart may be said to be "perfect towards God".~~***

*As for absolute perfection in this world, it exists only in the deluded imaginations of some visionary enthusiasts.* Nevertheless there is a perfection to which we should aspire, and which we may all attain, which consists in integrity, where "the heart is right with God." This may be said to be the case:

***~~1. When our trust in God is predominant.~~***

The heart of an unconverted man has no *disposition*to trust in God; nor indeed has he any just *ground*for trust in him, since God is his enemy. But after a man has been awakened to a sense of his sins, and has sought for mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, and has even some comfortable evidence that he has obtained mercy—yet he finds it exceedingly difficult to repose his confidence in God, to the extent that the Scripture warrants him to do so. He cannot believe that God is:  
so attentive to his concerns,  
so ready to administer to his needs,  
and so all-sufficient for his necessities  
—as he is represented to be in the Holy Scriptures.

In proportion as he grows in the knowledge of God, his trust in God is enlarged; and when he comes to realize the idea that there is nothing, whether great or small, that is not ordered by God, nor any situation which he cannot, or will not, overrule for our good, if only we put our trust in him; and when, in consequence of this conviction, his whole care for body and for soul, for time and for eternity, is cast on God, and he rests on God's promises "without staggering at any of them through unbelief;" then he honors God as he ought, and his heart may be said to be perfect towards God.

The difference between a person who has not attained this perfection, and one who has, may be seen in Elisha and his servant. Elisha's servant, though well instructed, and habituated to serve God, is troubled when he comes into circumstances of great and unexpected trial; while Elisha is composed, seeing the horses of fire and the chariots of fire forming an impregnable bulwark all around him, and God himself engaged for his support, [2 Kings 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.15-17).

***~~2. When our desire to serve God is supreme.~~***

Many are the considerations which arise in the mind to influence us in the discharge of our duty. Inclination, self-interest, passion, the fear of man, the hope of applause—will often bias our judgment, and lead us astray! The truth is, that in all wrong conduct the heart is more to blame than we are ready to imagine. Sin is the film in the eye that disguises and distorts the objects, "if the eye were single, the whole body would be full of light."

And here again the difference between Christians of different stature is very apparent; those of lower attainments being open to impression from a vast diversity of objects, while those of higher attainments keep their eyes steadily fixed on one object. It is surprising how clear the path of duty becomes, when a man discards every question but this, *"What will most please my God?"*But this question must be asked, not only in reference to things positively good and evil, but in reference to things in which we seem at liberty to adopt either alternative. Where this principle fully occupies the mind, and operates with promptness and decision, swallowing up every inferior consideration, [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19-20); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13), there the heart is perfect towards God, and the man "stands perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Let us mark,

***~~II. What tender regard God shows for those who are devoted to Him.~~***

"He does not despises the day of small things;" but those who thus honor him, shall be most abundantly honored by him:

***~~1. God will show himself strong in their behalf.~~***

There is nothing that he will not do for them, either in a way of providence or of grace. Are they in difficulties or trials of any kind? We do not say that he will work miracles for them as for Israel in the wilderness, or for his servants the prophets; but we do say, that what he did visibly for them, he will do invisibly for all who trust in him; and we conceive it of great importance to observe, that the miracles of former ages were not intended only for the comfort of those in whose behalf they were wrought, or for the confirming of the messages delivered by them—but also for demonstrating to the very senses of men what a minute attention he would pay to the concerns of all his people, and what effectual support he would impart unto them in every time of need.

As the imputation of righteousness to Abraham by faith was not recorded for his sake alone, but for that of believers in all ages, [Romans 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.22-24), so the miracles wrought, whether for him or others, were not wrought for their sakes alone, but for ours also, who shall experience similar interpositions, only in a less visible way; for *them*he accomplished ends without means; for *us*he will accomplish them by means; nor have we any more reason to be anxious about events than the most favored of his servants had in the days of old, [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6).

Assuredly too *he will afford us the assistance of his grace under spiritual trials*. The promises, "My grace is sufficient for you;" and, "I will never leave you nor forsake you;" are as valid at this day as they were in the days of Paul and Joshua! Nor can there be any *temptation*whatever which we shall not be enabled to surmount, if only we trust in him, 1 Corinthians 10:13.

***~~2. He will search out all occasions for such displays of his power.~~***

We have not to awaken him by our cries, or to prevail upon him by our pleadings—as though he were of himself either inattentive to us, or adverse to undertake our cause. It is not for this end that our prayers and tears are required; but for the impressing of our own minds, that all our help must come from him. His eye is upon us from the first moment that we begin to think of him; yes, his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to find out the objects, as it were, who feel their need of him. Whether they are in a cottage or a dungeon, he will fly to their aid, and delight to make known towards them "the exceeding greatness of his power! [Ephesians 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18-19)," and "the exceeding riches of his grace! [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7)." While Satan, their great adversary, "goes to and fro through the earth" "seeking whom he may devour," our God will surely not be less vigilant in our defense. *His whole heart and his whole soul are engaged for us,*[Jeremiah 32:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40-41), *nor will he lose one whom he has given to his beloved Son!* [John 10:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.27-29). [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32).

***~~As an improvement of this subject, we will suggest:~~***

***~~1. A few words of warning.~~***

Let those who neglect God, consider that his eyes are over them no less than over the righteous; but it is in order to bring upon them all the evil that he has denounced against them! [Amos 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.4). [Proverbs 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.21).

And let those who profess to know him, but in works deny him, remember, that it will be of little profit to "have a name to live, if they are either spiritually dead, or dying" in his sight [Revelation 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.2). Above all, let those who, like Asa, are in the main "perfect before God," beware how they resent the reproofs that may be given them for any failures in their duty, verse 10. For, though they should be saved at last, they little know what punishment they may suffer for their fault before they die.

***~~2. A few words of encouragement.~~***

Those who are supremely dedicated to God should never say, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me!" "Can a woman forget her nursing child? She may; but God never will" forsake the lowest of his people! [Isaiah 49:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-15). Do not ponder the greatness of your difficulties, but of the love, and power, and faithfulness of your God! Then in the midst of your warfare, you may already begin the shouts of victory, [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39). Only believe, and you shall assuredly "see the glory of God, [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40)."

***~~#408~~***

***~~THE ROYAL EDICT~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 17.9)~~***

"They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people."

[The author feels it necessary to prefix to this Sermon some short account of the occasion on which it was delivered. The author was at Amsterdam, (in June 1818,) partly with a view of re-establishing an Episcopal Chapel there, in which there had been no service for seven years, but principally with a view of seeking the welfare of the Jews. He went there rather to explore than to act. (See [Nehemiah 2:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.12-16).) But just previous to the 18th of June, he understood that the Third Anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo was to be kept throughout the Netherlands, as a day of thanksgiving; and just at that time also he quite accidentally heard that the King of the Netherlands had a year before issued an Edict, requiring all the Jews to educate their children in the knowledge of their own Scriptures, and calling upon all his Christian Subjects to aid in this good work. Despondency, not unlike to that which paralyzed all exertion at Jerusalem, in Nehemiah's days, so universally prevailed, that no one had risen to the occasion; the very Commissioners, who had been appointed to carry the Edict into effect, had published a Report, in which they gave it as their opinion, "that the Lord's time was not come;" and there was great danger that the gracious designs of the Monarch would be altogether frustrated. The author therefore judged this a fit occasion for calling the attention of the Public to the Edict; and accordingly, after devoting the Morning Service to the more appropriate subject of the day, he employed the Evening Service in an endeavor to forward this good work. Considerable attention was excited to the subject by means of the Sermon; which was therefore instantly printed in Dutch, French, and English, for the purpose of its being circulated throughout the Netherlands; and he has reason to hope that active exertions were afterwards made in many places, to promote what every benevolent mind must ardently desire—the edification and welfare of the Jewish People. So good an example having been set by the Emperor of Russia and the King of the Netherlands, the author hopes that the attention of our own Governors also, both in Church and State, may be called to this long-neglected people; and that, now the British Public has been invited by authority (the King's Letter) to aid in supporting Missions to the Heathen World, the claims of the Jewish Nation, to whom under God we owe all the light that we ourselves enjoy, will not be overlooked. It is with a view to this great object, that the author sends forth the Sermon in this country; where, if the foregoing explanation had not been given, its relevancy and use might have been justly called in question.]

[2 Chronicles 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 17.9), "They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people."

On a day set apart for thanksgiving to God for mercies received, it is peculiarly proper to consider what we may render unto the Lord for all his benefits. Certainly, if any event ever deserved repeated annual commemoration, it is that which has freed the world from the most grievous tyranny that ever it endured. Of the bitter cup which was put into the hands of every nation in Europe, this nation, The Netherlands, drank very deeply; and the change which it has experienced, in the restoration of their rightful Monarch, and in the establishment of a free Constitution, calls for their most devout acknowledgments to Almighty God.

Doubtless we may with justice pay some tribute of honor to those who by their counsels and their arms effected the overthrow of the Usurper; but *it is God alone who gives victory to kings, and to whom the glory of this great victory must be primarily ascribed*. He who accounts a day consecrated to this service superfluous, shows, that he is far from justly appreciating the blessings that have been conferred upon him. The monarch himself has given to his people a very decided evidence, that he feels the depth of his obligations to the God of his salvation; and it will be your own loss if you do not cultivate a similar spirit, and improve the occasion to the honor of your God.

But it is not to thanksgiving only that your Monarch invites you; he calls you, by a special Edict, to unite with him in seeking the welfare of your Jewish brethren, who, in their struggle with the enemy, signally approved their fidelity to their legitimate Sovereign. Their welfare he in his turn studies to promote; and he desires to combine the energies of all his subjects in efforts for their good. Methinks he is like Jehoshaphat of old, who, well knowing that piety must be founded in knowledge, and happiness in piety—sent forth the Princes of his empire, with a select number of Priests and Levites, to instruct his people in the knowledge of God's blessed word.

His edict on this occasion, and the manner in which it was carried into effect, will form the subject of my present discourse.

***~~I. We notice the edict of King Jehoshaphat.~~***

This was such as became a great and pious monarch; and we shall find it not unprofitable or unsuitable to the present occasion, to enter into a distinct consideration of it. We observe then, that it was:  
a kind and benevolent edict;  
a wise and politic edict;  
a good and beneficial edict.

Mark the benevolence displayed in it. He sought the present and eternal welfare of his subjects. He knew, that as men are raised above the beasts by the exercise of reason, so are they elevated in the scale of rational beings, in proportion as their intellectual powers are cultivated and enlarged. *Man destitute of knowledge, is a mere savage*; but when instructed in the various branches of science, he becomes refined, and civilized, and capable of contributing to the general good. In the very cultivation of knowledge there is much pleasure arising to the mind; and in the application of that knowledge to useful purposes there is an exquisite delight. We need only observe people when employed in their several vocations, how happy they are, how contented, how cheerful, oftentimes unconsciously proclaiming their happiness, like the birds of the air, in festal songs, or consciously, and with devotion, in songs of praise.

But it was not mere intellectual improvement which Jehoshaphat sought to convey; he wished his people to be instructed in the knowledge of that God whom they professed to fear and worship. This alone could make them truly happy; this alone could impart to them sound wisdom or solid consolation. He therefore gave particular directions that they should be taught "in the Book of the Law of the Lord," and this throughout the whole land.

O happy people, whose governor so employed the authority with which he was invested! And happy that monarch, who so improved his influence, not for his own personal aggrandizement, but for the best interests of the people committed to his charge! In so doing, Jehoshaphat approved himself to be indeed what every governor should be—the friend and father of his people.

Nor was the policy of this measure at all inferior to its benevolence. A people well instructed in moral and religious knowledge will view government as an ordinance of God, and will learn to obey the constituted authorities, not so much from fear of their wrath, as for conscience sake towards God. They will view their governors as God's viceregents upon earth; and will consider allegiance to them as an essential part of their duty to him. Hence will spring up love in their hearts, and a real delight in manifesting their loyalty to their king on all proper occasions; they will form a bulwark around his person in case of necessity, and even glory in laying down their lives for him as their greatest benefactor.

The benefits arising from this edict were incalculable. Such was the effect of it, that the fear of Jehoshaphat, and of Jehovah as his protector, fell on all the nations that were round about him; so that none, however hostile in their hearts, dared to make war against him, verse 10. Doubtless this resulted chiefly from an impression made upon their minds by God himself; yet it was also produced by a dread of that energy which a united people were ready to put forth at any instant, at the call of their beloved monarch.

At the same time that peace was thus secured, prosperity reigned in every part of the empire; and, as the immediate fruit of it, Jehoshaphat, as well as the people, "had riches and honor in abundance, verse 5."

In his own mind too he reaped the fruits of his own benevolence. God smiled upon him, and manifested himself to him, and enabled him to walk with "his heart was devoted to the ways of the Lord, verse 6."

Such was the edict of the pious Jehoshaphat:  
benevolent,  
politic,  
beneficial.

And what, I would ask, is the Edict which has been issued by the highest authority in this kingdom? Do we not see in it the same blessed characters, as in that which we have been considering?

It was "in the third year of his reign, verse 7," that Jehoshaphat sent forth teachers to enlighten and instruct his subjects. The very instant he felt himself at liberty from the more urgent and pressing calls of duty, (such as the fortifying of his land against foreign enemies, and the correcting of some great internal abuses,) he engaged in this good work of diffusing light and knowledge through all classes of the community.

In like manner the sovereign of this kingdom has scarcely had time to repair the ravages of war, and to establish his empire, too long weakened and impoverished by a cruel usurpation, before he stands forth as the friend and father of his people, and more especially of that portion of them who have in every age and place been most treated with neglect and disdain—to have them educated in scriptural knowledge and in the fear of God. It is much to be lamented, that the Jewish people have not in general been so attentive either to the learning or morals of their children as might be wished; and hence arose a necessity for some authoritative admonition on the subject. Yet, if I may say it without offence, this *neglect*has not been more reprehensible in them, than has been the *indifference*with which the Christian world has regarded it.

The monarch (may God recompense it richly into his bosom!) has risen up to remedy the supineness both of the one and the other, and to call forth the united energies of all to correct and terminate this evil. Yet, while he thus consults the best interests of his subjects, with what paternal tenderness has he guarded against wounding the feelings of any, or exciting their religious prejudices! The Scriptures of the Old Testament are alone to be used in the schools that shall be established; even those Scriptures, which Jews as well as Christians believe to have been given by inspiration of God, and to contain truth without any mixture of error.

In this is marked the policy, no less than the *benevolence*, of the edict; for it is not by constraint, but by conciliation and kindness, that good is to be done to any, and more especially to those who have shown themselves now, for so many centuries, proof against all the efforts of intimidation or force. In this kingdom they form no small body, and, I may add, no unimportant portion of the community. It is well known how extensive is their influence in the affairs of commerce; and how, by their activity, they contribute to enrich the state. Hence it is now generally seen and felt, that they are entitled to the same respect as any other subjects of the realm; and while, as in the present instance, they see how deeply their monarch feels interested in their welfare, they cannot but on their part be sensible of the privileges they enjoy under his paternal government, and testify their gratitude to him by every possible expression of loyalty and affection.

What the ultimate effect of these measures will be, may be conjectured from the blessed results of the edict of Jehoshaphat; all will feel themselves happy under the government of such a prince; and he, while he is respected abroad, and beloved at home, will have the happiness of seeing his labors crowned with prosperity throughout his dominions, and with peace in his own soul.

***~~II. The manner in which Jehoshaphat's edict was carried into execution is now to be noticed.~~***

The promptness with which his commands were executed deserves the highest praise. All were ready to co-operate in this good work as soon as it was proposed. "Princes, and priests, and Levites, verses 7and 8," all addressed themselves to it instantly, with one heart and one soul. None accounted their dignity so high, or their functions so sacred, but they thought it an honor to be employed in such a service, and found a delight in fulfilling the wishes of their revered monarch. All entered into the work with zeal, and prosecuted it with diligence; and hence a rapid change was effected both in the temporal and spiritual condition of the whole nation.

And what may not be effected in this kingdom also, if a similar zeal is exercised by "the princes and priests" (the magistrates and clergy) of the land? With them it must begin. Those who move in a lower station can effect nothing, if they are not aided and countenanced by the higher orders, whose rank in life, or sacredness of character, will give a tone to the general feeling, and combine the energies of the whole kingdom. If it be said, that those for whom the benefit is designed do not feel a desire after it, this only shows how much they need it, and how earnestly we should all embark in a cause proposed by such high authority, and recommended by the soundest dictates of wisdom and piety.

That our obligations to unite in this labor of love may the more distinctly appear, I would beg permission to suggest the following considerations:

First, LOYALTY to the king demands our concurrence with him in this good work, and a holy emulation among us to carry into effect his benevolent designs. What can the greatest or best of men effect, (what could Jehoshaphat himself have done?) if there are none to act in subserviency to them, and to follow their directions? As the most potent monarch upon earth would in vain proclaim war, if there were no soldiers found to enlist under his banners and to execute his commands—so it will be in vain that the design of benefitting the Jewish people was ever conceived in the mind of the king, or that his edict respecting them was ever issued, if his subjects do not put forth their energies in obedience to his call.

In truth, a backwardness to cooperate with him in this blessed work would seem like a reflection cast upon him, as recommending a measure that was unworthy of attention. I do not mean to insinuate that such an idea really exists in the minds of any; for I am perfectly convinced it does not; but certainly in appearance it is open to this construction; and every subject of the empire is concerned to act in such a way, as to cut off all occasion for a reflection like this. I say, loyalty alone, even if we had no higher motive—should be sufficient to call forth our exertions in this cause.

Second. Let me next observe, that GRATITUDE to the Jewish nation demands it at our hands. How great, how manifold are our obligations to them! Behold Moses and the prophets, what instruction have they given us, in reference to the way of life and salvation! Without the moral law, as revealed by Moses, we would never have known to what an extent we need a Savior; nor, if the prophecies had not so fully designated the promised Messiah, could we have ever so fully known that Jesus was the Christ.

Of whom did the Lord Jesus Christ himself come as pertaining to the flesh, but from the loins of David, and of the seed of Abraham? Yet to him are we indebted for all that we either have, or hope for, in time or in eternity! And who were the Apostles, but Jews, who for our sakes went forth preaching the Word, and counted not their lives dear to them, so that they might but lead us to the knowledge of Christ, and make us partakers of his salvation? From them too we have received the living oracles, which are the one source of all spiritual knowledge, and the one foundation of all our hopes.

Does all this call for no recompense at our hands? Knowing as we do the vast importance of education, should we not endeavor to impart it to those from whose ancestors we have received such innumerable, such inestimable benefits? Yet behold, these are the people whom for many, many centuries, we have treated with more neglect and contempt than any other people upon the face of the earth; the savages of the most distant climates have received more attention from us than they. Surely it is high time that the Christian world awake to a sense of their duty, and begin to show to the Jews something of that love, which their forefathers exercised towards us in our Gentile state. We are debtors to them to a vast amount, and it is high time that we begin to discharge our debt. How can we discharge it better, than by enabling them to read and understand those very oracles, which they have preserved with such fidelity, and which testify so fully of their promised Messiah?

Third. A LOVE to the rising generation should lead us to avail ourselves of the present opportunity to promote their welfare. It is truly afflictive to see how low and degraded is the state of multitudes, especially of the Jewish nation, purely through the neglect with which they are treated in their early youth. Still more grievous is it to reflect on their ignorance of those things which belong to their everlasting peace. To counteract this, we should endeavor to qualify the whole of their population for good and useful employments; and, through the medium of useful instruction, to make them holy, and to make them happy. We need never be afraid that there will not be a sufficient number of poor to fill the lower stations; do what we will, there will never be lacking people, who, through their own fault or misfortunes, are necessitated to undertake the lowest offices of life. And, if they have been previously instructed in the Scriptures of Truth, they will have a fund of consolation ever open to them in their deepest afflictions; they will learn from the inspired volume, in whatever state they are, there-with to be content; and in the prospect of the eternal world, they will find joys with which a stranger intermeddles not, and which the world can neither give nor take away.

We feel the force of these considerations in reference to the poor of our own communion; how is it that we feel it not in reference to our Jewish brethren? This is a partiality unworthy of us; and we should rise as one man to wipe off this disgrace from our own character.

This brings me to the last consideration which I propose to mention, namely, that a concern for the honor of our holy religion should operate to unite us all in executing the Royal Edict. What must a Jew think of our religion, when he sees how little it has wrought for us in the production of love? We may tell him of a Messiah, who has loved us, and laid down his life for us; but what credit will he give us for our principles, when he sees how little our practice corresponds with them! May he not well say to us, "Physician, heal yourself?" Show by your conduct the superiority of your principles, before you call on me to embrace them.

It is by love that we must win them; it is by showing kindness to them that we must efface from their hearts those prejudices which, with too much reason, they entertain against us. We must exhibit in our own persons the loveliness of Christianity, before we can bring them to investigate the grounds of our faith, or to imagine that they can improve their own condition by embracing it.

May I not then call upon you as Christians to unite in the good work that is now before you, that you may thereby serve and glorify your Lord and Savior? As Christians, you believe that there is no other way to the Father but by Christ, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6); and no other name but his, whereby any human being can be saved, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12). Where is your piety, where is your love to Christ, where is even common humanity—if you will not avail yourselves of the present opportunity to remove from before your Jewish brethren the stumbling-blocks which for so many ages have been laid in their way?

Do any ask, What shall we do? I answer, search out among the Jews some people of honesty and talent to commence schools among them; and do you yourselves aid to the utmost of your power in the support of them; provide them with all necessary books for instructing children in the first rudiments of knowledge; provide them with Bibles also, both in the Dutch and Hebrew languages, that they may be thoroughly instructed in the knowledge of their own religion, and learn to walk in the steps of their father Abraham, and of all the holy prophets.

Begin too, without loss of time, Adult Schools. You will find many among the house of Israel who will be glad to avail themselves of your instructions. Let those who are benevolent among you dedicate an hour in a day to the instructing of a few who may be desirous to learn; and carefully avoid everything which may give unnecessary offence. Confine yourselves to the Old Testament, which they venerate, as well as you. Let those who can teach only in the Dutch language give instruction in that; and let those who either understand, or have leisure to attain the Hebrew tongue, draw their attention to that. In particular, let it be the united endeavor of all to qualify masters for this good work.

And let it not be thought, that this is the duty of men only. The Royal Edict has particularly, and with great wisdom, recommended it to females, who may be of infinite service in conveying instruction to their own gender. This age is distinguished above all others for the activity of females in the service of God, and in the performance of every good work. Were I able to declare the proportion of good that is done in Britain by the female gender, it would appear incredible; I believe from my soul that it far exceeds one half in all the societies raised since the commencement of the present century, in the Bible Society, the Missionary Societies, and the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of Christianity among the Jews. Yes, let the ladies of this country exert themselves, in a prudent, modest and discreet way, and the effects will soon appear; the Royal Edict will not be a dead letter, but will produce incalculable good to the whole nation; and the agents in this benevolent work will themselves receive quite as much benefit as they impart, their benevolence being, in proportion as it is exercised, its own reward.

***~~#409~~***

***~~JEHOSHAPHAT'S CONNECTION WITH AHAB REPROVED~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 19:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 19.1-2)~~***

When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is upon you!"

It is happy when pious children rise up in the places of their parents, and, unmoved by the sufferings which their fathers have experienced, dare to tread in their steps with fidelity and zeal.

Hanani, the father of Jehu, had been cast into prison for faithful reproof which he administered to King Asa, [2 Chronicles 16:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.7-10); yet does Jehu give a similar reproof to Asa's son and successor, Jehoshaphat; and as he was enabled to temper his reproof with seasonable commendation, he succeeded in convincing the monarch of his fault, and in stirring him up to a more becoming conduct.

The conduct here blamed, was Jehoshaphat's uniting himself with Ahab against the king of Syria; but the terms in which the censure was conveyed, are of more general import, and may be applied to all alliances with the ungodly. We will endeavor therefore to improve them, by showing,

***~~I. What is that intimacy with the ungodly which God forbids.~~***

We are not to suppose that all connection with them is forbidden; for then, as the Apostle says, "We must needs go out of the world," since the necessities of our nature constrain us to keep up some sort of interaction with them. Moreover, there is an attention to them which compassion itself demands, and which our blessed Savior himself manifested to such a degree, as to incur the reproach of being "a friend of publicans and sinners." Nor are we to forget, that courtesy is one of the most amiable and important of Christian graces. "Be pitiful, be courteous," is the command of God himself; and those who are grossly deficient in relation to this duty, as too many professors of religion are, have greatly mistaken the true genius of Christianity, which is, in every possible modification of it, a religion of love.

Yet there is a very broad line of distinction to be drawn between the extremes of unmeasured union with the world, and a contemptuous abstraction from it. Though the righteous are not to despise the ungodly:

***~~1. Believers are to carefully avoid marriage to the ungodly.~~***

Under the law, all intermarriages with the heathen were strictly forbidden; and under the Gospel the same law applies to the ungodly; the Apostle's direction respecting those who are seeking a matrimonial alliance, is, "Let them marry, but only in the Lord, [1 Corinthians 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.39)." In many places of Scripture are the evils arising from unequal marriages of believers with unbelievers, strongly marked, [Genesis 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.2-3) and in Jehoshaphat's own son; [2 Chronicles 21:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 21.6); we must not wonder then that such contracts are expressly forbidden, 2 Corinthians 6:14-16.

***~~2. Believers are to carefully avoid a conformity to the ungodly.~~***

They who are of the world, both speak of the world, and act agreeably to its dictates; they have no higher objects in view, than "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." But these are wholly unsuited to the Christian's state; they are in direct opposition to that holy and heavenly course which he is commanded to pursue, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16); and therefore he is enjoined "on no account to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of his mind, that he may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2)."

**3.** **Believers are to carefully avoid intimate companionship with the ungodly.**

We should not choose them as our intimate friends and companions; for "how can two walk together, except they be agreed?" We almost of necessity imbibe the spirit of our associates; and therefore we should select for our acquaintance those who will help us forward, and not those who will retard us, in our heavenly course. We can never too attentively consider that instructive declaration of Solomon, "He who walks with wise men, will be wise; but a companion of fools will be destroyed! [Proverbs 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.20)."

That such intimacy with the ungodly is not prohibited by God without reason, will appear, while we show,

***~~II. Why intimacy with the ungodly is so displeasing to God.~~***

God was greatly offended with Jehoshaphat, and severely punished him for his fault. It was in consequence of his alliance with Ahab that his eldest son Jehoram slew all his younger brethren, [2 Chronicles 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 21.4), and that all his grandchildren were slain by Jehu, [2 Kings 10:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.13-14) and especially [2 Chronicles 22:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 22.7-8). And in every instance, such intimacy with the ungodly is offensive to him"

**1. On account of the state of mind it implies.**

It is evident that any person professing godliness, and at the same time desiring the society of the ungodly, must be in a very degenerate state. Such a state of mind indicates in a very high degree:  
a lack of love to God,  
a lack of aversion to sin,  
a lack of self-knowledge,  
and a lack of common prudence.

*How low must be his love to God!*Would any man who loved his parents and his family select for his intimate friend a man that was the avowed enemy of them all? Yet the character of the ungodly is, that they are "haters of God! [Romans 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.30); [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7);" how then can anyone who truly loves God, take such a person for his bosom friend, or maintain, except from necessity, any interaction with him?

*And small indeed must be his aversion to sin*, when he can find pleasure in those who belong to "a world that lies in wickedness," and whose whole life is a continued and voluntary course of sin.

*His self-knowledge too must be at a very low ebb*, if he thinks that he can frequent such company without having both his principles and his practice greatly vitiated.

*Even to common prudence, he is almost an utter stranger*; for would any man on the brink of a stupendous precipice go unnecessarily to the utmost edge of it, where it was exceeding slippery, rather than pursue a path which was comparatively both safe and easy? Yet this is his conduct, who chooses to mix unnecessarily with a tempting and ensnaring world; and the absurdity of it is strongly marked in the expressions of our text, where an appeal is made to the common sense and reason of mankind, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?"

**2. On account of its pernicious tendency.**

We often form very erroneous calculations on this subject. We are ready to think that we shall ingratiate ourselves with the world, and recommend religion to their favorable acceptance. But the very reverse is the case; we lower ourselves in their estimation, and make them think better of their ungodly beliefs than they would otherwise do. They take for granted that true religion sanctions all that conformity to their customs that they see in us; and consequently that they are much nearer to the standard of true religion than they really are. Nor are they a whit more reconciled to those practices which they do not choose to follow, and which, in spite of all our efforts, they will account over-righteous, unnecessary, and absurd. It will be found almost invariably that little, if any, good accrues to the ungodly from such sacrifices, and that great injury is sustained by those who make them.

In the chapter preceding our text, we may see the experiment fairly made. Jehoshaphat having joined affinity with Ahab, paid him a friendly visit, and was hospitably received by him, [2 Chronicles 18:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.1-2). Presently Ahab proposed to him a union of their forces in an attack on the king of Syria; to which proposal Jehoshaphat, unwilling to refuse him, accedes; but, being a pious character, Jehoshaphat recommends that an inquiry should be first made of God for his direction. To this Ahab apparently agrees; but consults none except his own idolatrous prophets, [2 Chronicles 18:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.3-5). Jehoshaphat, not quite satisfied with their advice, asks if there is not a prophet of Jehovah by whom their inquiry may be made? Ahab acknowledges that there is; but that he hates that prophet, because he never prophesied good concerning him, but evil. This aversion Jehoshaphat tries to soften; and for a moment prevails, [2 Chronicles 18:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.6-8); but, as soon as Micaiah has delivered his message from the Lord, Ahab is filled with rage against him, and orders him to be put in prison, and to be fed with the bread and water of affliction; and Jehoshaphat, contrary to God's revealed will, proceeds with Ahab to execute the plan proposed, [2 Chronicles 18:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.16-17); 2 Chronicles 18:25-28.

Now here is an exact representation of what generally takes place in such connections: the compliances that are required by the ungodly, are too faintly refused; while the barriers interposed by the godly, produce no adequate effect. The two parties may fitly be compared to people pulling against each other on a steep declivity; the one who is on the more elevated site, may think he shall prevail; but a moment's experience will suffice to show him, that his adversary draws against him with a ten-fold advantage, both as it respects the comparative force which he is able to exert, and the greater facility with which a descending motion may be produced.

Thus it is between the godly and the ungodly, when too intimate a fellowship exists between them; the conscience of the one is ensnared and violated, while the other retains all his principles, dispositions, and habits!

***~~3. On account of its opposition to God's revealed will.~~***

Nothing can be plainer than God's declaration respecting friendship with the world; it is actually a state of "enmity against God;" yes, the very desire to possess its friendship is constructive treason against God himself; and actually constitutes treason, as much as the holding of forbidden interaction with an earthly enemy constitutes treason against the king, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4).

It is in vain to dispute against such a solemn declaration as this, or to think that we can ever reconcile such opposite interests as those of "God and Mammon." We must hold to the one, or to the other; and if we choose friendship with the world, then must we expect to be dealt with as the enemies of God. *If we are intimate friends with the goats in this world, it is in vain to hope that we shall be numbered with the sheep in the world to come*, [Matthew 25:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.32-33).

***~~ADDRESS.~~***

The character of Jehoshaphat was on the whole good, "good things were found in him; and he had prepared his heart to seek God, verse 3." Now it is to people of this character more particularly that our subject must be addressed; for the ungodly, when mixing with the world, are in their proper element; and the established Christian feels but little temptation to go back to worldly pleasures, or to worldly society.

But the temptation to young and inexperienced Christians is great. Be it remembered however by all, that the true disciples of our Lord "are not of the world, even as he was not of the world." They cannot say to an ungodly man, "I am as you are;" for they are as different from him as light from darkness. "By the cross of Christ, they are crucified unto the world, as the world also is to them, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

Let me entreat you then, brethren, not to "be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, but to come out from among them, and be separate, [2 Corinthians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14); [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17);" and endeavor to be in reality, what all the Lord's people are by profession: "a city set upon a hill," and "lights shining in a dark place."

***~~#410~~***

***~~PRAYER THE BEST MEANS OF DEFEATING INVASION~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 20:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.1-4)~~***

"After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). Fearful, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him."

[Fast-day Sermon, October 19, 1803. At this time France, under Napoleon Bonaparte, was threatening invasion of England.]

There is scarcely anything that more awfully proves men's sinful state than their readiness to devour one another. There is not a nation under Heaven where the art of war is not cultivated; and he who attains the highest proficiency in that art, and is crowned with most success in destroying his fellow-creatures, is deemed the greatest benefactor to his country, and is rewarded with all the honors that can be heaped upon him.

Under these circumstances it is not optional whether a nation will have a military force; they are compelled to maintain armies, and to preserve their lives and liberties by the same means that others use to subjugate and overwhelm them. Yet there are other means of self-defense, which, though they do not supersede the use of weapons, are more effectual than numerous levies, or military skill. What these means are, the text informs us.

Jehoshaphat was invaded by three confederate armies; and, though taken by surprise, and consequently not having an hour to lose in mustering his forces, he devoted a day to humiliation and prayer for the divine aid. This would seem absurd to many; but to those who believe in the all-governing providence of God, it will appear the most rational and most efficacious method of defense, which it was possible for him to adopt.

In considering this account of Jehoshaphat, we shall point out,

**I. Jehoshaphat's feelings on the approach of an invasion.**

We have no reason to think that Jehoshaphat was defective in courage; yet he "feared." But what was it that he dreaded? was it merely his own personal danger? No!

***~~1. Jehoshaphat feared the calamities that were coming on the nation.~~***

Fear even of personal danger is by no means incompatible with real courage. Fear is an affection planted in the human bosom by God himself, and is necessary to put us on our guard, and to stir us up to use the means of safety. It is then only to be deemed a weakness, when it incapacitates us for deliberate counsel, or manly exertion.

But when the danger is public, and the welfare of a whole nation is at stake—then it is criminal not to fear; thoughtlessness and indifference then become most inexcusable, inasmuch as they manifest an atheistical security with respect to themselves, and an utter lack of humanity towards others.

Who can reflect on the miseries that an invading army may occasion, and not tremble for the land that is exposed to them? We confess, that one of the worst symptoms that appear in our land, at this present moment, is the general, and almost total, lack of this fear. It should seem as if we thought it out of the power of man, or even of God himself, to hurt us. We are really sleeping, while our enemies are watchful; and folding our arms in security, while the gathering storm is ready to burst upon us! Would to God that we had more fear of the approaching danger! and then we should have less cause to fear when it shall have actually arrived.

***~~2. Jehoshaphat feared the displeasure of God in the coming calamities.~~***

The displeasure of God makes an invading army terrible. The displeasure of God renders even the weakest insect, a locust, or a caterpillar, an object of dread (alluding to the plagues of Egypt). We are assured that "men are God's sword;" and that whatever the motive that actuates them is, it is God who gives them their commission, it is God who sends them to "avenge the quarrel of his covenant, [Leviticus 26:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.25). [2 Kings 24:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 24.2-3)."

Now Jehoshaphat had particular reason to apprehend the divine displeasure, having incurred it by making an alliance with Ahab, [2 Chronicles 19:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 19.2); and surely he considered the invaders as people sent of God to inflict the punishment he deserved. And was not this just ground for fear?

Here again we cannot but lament that the generality among us leave God out of their thoughts; they declaim against the ambition of Napoleon who would reduce us, as he has done one half of Europe, to a state of vassalage; but they never associate with Napoleon's plans the idea of God's displeasure. To say that "God had stirred him up against us, [1 Samuel 26:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.19). [1 Kings 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.14); [1 Kings 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.23). 1 Chronicles 5:26 and [2 Chronicles 21:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 21.16)," would he looked upon as absurd. To suggest that Napoleon was an instrument in God's hands, lifted up to punish our sins, would be deemed a weak enthusiastic notion, a dream of a distempered imagination.

But this is true, whether we all believe it or not; and it is this, much more than either the number of his forces, or the inveteracy of his malice, which renders him formidable! Were he far less equal to the contest than he is, our multiplied iniquities which have incensed God against us, might well make him an object of terror. And the less we fear Napoleon as the instrument of God's wrath, the more likely we are to be given over to his power.

Corresponding with Jehoshaphat's feelings on account of the invasion were,

***~~II. The means Jehoshaphat used to defeat the invasion.~~***

Doubtless he did not neglect any prudent means of defense which his circumstances would admit of. But, together with these,

***~~"He set himself to seek the Lord" by fasting and prayer.~~***

Jehoshaphat well knew that all things were subject to God's control; that the events of war were in his hands, verse 6, 15; and that it was equally easy with him to "save by many or by few, [1 Samuel 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 14.6)." He knew that God was ever ready to forgive those who confessed and forsook their sins, and to interpose for the preservation of those who trusted in him.

Under this conviction he not only fasted and prayed himself, but "proclaimed a fast," in order that all his subjects might join in these holy exercises, and, by their united importunity, prevail on God to spare them. It might have been thought, that to consecrate a day to such a service, when there seemed not an hour to spare, was impolitic; but he was aware that *the greatest preparations without God would avail nothing; and that, if God's favor and assistance were secured, then no enemies could ever prevail against him*. In this holy service therefore he engaged with earnestness; and all his subjects, male and female, old and young, concurred with him, verse 13.

***~~Prayer and fasting was, in truth, the most effectual means he could employ.~~***

If we consider how successfully these means had been employed in former times, the wisdom of his conduct will immediately appear. God had on many occasions given direction to his people, where, and when, and how, to attack their enemies, [2 Samuel 5:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.23-25). He had strengthened them miraculously for the combat, [2 Samuel 23:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.8-12); and crowned them with success beyond all human expectation, [1 Samuel 14:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 14.13-16).

He had invariably done this in answer to their humble and earnest supplications. Prayer was the cause of *Othniel's*victory, [Judges 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 3.9) and *Ehud's*victory, [Judges 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 5.15) and *Barak's*victory, [Judges 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 4.3) and *Gideon's*victory, [Judges 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.6) and *Jephthah's*victory, [Judges 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.10). And God had as constantly withheld his supports, when they refused to humble themselves before him.

There was one example in particular, with which he was well acquainted, and from which he could not fail to derive encouragement; it was that of Moses when attacked by Amalek; Moses sent Joshua into the valley to fight, while he himself remained on the mountain to pray; and it soon appeared that the success of the engagement did not depend on the skill or valor of Joshua, but on the holding up of the hands of Moses. When Moses' hands were let down through weariness, Amalek prevailed; but on their being held up until sunset, victory was decided in favor of Israel! [Exodus 17:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.11-13).

This was sufficient to justify and encourage Jehoshaphat in the proclaiming of a fast; and the event strongly recommends to us the use of similar means in any similar emergency. God heard and answered his prayer; and did not allow him even to risk his life in battle; he caused dissension to arise in the confederate armies, insomuch that two of those armies combined to destroy the third, and then destroyed each other, and left all their spoil for a prey to those whose country they had invaded! verse 22-25.

***~~INFERENCES.~~***

***~~1. What reason have we for thankfulness on account of the appointment of this fast!~~***

Many, forgetful of Jehoshaphat's example, deny the right of the civil magistrate to proclaim a fast; and multitudes who acknowledge the propriety of such an appointment, are as regardless of the duties of this day, as if it had not been consecrated to any religious service. But there are many who really improve this occasion in devout and earnest supplication to God; and we doubt not but that more will have been done this day towards the preservation of the kingdom, than could have been effected in any other way.

***~~2. Of what signal benefit to a nation are the godly and praying few!~~***

They are often regarded as people that trouble and endanger the state; but it has been on their account that the nation has not been long since made as Sodom and Gomorrah! [Isaiah 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.9); and, if the present days of trouble are shortened, it will be for their sake, [Matthew 24:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.22). These are the people who alone have interest with God; and who bring down his blessing on the land.

To represent the country as indebted to them for its safety and success, is deemed the height of arrogance and folly. But let anyone inquire what saved Jerusalem from the Assyrian hosts, [Isaiah 37:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.21-22); or, in the instance before us, from the confederate armies? Was it not prayer; prayer chiefly, prayer solely and exclusively? Let atheistic scoffers then deride the idea as they please; but it is a fact, an undeniable fact, that *the despised few are the greatest benefactors of their country; and that our hopes in the present contest are founded more on their prayers than on all the efforts of an arm of flesh.*

***~~3. How much may they do for their country, who are ready to think themselves incapable of rendering it any essential service!~~***

Females and infirm people may suppose themselves of no use in the present contest. But will not their petitions come up with acceptance before God? Shall not the prayer of faith, by whoever offered, prevail? Let none then imagine that they cannot benefit their country; but let all unite in weeping and supplication, and "give no rest unto our God, until he arises for our help, and makes our Jerusalem a praise in the earth [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7)."

***~~#411~~***

***~~FAITH THE MEANS OF NATIONAL AND PERSONAL PROSPERITY~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20)~~***

"Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful."

*A belief in the providence of God is able to compose the mind under the greatest difficulties.* The Scriptures abound with displays of the efficacy of this principle.

In this passage before us we are told, that three confederate armies came up against Jehoshaphat; yet, while he acknowledged that "he had no might against them," he was enabled by faith to commit his cause to God, and to go forth in triumph, as much as if he had already gained the completest victory. The words of our text are his address to his army when leading them forth to meet the enemy. One would have expected that he would rather have exhorted them to be strong and courageous; but, feeling in himself the blessed influence of *faith*, he rather exhorted them to the exercise of that divine principle, and assured them that by means of it they should attain success.

It is our intention to show,

***~~I. What is implied in the faith here recommended.~~***

Doubtless there are many particulars which might be enumerated if it were expedient to enter fully into the nature of faith. But, if we consider to whom, and on what occasion, the address was made, we shall see at once that there were two prominent ideas contained in it; namely:

***~~1. A renunciation of all false confidences.~~***

This is indispensably necessary to the exercise of faith. God is a jealous God, and "will not give his glory to another." He is rather concerned to defeat, than to prosper, the exertions of those who lean to their own understanding, or trust in an arm of flesh; because they practically deny his agency, and would be encouraged by success to harden themselves in their infidelity, See [Isaiah 30:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.1-3); [Isaiah 31:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.1-3).

This self-renunciation is, if possible, still more necessary in relation to the concerns of the soul. If we trust at all in our own wisdom, goodness, or strength—then God will consider us as abandoning all hope in him. However good the thing may be which we make even a joint ground of confidence before him, instead of contributing to our welfare, it will make the Gospel of no effect to us, and Christ will profit us nothing, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4).

***~~2. A simple trust in God.~~***

In the instance before us, the people were not to fight, but to stand still and see the interposition of God for them. But we are not therefore to neglect the proper means of self-preservation; *we must use the means, but not trust in them; God alone must be our trust and our confidence; and we should commit ourselves to him, without doubting either his ability or willingness to help us.*

Thus in reference also to our spiritual interests, we should never limit his mercy or his power. God's promises should be the ground of our hopes, and the measure of our expectations.

Having endeavored to ascertain the true nature of faith, let us consider,

***~~II. Faith's influence on our welfare.~~***

***~~1. Faith has a favorable aspect upon on our national prosperity.~~***

When a nation is enabled to exercise faith in God, there is good hope that its deliverance is near at hand. For faith conciliates his favor; he is honored by it; and he will surely put honor upon it. Faith engages God's protection. He has promised to be a wall of fire round his people, and as a munition of rocks; and, when they plead his promises, he will not fail in the execution of them. Faith also calls forth God's aid. He has told us that his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in the behalf of his people; and he has proved in ten thousand instances how ready and effectual is the support which he will afford to those who call upon him.

***~~2. Faith has a favorable aspect upon on our personal welfare.~~***

In allusion to the circumstances of the history before us we may observe, that faith will secure us victory over all our enemies. Sin, Satan, death and Hell shall all be overcome, if only we believe in Christ; yes, we shall be more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Faith also will enrich us with the most abundant spoils. Jehoshaphat and his army were three days occupied in gathering the spoils, so wonderfully were they enriched by the very people who had sought only their destruction. And shall not we find ourselves benefitted even by the assaults of our enemies? Yes, we shall have deeper discoveries of the love, the power, the faithfulness of our God, and be more amply furnished for our future conflicts.

Faith moreover will bring us to a quiet possession of our eternal inheritance. Jehoshaphat had rest and quiet throughout his realm by means of that exercise of faith. But we shall obtain the undisturbed enjoyment of Heaven itself. As soon as faith and patience have had their perfect work, we shall be freed from enemies, and "not a dog shall wag his tongue against us" any more forever.

Thus prosperous, thus established, shall the weakest be, provided they believe in God, and give implicit credit to his Word.

***~~We would further address you on this subject:~~***

***~~1. As members of the community.~~***

The state has a right to expect of you all the aid which you can afford her under the pressure of her present troubles. Will any of you say, 'I am unable to render any effectual assistance?' Pause before you reply in such a way. Can you exercise faith in God? Can you commit your affairs to him? Do not say then, 'I can do no good,' for whether you be old or young, male or female, healthful or infirm, you can render the most important services. God will hear your prayer, and respect your faith.

It was not by the sword, but by the simple exercise of faith, that three confederate armies were totally destroyed. Fight then with the same weapon; entreat your God to direct the counsels of our governors, and to prosper their endeavors; and we shall yet have fresh evidence, that the injunction in our text was never given or obeyed in vain.

***~~2. As members of the Church.~~***

Far be it from us to express indifference respecting good works. We know you must abound in them; and we desire you should abound in them to the glory of God. But they can proceed from nothing but a living principle of faith; and therefore, from a regard to the interests of morality, we repeat the exhortation in the text. *It is not by self-righteous, self-confident exertions that you are to become holy, but by exercising faith in Him, who is our "righteousness and our strength."*Live then by faith in the Son of God; so shall you derive from him all needful supplies of grace, and progressively advance, both in an enjoyment of his presence and a fitness for his glory.

***~~#412~~***

***~~THE DANGER OF FOLLOWING EVIL COUNSEL~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 22:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 22.2-4)~~***

"Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. He too walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother encouraged him in doing wrong. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for after his father's death they became his advisers, to his undoing."

Though Jehovah is undoubtedly the Governor of the universe, it is certain that there is a mighty being always exerting himself in opposition to him; and with such great apparent success, as to be justly designated "the god of this world." In the contest that is maintained between them, each has, if I may so speak, his partisans and agents, who, under their respective heads, labor to execute their master's will, and to promote the interest of him to whom they belong.

Jehovah employs holy men, whose hearts he has touched with his heavenly grace; and whom he sends forth as his ambassadors, to instruct our fallen race, and to rescue them from the dominion of the great usurper.

Satan, on the other hand, has his servants also, whom he employs to deceive mankind, and to rivet on them the chains with which they are already bound. In this, however, he differs from that Almighty Power against whom he is arrayed; that, whereas Jehovah delights to make use of the weakest instruments, and "by things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are," Satan is constrained to select the most powerful agents to carry on his cause; well knowing that, without them, he has no hope of effecting anything.

When, in his efforts to rob *Job*of his integrity, he destroyed all his children, he forbore to destroy the wife of Job, that by her means he might tempt that holy man to "curse God and die."

When he would divert the Lord Jesus Christ from his purpose to redeem the world, he employed the Apostle *Peter*to dissuade him from subjecting himself to the sufferings that were to come upon him.

Thus he acted in reference to the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Judah. Jehoshaphat was a pious king, and served Jehovah faithfully. But Satan wished to reduce Judah, as well as Israel, to idolatry; and, for this end, stirred up Jehoram's wife to tempt him to it, [2 Kings 21:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 21.6), and afterwards to give the same impious counsel to her son Ahaziah; thereby leading both of them "to their destruction."

The history before us will naturally lead me to point out,

***~~I. The influence of evil counsel.~~***

*Good counsel, alas! has, for the most part, but little effect.*We cannot doubt but that Samuel, knowing as he did the bitter consequences which a lack of parental authority had entailed on Eli, was careful to instruct his children in the ways of God, and to reprove in them the first appearances of evil. But, notwithstanding all his efforts, his sons turned aside from the paths of judgment, and rendered the very government of Jehovah himself odious in the eyes of all Israel [1 Samuel 8:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 8.1-5).

Nor can we doubt but that Jehoshaphat, though in some respects faulty, strove to maintain the authority of Jehovah in his family. But *his sons were more easily led to imitate his errors, than his piety*. He himself had joined in an alliance with Ahab, and had consented to a marriage of his son with Ahab's daughter, whose counsels weighed both with her husband and her son far more than any advice of his; yes, though God had signally interposed to thwart his efforts, when combined with those of Ahab, his son and grandson courted the same alliance, and brought on themselves, and on all connected with them, the heaviest judgments! [1 Kings 20:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.35-37) with 21:14, 15 and 22:4.

***~~But let us mark this matter more distinctly,~~***

**1.** In the case before us.

What was it that Ahaziah's mother tempted him to? It was to idolatry! But can we conceive that the counsel of anyone, however dear, should have power to draw a person to idolatry? yes, that it should prevail with a person who had been educated in the knowledge of the one true God? Hear the account given of idolaters by the Prophet Hosea, "My people ask counsel of their stocks, and their staff declares unto them." Can we conceive it possible that any person who had heard of all the wonders which Jehovah had wrought for his people in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and in Canaan—should ever be seduced to such infatuation as this? Of ignorant savages we may imagine anything; but of God's own peculiar people, and of him who was at the head of them, the grandson of the pious Jehoshaphat, we cannot believe it! or the apostate must at least have been bereft of reason. Alas! not so; the man has his mother for his counselor; and her advice is quite sufficient to draw him from the Most High God to the worship of stocks and stones! I say again, if this fact were not attested on the authority of God himself, we could not credit it; we could not conceive it possible that evil counsel should possess such an influence as this.

***~~2. In our own case.~~***

It is well known how generally *the rising generation are counseled by their friends and relatives to follow the world rather than God, and to attend to the concerns of time rather those of eternity*. I speak not here respecting any particular doctrines of religion which may be supposed to have an injurious effect, and therefore to be an object of jealousy; but I speak of all serious religion, irrespective of any peculiar doctrine. I speak of the fear of God; of a holy concern about the soul; about a diligent preparation for death and judgment. Of these things, speculatively considered, everyone professes to approve; yet no sooner does any person begin to experience them in his soul, than his own dearest friends—his mother, his wife, his sister, his "friend that is as his own soul," will begin to caution him against being "righteous over-much," or, in other words, against being righteous at all. If the person replies, 'But I have a soul; and it will be called into judgment, and be doomed either to Heaven or Hell, according to the state in which it is found; and should I not prepare for that great account?' The answer will be, 'No; you have no need to fear; only do as others around you, and you have nothing to be afraid of; God will never enter into judgment with people who live as you have done.' Thus all the most blessed counsels of Jehovah are set at nothing; [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3). [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18). And poor fallible men will set their word against the word of Jehovah, and will assure those of ultimate impunity, whom God, in the most solemn manner, dooms to everlasting perdition!

But can it be supposed that anyone will follow such counsel, and be led by it to prefer:  
the body to the soul,  
the creature to the Creator,  
time to eternity,  
and Hell to Heaven!

It cannot surely be, that anyone in his senses can be so influenced, either by friends or enemies. Methinks, the answer that would instantly be given to all such counselors would be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge." But there are few, very few, in whom this fortitude is found. And if a person can only say, My father or "my mother so counseled me," he will cease to think that he "does wickedly," or that he has reason to fear the displeasure of his God.

But let me faithfully warn you of,

***~~II. The danger of following it.~~***

This unhappy king was soon made to feel the bitter consequences of his folly; for God "fixed his eyes upon him for evil," and in one short year brought him down "to his destruction." His end, in this view, is worthy of notice. He went with Jehoram, the son of Ahab, to fight against Hazael, king of Syria. Being wounded in the battle, he went to Jezreel, to be healed of his wounds. While he was there, on a visit to Jehoram, king of Israel, he went forth with Jehoram to inquire into the reason of the apparently hostile approach of Jehu; and finding Jehu too powerful for him, and his friend the king of Israel slain by him—he fled to Samaria, and hid himself there; but, being found, he was taken, and brought to Jehu, and put to death. And all this was ordered of the Lord, as we are expressly told, "The destruction of Ahaziah was of God, by coming to Joram, verses 5-9." In like manner will *everyone find, that in "despising God's counsel," he only ensures his own destruction*,[Psalm 107:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.11).

***~~In two ways will a compliance with evil counsel operate to a man's destruction:~~***

1. By the sinful habits which it will induce.

A person, in yielding to evil counsel, thinks perhaps, that he will only follow it on a particular occasion, or to a given extent. But *who shall say where a man on a precipitous descent shall stop?*Perhaps the advice given was only to avoid singularity; and, for this end, to avoid the ministry of those who might awaken his conscience, or the society of those who might lead him to God. By following this advice, he is kept from attaining a principle of true piety, which alone can preserve him from any evil. He loves not the Word of God; and therefore he employs his leisure in some foolish vanity; he has no pleasure in communion with God; and therefore he associates with those who are like-minded with himself; he affects not Heaven; and therefore is satisfied with the things of time and sense.

It may be, that he is never particularly tempted to the commission of any flagrant evil; and therefore he goes on respectably in the eyes of the world; but without any real delight in God, or any serious preparation for eternity; but if he is tried by any violent temptation, he is carried away, like the dust before the wind, and falls a prey to his great enemy! Behold the gambler, the adulterer, the duelist! Each, in his calling, was deemed a man of worth, until, by his lack of principle, he was betrayed into the evils by which he fell. But had he, in the first instance, listened, not to the counsels of ungodly men, but to the voice of God in his Word, he had escaped the snares which were laid for his feet, and avoided the destruction that has come upon his soul.

Nor is it into occasional sin only that men are drawn by a lack of religious principle, but frequently into a contempt for all religion; as the Psalmist intimates, when, in a triple climax, he describes a man, first "walking (transiently) in the counsel of the ungodly (who have no vital piety); then standing in the way of sinners; and, at last, sitting in the seat of the scornful! [Psalm 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.1)."

2. By the judgments which it will entail.

Men may promise us impunity in the ways of sin; but it shall be found, at last, "whose words shall stand, theirs or God's, [Jeremiah 44:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.28)." God has said, "Evil shall hunt the wicked man, to overthrow him, [Psalm 140:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 140.11)." The hunted deer thinks himself at a distance from any enemy, and that he has no ground for fear; but his step has left a scent behind him; and that, once found, is traced with fatal precision, until he is overtaken, and destroyed. *So the judgments of God, at whatever distance they may be thought to be, follow the sinner, until at last "his sin finds him out!*[Numbers 32:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.23)," and brings down the wrath of an offended God upon him.

In vain may he "make a covenant with death and Hell; his covenant with death shall be disannulled; and his agreement with Hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, he shall be trodden down by it! [Isaiah 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.18)." Yes, "though hand join in hand," and there be a confederacy of the whole universe for his protection, "he shall not be unpunished [Proverbs 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.21)." "Let no man deceive himself; God is not mocked; nor will be; for whatever any man sows, that shall he also reap; he who sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he who sows to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. To those who are exerting their influence against the Lord.~~***

Who has not, at one time or other, been guilty of this sin? Who has not either derided serious piety himself, or forborne to vindicate it when derided by others, and thus sanctioned, by silence at least, the counsel of the ungodly? We may think lightly of this evil; but the rebuke given to Peter, when, from a love to his Master, he would have dissuaded him from suffering, shows clearly enough the light in which our conduct has been viewed by Almighty God. In every such act we have taken part with the devil, and done his work; and we may well expect to hear from him that indignant reproof, "Get behind me, Satan; you are an offence unto me; for you savor not the things that be of God, but those that be of men!" Consider, then, I beg you, brethren, what you are doing, when you "counsel anyone to do wickedly," or to refrain from obeying any command of God; you "cast a stumbling-block before your brother, and destroy a soul for whom Christ died, [Romans 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.15)," You also bring the deepest guilt upon your own soul; and will have the blood of those, whom you have ruined, required at your hands.

Reflect a moment on the state to which both you and those who have followed your advice will soon be reduced. It is said that the wicked will be "bound in bundles, and cast into the fire! [Matthew 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.30)." By this I understand that those who have encouraged each other in sin will be so brought into contact with each other in the eternal world, as to increase each other's torment to all eternity by their mutual recriminations.

The mother will then execrate the folly that her son committed in listening; to her counsels, in opposition to the Word of God; while the son will cast the most bitter reflections on her, for so abusing her influence to the ruin of his soul. Let these considerations be laid to heart by those who imagine that they are only exercising love; for truly it is such a love as Satan himself approves; and such a love as all, who either exercise it or obey it, will bitterly bewail!

***~~2. To those who yield to evil influence so exerted.~~***

Do not imagine, that, in guarding you against a compliance with the counsels of a wife, a mother, a sister, a friend, I would willingly interrupt the harmony of the domestic circle, and still less that I would lessen in your eyes the obligations of parental authority. No; in everything that is not contrary to God's commands, parental authority ought to be regarded with the deepest veneration, and obeyed with the greatest readiness. To honor our parents is "the first command with promise;" and the blessing of God will always come on those who duly respect it. But there is an authority paramount to that of any creature; and our blessed Lord has expressly told us that no creature under Heaven must be put in competition with him, "He who loves father or mother, or son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me! [Matthew 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.37)."

It will be no excuse that you have yielded either to the endearments or authority of love, if, in so doing, you have violated any command of God, or withheld from him any service which you might have rendered.

Let it be granted, that, in withstanding the solicitations of your friends, you grieve and offend them; is it not better than to grieve and offend your God? Or, if by means of it you suffer the loss of an earthly inheritance, is not that a better alternative than to lose your own soul? for, "what shall a man take in exchange for his soul?"

Learn, then, Beloved, to regard, in the first place, the commands of God. Learn to seek, above all things, his favor; for "in his favor is life;" and "his loving-kindness is better than life itself." If the advice given you is good, you will do well to follow it, as Timothy did that of his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, [2 Timothy 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.5);" but if it is evil, "We ought to obey God rather than men, [Acts 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.29)," must be the principle to which you must inviolably adhere.

***~~#413~~***

***~~THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JOASH~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 24:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.2)~~***

"Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the years of Jehoiada the priest."

*In order to display more fully his own truth and faithfulness, God often permits events to arise which seem to render the accomplishment of his promises almost, if not altogether, hopeless*.

This was particularly visible in his conduct towards the posterity of Abraham in Egypt, in that he forbore to rescue them from their captivity, until the period assigned for their deliverance was brought to the very last hour.

We behold a striking interposition also in behalf of the *descendants of David*, to whom God had promised that his seed should continue to sit upon the throne of Judah. More than once had they been in imminent danger of utter extinction, [2 Chronicles 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 21.4); [2 Chronicles 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 22.1), before Athaliah usurped the throne; and she was bent upon destroying them all, [2 Chronicles 22:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 22.10); but God would not allow his promise to fail, [2 Chronicles 21:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 21.7).

It should seem that Joash, the youngest son of Ahaziah, was actually with his brethren when they all were slain, and by some means, being only an infant, was hidden among them, so as to escape the general slaughter. From that state he was rescued by his aunt, and was hid, together with his nurse, in a bed-chamber, 2 Kings 11:2, until he was seven years old; at which time Jehoiada the priest, who had married his aunt, put to death the usurper, and established Joash on his father's throne.

One might have hoped, that a person so signally preserved, should, like Moses, have proved a great blessing to his nation; but, hopeful as his *beginnings*were, his reign was evil, and his *end*was calamitous!

We propose:

***~~I. To take a brief view of his history.~~***

A sudden and total change having taken place in his conduct about the middle of his reign, it will be proper to consider:

**1. Joash's history during the life of Jehoiada.**

At first, as might be expected, he was under the entire management of Jehoiada, who was his instructor, and acted towards him as a father, [2 Kings 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 12.1) with [2 Chronicles 24:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.22). But it was not only during his youth that he was thus observant of Jehoiada, but for many years after he had attained to manhood, even at long as Jehoiada himself lived.

Now in this we admire his humility; for he was a king, possessed of arbitrary power; and yet, because he was convinced of the *skill*, the *integrity*, and the *piety*of his instructor, he still continued to consult him on all occasions, and to follow his advice without reserve. In this conduct also he evinced his *wisdom*; in that he preferred the sage advice of an experienced counselor, before the less matured dictates of his own mind, or the judgment of sycophants around his throne. Even *piety*itself seems to have possessed his mind at this period; for when he saw to what a dilapidated state the temple was reduced by the impious rage of Athaliah, verse 7, he set himself to repair it; and even reproved Jehoiada himself, and all the Levites, for their tardiness in executing this important work, verse 5, 6.

Who from such beginnings, would not betoken well of the remainder of his reign? From such a view of him we are ready to say, 'O that our princes, our nobility, our youth of every rank, were thus observant of pious instructors, thus intent on "doing what was right in the sight of the Lord!"'

But our views of Joash will be greatly changed, if we consider his further history.

**2. Joash's history after Jehoiada's death.**

Instantly did a mighty change appear in him. Having lost his pious counselor, he began to listen to the advice of young unprincipled sycophants, verse 17. O what a misfortune is it to any man to connect himself with ungodly associates! How many are there, who, while under the care of pious parents or godly instructors, have promised well, who yet, by means of ungodly companions, have been drawn from every good way, and been led to disappoint all the hopes that have been formed concerning them! We cannot too earnestly caution all against the influence of bad advice, by whoever it is given, even though it be by their nearest friends or relatives, [2 Chronicles 22:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 22.3-4). *Every counsel must be tried by the unerring Word of God*; and to those who would lead us in opposition to that, our answer must invariably be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge."

Released, as it were, from the restraints of man, Joash soon cast off all fear of God, and abandoned his temple and service for the service of groves and idols, verse 18. Nor, when God sent him prophets to testify against his evil ways, would he regard them at all; yes, when Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada himself, was sent to him, instead of attending to his admonitions, Joash gave commandment to the people to stone Zechariah to death; which commandment they executed, even in the court of the temple itself.

To what excesses will not men run, when once they give ear to ungodly counselors, and knowingly violate all the dictates of their own conscience! *It frequently happens that backsliders and apostates become the bitterest persecutors*; and that those who "*walk*in the counsel of the ungodly, soon learn to *stand*in the way of sinners, and come at last to *sit*in the seat of the scornful! [Psalm 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.1)."

We wonder not at the melancholy end to which these transgressions brought him. Within the short space of a year was he, notwithstanding "his very great army," subdued by "a small company of Syrians," who destroyed all the princes, his advisers, and sent the spoil of the city and temple to Damascus, verse 23, 24. And Joash himself, being seized with multiplied disorders, was assassinated in his bed by two of his own servants, verse 25.

Unhappy man! Yet more unhappy still, if we contemplate the fearful state to which he was driven from the presence of his offended God. But such is the end which, if not in this world, certainly in the world to come, awaits those who "turn from the holy commandment delivered to them."

Let us, from this brief view of his history, proceed,

***~~II. To make some reflections on Joash's character.~~***

From his character in its commencement, we observe,

***~~How great is the benefit of a pious education!~~***

From what appeared in his latter days, we may judge what he would have been, if he had been left to himself in early life. What pernicious habits would he have contracted, and what multiplied evils would he have perpetrated! Instead of doing for several years "what was right in the sight of the Lord," it is probable that he would have "done evil from his youth." To be restrained from such enormities, was a mercy both to himself and to the whole nation. That he turned this blessing afterwards to a curse, is deeply to be lamented; though the proper tendency of a pious education is not a whit the less apparent.

*Let all be thankful for the advice given them, and the restraints imposed upon them in early life. Little do any of us know to what an extent of wickedness we might have been carried, if those admonitions or corrections, which were once irksome and painful to us, had not been administered!*Indeed the more irksome such restraints appear to us, the more reason we have to be thankful for them; since the very impatience which we feel, demonstrates clearly our need of them. An aversion to them argues a disposition that is hateful and ruinous, [Proverbs 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.1); [Proverbs 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.5); [Proverbs 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.10); [Proverbs 15:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.31-32); and those who, from an undue tenderness, neglect to reprove their children, lay up sorrow for themselves, as well as for the objects of their ill-judged lenity! [Proverbs 29:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.15).

Let parents consider that they are accountable to God for the authority vested in them, and for the talents committed to their care; and let them remember that if it is not always found that "a child trained in the way he should go will not in more advanced life depart from it"—yet it is *generally*true; and that such a promise affords ample encouragement for their most strenuous exertions.

From his character toward the close of life, we observe,

***~~How awful is the state of those, who, after hopeful beginnings, turn aside from the paths of piety and virtue!~~***

In one view, it is a blessing to have been kept from evil for a time; but in another view, the instructions that have been given to us, the convictions we have felt, and the obedience we have rendered to the voice of God, will serve but to aggravate the guilt of our subsequent wickedness, and to bring upon us an accumulated weight of misery! As the instructions given by our Lord to the Jews served only to enhance their guilt, and render their state in the eternal world "less tolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah," so all our advantages, professions, and attainments, will, if renounced, make "our latter end worse than our beginning; for It would have been better never to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it to depart from it! [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)."

While this thought primarily applies to those who, like Joash, have burst through the restraints of a pious education under Jehoida the priest—*it speaks powerfully to those who have turned back from a pious course of life, and relapsed into a state of worldliness and sin!*To what they will come at last, God alone knows; but the downward road is very slippery; and they who provoke the Holy Spirit to depart from them, will most probably go on from bad to worse; until, having filled up the measure of their iniquities, they be made distinguished monuments of God's righteous indignation in Hell!

From his whole history in a collective view, we observe,

***~~How necessary divine grace is to produce any radical change of heart and life!~~***

Education may change the exterior conduct, but the heart will remain the same. And when the restraints that operated at first are removed, the dispositions of the mind will break forth into outward acts! The lamp which is not supplied with oil, will go out at last; and, not uncommonly, the restraint which obstructed the stream of nature for a while, will, like a dam broke down, give occasion for the greater and more fatal inundation!

Nothing but the saving grace of God can convert the soul; and every change, short of true conversion, will but deceive us to our eternal ruin! The redeeming love of Christ must be felt in the soul; nothing but that will have a constraining efficacy to renew and sanctify us after the divine image.

Whatever therefore any may have done in compliance with the advice of others, know that we must have a principle of life within ourselves, and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds," and be "New creatures in Christ Jesus." "Old things must pass away, and all things become new." Nothing but this change will prove effectual for a consistent walk; nor without this can we ever behold the face of God in Heaven.

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those to whom the care of young people is entrusted.~~***

Whether you are parents, or instructors only, do not be discouraged because you do not see all the fruit that you could wish; but continue to sow in hope; for you know not which attempt shall prosper, or when the Angel at Bethesda's pool shall make your labors of love effectual.

***~~2. Those who are yet under the authority or instruction of others.~~***

Do not think harshly of the restraints imposed upon you; they are all beneficial, and intended for your good; and the day is coming when you will see reason to bless your God for those very things which are now irksome to you. Your advancement in a holy life is the richest recompense your instructors can receive; and, in repaying them, you will greatly enrich yourselves.

***~~#414~~***

***~~THE RE-OPENING OF THE TEMPLE BY KING JOASH~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.14)~~***

"As long as Jehoiada lived, burnt offerings were presented continually in the temple of the LORD. "

[Preached in September, 1825]

The temple of God, which "had been broken up" and "made desolate" by the sons of Athaliah, was now repaired and opened by King Joash. Long had he labored to attain this object; but the priests and Levites were averse to it, insomuch that for twenty-three years he was unable to accomplish this desired measure, [2 Kings 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 12.6). At last he reproved even Jehoiada himself, his relative, his preceptor, and the very man to whom, under God, he owed both his life and his crown; yes, even him and all the priests that were under him did this young king reprove, for being intent only on their own interests, while they utterly neglected the house of God, [2 Kings 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 12.7). As for the priests, they would have waved their own gains, if only they might be excused the trouble of advancing the honor of their God, [2 Kings 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 12.8).

But Jehoiada devised an expedient, which, while it relieved the priests from a part of their burdens, gave to the people generally an opportunity of showing what their wishes were in relation to this matter. He made "a chest, with a hole in the lid;" and put it beside the altar, to receive the gifts which should be voluntarily contributed for the furtherance of this good work, [2 Kings 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 12.9); and God so wrought on the hearts of the people, that a sufficiency was soon obtained; so that the temple being repaired, they could resume with comfort the worship of their God, [2 Chronicles 24:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.11-13).

In my text there are two things to be noticed:

***~~I. The reformation made.~~***

Of course, the temple being desolated, the service of it would be neglected. Now, therefore, when the repairs of the temple were completed, the service of it was resumed.

***~~Of all the sacrifices that were presented to God, those of burnt-offerings were the most ancient and dignified.~~***

This was the offering which procured for Abel such a manifest token of God's approbation and acceptance, [Genesis 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4-5). And whereas it is said that "Abel offered it by faith, [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4)," it seems that it must have been of divine appointment; and most probably was appointed immediately after the Fall, when beasts were slain, and our first parents were clothed with their skins [Genesis 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.21).

Under the Mosaic economy, burnt-offerings were offered every morning and every evening throughout the year; and on the Sabbath-day they were doubled; and, being entirely consumed upon the altar, they were peculiarly fitted to *represent the desert of men on account of sin, and the sufferings of Christ in their behalf*.

Consider the burnt-offerings in this point of view. Behold a spotless victim slain, and its body consumed upon the altar, as a sacrifice for the sins of men! Methinks, the offerer could not but see that death was his deserved portion, even the second death in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!

At the same time, *viewing these* *burnt-offerings as a typical representation of the Lord Jesus—what an idea does it convey of his sufferings under the curse due to sin, even the wrath of an avenging God!*Surely it was a most instructive ordinance; and, being repeated "continually," the people enjoyed the full benefit of the Mosaic dispensation, and God was glorified in the midst of them.

***~~Among you, also, the same sacrifice is now renewed.~~***

The Jews possessed the shadow; but you enjoy the substance. In the Gospel that is ministered unto you, the same truths are held forth, but with infinitely clearer evidence, and more consoling power.

1. You are told that you deserve the wrath of God, not by a mere shadowy exhibition, but by a faithful statement of your sins, and an explicit declaration of God's threatened vengeance against you.

2. You are informed, also, that there is mercy for you through the intervention of the Savior, who has offered himself as a sacrifice for your sins; but you have not to see this held forth under the image of a slain beast; you are instructed, that the Son of the living God himself has become incarnate; that, having approved himself spotless, and been acknowledged to be so even by his most inveterate enemies, he offered himself a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savor, and has been accepted in your behalf; so that all who believe in him may henceforth be justified from all things.

These two great doctrines, of your own personal desert of punishment, and of your redemption through Christ—are "continually" set before you. Whatever is the immediate subject of discourse, these are either taken for granted as acknowledged truths, or are rendered prominent, as the occasion may require. These truths every minister of our Church is bound to make the "continual" subjects of his ministration; and I thank God, that, from the first moment that I ever ministered among you, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified! [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2)."

But, if we rejoice at the reformation made, then our joy is damped by what is spoken of,

***~~II. The shortness of the reformation's continuance.~~***

***~~It was only "during the days of Jehoiada" that this reformation continued.~~***

King Joash had, from his infancy, been instructed by Jehoiada; and during the life of that aged priest he was kept steadfast in the ways of God, [2 Kings 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 12.2). But no sooner was that pious monitor removed, than Joash listened to the voice of evil counselors, deserted the worship of his God, and abandoned himself to idolatry, verse 17, 18. Yes, and he even slew the very son of Jehoiada, whom God had sent to remonstrate with him and reclaim him! verse 20-22.

*What a solemn picture does this give us of human nature!*But, in every age, man has shown himself prone to depart from the living God. Moses warned the Israelites, that, after his departure, they would, notwithstanding all the wonders that had been wrought for them, forsake the Lord, [Deuteronomy 31:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.27); [Deuteronomy 31:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 31.29). Even Paul himself, whose ministrations were so powerful, foresaw that, after his removal, the good work which he had begun among the Ephesian elders would be greatly impeded, and that many among them, who had run well for a season, would be hindered in their way, and be turned at last from the faith which they had professed, "I know this," says he, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch; and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears! [Acts 20:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.29-31)."

***~~And who shall say how long the work that has been begun among you shall continue?~~***

It is not three, but forty-three years, that I have had the happiness of watching over you, and of endeavoring, according to the grace given me, to advance your spiritual welfare. But I tremble to think how soon the instructions now given you may be forgotten, and the hopeful appearances among you may vanish. But, as Peter says, "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things!

[2 Peter 1:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.12-15)."

Know, then, that you are sinners, deserving of the wrath of God! But know, that "God has laid help for you upon one that is mighty;" and that, through the sacrifice which Christ has offered for you on the cross, every one of you may obtain both pardon and peace; Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ is both "able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him;" and, "of those who sincerely come to him, not so much as one shall ever be cast out!" O, treasure up these truths in your hearts; for "they are your very life, [Deuteronomy 32:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.46-47)." Without the knowledge of them you never can be saved; and with the *experimental knowledge*of them in your souls, you can never perish. Seek, then, to realize them more and more in your secret chamber; that, whether he who now ministers them unto you is alive or not, you may have the comfort of them in your own souls, and find them, as you most assuredly shall, "the power of God to your everlasting salvation! [1 Corinthians 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.2). [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)."

***~~#415~~***

***~~AMAZIAH'S CONFLICT BETWEEN DUTY AND SELF-INTEREST~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.9)~~***

Amaziah asked the man of God, "But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops?"  
The man of God replied, "The LORD can give you much more than that."

It is humiliating to reflect, that more attention was often paid to the messengers of the Most High by ungodly men under the Jewish dispensation, than is generally paid to them even by the godly in the present day. At one time we read of a whole army stopped and disbanded by one single declaration of a prophet, [1 Kings 12:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 12.21-24). At another time, a great national reformation was effected by the very same means, [2 Chronicles 15:8-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.8-15). In like manner, when Amaziah king of Judah was going with an army of four hundred thousand men against the Edomites, one word from a man of God prevailed on him to dismiss one fourth of their number, because, as being idolaters, they were under the displeasure of the Most High. He was indeed concerned about the subsidy which he had paid them for their assistance; but that only serves to show more strongly what implicit obedience he was disposed to pay to the commands of God, when he could so easily be induced to sacrifice his temporal interests, and to release from their obligations so large a portion of his army. The difficulty however which he started, and the solution of that difficulty by the prophet, deserve particular attention. Let us consider:

***~~I. The difficulty started.~~***

Amaziah had hired one hundred thousand Israelites as auxiliaries in this war, and had paid the money for their equipment; and, when he was required to discharge them, he naturally concluded that he would lose all that he had advanced. Hence he expressed to the prophet the difficulty that was in his mind. Now,

***~~This is a common difficulty in the minds of men.~~***

Circumstances of necessity will sometimes arise, where duty and self-interest appear to clash with each other. Sometimes they actually exist, as in the instance before us; and sometimes they are only apprehended as likely to exist.

It sometimes happens that a person has been placed by his parents in a line of business where he cannot get a livelihood without continually violating the laws of the land and the dictates of his conscience. What is to be done in such a case? His property is invested; and cannot be disposed of without a considerable loss. And shall that be done? Shall such a sacrifice be made to God? It is desirable indeed to maintain a conscience void of offence; but is it to be done at such an expense?

It sometimes happens also that a person is educated for the ministry, with certain expectation of preferment; but when the time for his ordination arrives, he finds no disposition for the holy employment, no real determination to give himself wholly to the service of the sanctuary. What then shall he do? To go to God with a lie in his right hand, and profess that he is moved by the Holy Spirit to take on himself that sacred function, when he is moved only by the temporal advantages annexed to it, is very painful! And to contract a responsibility for the souls of hundreds and of thousands, when he has scarcely any concern about his own soul, appears to him a very dangerous step. But what must be done? He has been educated for it; he finds it difficult to turn to any other line of work; and, above all, the provisions designed for him will be lost; and how can these difficulties be surmounted?

When the evils are in prospect only, their operation is exactly the same. One man feels that it is his duty to become a faithful follower of Christ. But his parents will be offended; his friends will be alienated; his prospects in life will be destroyed—and how can he endure to make such sacrifices as these? A few pence he would readily lose; but the loss of so much would be ruinous; and he knows not how to combat evils of such magnitude as this.

***~~But the difficulty referred to would be no difficulty, if only we viewed things in their true light.~~***

If we should suppose an angel sent down to sojourn for a time on earth, would he find any hesitation whether to prefer his self-interest or his duty? Nor did the Apostle Paul hesitate even when life itself was at stake, "I am ready," says he, "not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Lord's sake." Nor should we find any difficulty if we formed a proper estimate of things around us.

***~~Would we regard our temporal interests, if we reflected on the extreme emptiness and vanity of everything here below? Should we hesitate in our choice of evils, if we considered the impossibility of ever being acknowledged by Christ, without forsaking all, even life itself, for him? Above all, would we allow the whole world to stand in competition with Christ, if we considered what wonderful things he has done and suffered for us?~~***

Truly, the loss of all things compared with the loss of his favor, would be only as a feather in a scale against a ton of lead; and, like Paul, we would "count all things but loss, that we might win Christ;" and instead of repining at the injuries sustained, we should regard them rather as grounds of mutual gain; saying with Paul, "If I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; for the same cause also do you joy and rejoice with me, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18)."

But we cannot suggest a better view of this matter than that which is contained in our text; in which we have,

***~~II. The difficulty solved.~~***

We are contented that men should lean to the side of self-interest, if only they will consider wherein their true interest consists. If God cannot do more for them than the world can—then let them seek the world; or, if God cannot compensate all that they can lose or suffer for him—then let them seek the world. But we do not fear to say, whatever be the sacrifice which they make for him, "The Lord is able to give you much more than this!"

***~~1. The Lord is able to give you much more than this, in this present world.~~***

It is a certain truth, that God does often recompense the services or sufferings of his people even with worldly prosperity, "Godliness has in this respect the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come, [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8)." This very consideration is urged by God himself as a motive to charity, [Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10); and our text suggests it as an argument for submitting cheerfully to losses in the path of duty.

It is curious to observe, that the loss sustained by Amaziah in obedience to God's command, was not only recompensed by present victory, but was restored in a three-fold proportion to his grandson Jotham; the same sum being paid to him for three successive years by the Ammonites, which Amaziah his grandfather sacrificed to the Lord on this occasion, verse 11 with [2 Chronicles 27:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 27.5).

But it is not three, or thirty-fold that we are to expect, but "a hundred-fold" of whatever we sacrifice for the Lord [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30); and is not this an ample compensation?

It is true, the Israelites whom he dismissed on this occasion did him great injury in their return home, verse 13; and this might almost seem to contradict the promise in our text; but we apprehend that this very circumstance was permitted by God, on purpose to show Amaziah how great a ruin he had been delivered from; since these Israelites were not hearty in his cause, and would have turned against him when once they saw the Edomites prevail, and would thus have utterly completed his destruction.

Other reasons might be assigned for this dispensation; it might be supposed to be a punishment on Amaziah for hesitating to obey the divine mandate, and for placing his interest in competition with his duty; or it might be intended to guard him against the idolatry into which he was about to fall, by allowing the most idolatrous part of his own dominions to participate in the judgments inflicted on the Edomites.

But we apprehend that the reason first assigned, is that which was more immediately in the mind of God, when he permitted to dark and mysterious a judgment to fall on one who was obedient to his command, yes to arise, as it were, out of that very obedience.

But, waving all consideration of temporal recompense, God can infinitely more than counterbalance all temporal losses by the richer effusion of his Spirit on the soul! If he allows us to be deprived of earthly wealth, are we any losers, if he gives to us a proportionable increase of spiritual riches? Cannot he, by the consolations of his Spirit, raise us far above all temporal distresses, and, by opening a prospect beyond the grave, make us to rejoice and glory in all the sufferings that can be inflicted on us here?

Behold the Apostle Paul, how he "took pleasure in infirmities, and reproaches, and necessities, and persecutions, and distresses, for Christ's sake," because they tended to his spiritual welfare! [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10). And others, his companions, "took joyfully the confiscation of their goods, knowing that they had in Heaven a better and an enduring substance, [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34)."

Thus may *we*expect it to be with us in this world, "If our afflictions abound—then so shall also our consolation abound by Christ;" and the very sense of having sought the glory of God will make every pain a pleasure, and every loss a gain.

***~~2. The Lord is able to give you much more than this, in the world to come.~~***

"If we *suffer*with Christ, we shall also *reign*with him;" and who can declare the full import of that promise? Truly, the reward that awaits the faithful followers of Christ hereafter, no words can express, and no imagination can conceive. It will be in vain to attempt any description of the glory and felicity of Heaven; but I will ask, Whether one single plaudit from our Judge will not overbalance all that we can either do or suffer in a hundred years? *How ashamed shall we be in that day, to think that we permitted the things of time and sense to warp our judgment, or hinder our practice!*One glimpse of the Savior's glory will repay whole years of trouble! No sooner shall we be received into his bosom, than we shall adore him for every trial that weaned us from the world, and for every loss that facilitated our progress towards the heavenly kingdom. Let us only take eternity into our estimate, and we shall instantly say with the Apostle, "I reckon (I compute) that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us! [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)."

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. Those who are yet undecided in the course they shall take.~~***

As strongly as we have condemned the conduct of Amaziah for hesitating between the calls of self-interest and of duty, we yet will venture to propose him as an example, changing only the object of your concern. Are you tempted to violate a duty, or to draw back from suffering—then ask yourselves immediately,

"But what shall I do for the favor of my God?  
 What shall I do for the peace of my conscience?  
 What shall I do for the salvation of my soul?  
 How can I bear the loss of all these?"

Let, I say, your hesitation be on this side; let the consideration of your eternal interests rise in your mind as instinctively and forcibly, as that of temporal interests does in the mind of a worldling; and then we shall have no fear but that your obedience to God's Word will be prompt, uniform, and unreserved. You will "buy the truth" at any price, "and never sell it" for a thousand worlds!

**2. Those who have been enabled to give up all for Christ.**

Whatever you may have lost or suffered, have you ever for a moment repented of the sacrifices you have made? No! if your hearts are right with God, you will feel yourselves indebted to God in proportion to the losses you have sustained for him; seeing that the privilege of suffering for him is an inestimable gift [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29), and the highest honor that can be conferred upon any man! [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41). [1 Peter 4:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-14).

Go on then, Beloved, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;" and let it be seen in you, that "a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses," but that "in God's favor is life;" and that, with "his love shed abroad in your heart," "though you have nothing—you are yet possessing all things! [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)."

***~~#416~~***

***~~THE SIN AND DANGER OF DESPISING GOD'S COUNSEL~~***

**[2 Chronicles 25:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.16)**

While he (King Amaziah) was still speaking, the king said to him, "Have we appointed you an adviser to the king? Stop! Why be struck down?"  
So the prophet stopped but said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel."

Wherever "the heart is not perfect with God," a compliance with the divine will may be occasional and partial, but it never can be uniform and unreserved. When circumstances occur that require the sacrifice of a bosom lust, the heart will rise against the commandment, and trample under foot the authority of God himself.

*Herod*would comply in some things with the injunctions of John the Baptist, but when a separation from Herodias was insisted on, he broke through all the restraints of conscience, and inflicted death on his monitor as the penalty of his fidelity.

Not unlike to Herod was *King Amaziah*; who obeyed the voice of a prophet requiring him to dismiss his hired troops, and to rely on God to compensate his loss, but was filled with indignation against one who expostulated with him on the subject of his idolatry. It would seem, that in proportion as a man is degraded in his own eyes by the conduct reproved, he will, if not truly penitent, swell with resentment against the person that undertakes to reprove him. The hiring of troops to augment his army appeared a prudent and commendable measure; but to take for his gods those worthless idols, over whom he himself had prevailed, was folly in the extreme! Hence, when reproved for it, he burst forth into a rage, and quickly terminated his conference with the inspired messenger.

From hence we shall take occasion to show:

**I. What is the conduct of the generality in reference to the counsels of God.**

God still, as formerly, sends his servants to testify against prevailing iniquities; and still, as before, are his messages rejected.

***~~In Amaziah we see a striking picture of rebellious man.~~***

Nothing could be more just than the reproof given him. To renounce Jehovah, who had interposed so wonderfully in his behalf, and to substitute in his place those idols which had not been able to protect their own votaries, was an infatuation, of which we should scarcely have conceived him capable. Yet behold how he resented the prophet's expostulation! He regarded the admonition as an insult, and as an interference with his royal prerogative; as though God himself was not at liberty to counsel him. He moreover threatened the prophet, with an evident reference to Zechariah, whom for a similar offence his father had put to death, [2 Chronicles 24:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.20-21). Thus he authoritatively silenced the messenger of God; and determinately persisted in his own impious idolatry.

***~~No less reasonable than the expostulations made with him, are those which in God's name we make with you from time to time.~~***

They principally relate to two points:

Your rejection of God as the supreme good.

Your neglect of Christ as the only Mediator between God and man.

And is there not ground, abundant ground, for remonstrances on these points? Though Jehovah is acknowledged in *words*as the true God, is he loved, and served, and honored, as God? Do we give him our whole hearts, and "cast all our idols to the moles and to the bats?" Say whether "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life" be not in reality preferred before him, and whether we do not provoke him to jealousy by these, and other "idols which we set up in our hearts!"

And though we confess Christ to be the Savior of the world, say whether we seek him, and rely upon him, and plead his merits at the throne of grace, and renounce with abhorrence all dependence on our own wisdom, strength, or righteousness?

Alas! it is manifest, that the regard paid to him among us, is by no means what it ought to be, and that all his love to us is repaid, for the most part, with cold indifference and mere formal acknowledgments.

We ask then: Whether, as servants of the Most High God, we have not reason to complain, reprove, expostulate? and whether our most earnest representations ought not to be received?

***~~Yet is our testimony, like that of the prophet, too often rejected with disdain.~~***

In public indeed we are permitted to speak with some degree of plainness; yet even there a faithful discharge of our duty is sure to bring upon us no little measure of odium and reproach. If we exhort, reprove, rebuke, with all authority, as we are commanded to do—then many, especially of the higher ranks, will consider themselves as insulted; and will either endeavor to silence us, or, if unable to effect that, will withdraw from a minister that is so offensive to them. Their advice to us is like that of the Jews of old, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits; make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us," or, at least, do not set him before us in his real character! [Isaiah 30:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.8-11).

And, when they cannot prevail, they tell us plainly, if not in words—yet more strongly in deed, "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)."

And what if we presume to speak to men in private? What indignation do we then excite! If there we should say to them, "I have a message unto you from the Lord;" and should then proceed to add, in reference to their contempt of God as their chief good, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2)." And then, in reference to their contempt of Christ as their Savior, "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great a salvation! [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)." Then we should soon find whether the spirit of Amaziah does not prevail at this day, as much as ever.

It is worthy of observation, that those very people who will take the most indecent liberties with us, decrying to our face all our views and conduct as the grossest absurdity—will not allow us to speak in ever so gentle terms to them against their views and conduct. And, if we presume to bear a faithful testimony against the iniquities that prevail around us, we are instantly silenced by reproaches, and are cast out as the very pests of society! See [Jeremiah 29:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.24-27)."

That we may be the better able to appreciate such conduct, we now proceed to show,

***~~II. In what light this conduct is to be viewed.~~***

The world themselves uphold one another in this conduct, as innocent at least, if not also highly laudable; but, wherever it is found, it must be regarded,

***~~1. As a symptom of sinful obduracy against God.~~***

The prophet needed no other evidence than this to convince him, that Amaziah was a hardened sinner before God. We do not say that every neglect of divine warnings argues the same degree of obduracy; but, in proportion as such neglect is willful, deliberate, and persevering—it betrays a spirit of rebellion, and a determined hostility against the God of Heaven.

Here let us ask ourselves whether we have not throughout the course of our whole lives set God at defiance, neglecting daily what we knew to be right, and practicing habitually what we Knew to be contrary to the divine commands? Let each of us enter into the secret recesses of his own heart, and say: Whether his own will, rather than God's, has not been the determining principle of all his actions? And whether *self*has not been the rule, the measure, and the end even of those things wherein he has professed to serve his God? Truly, if to "tremble at God's Word" is that which characterizes the first beginnings of grace in the soul, the state of those who can live so carelessly in a willful opposition to it must be awful indeed.

***~~2. As a ground of sinful dereliction of his duty as king.~~***

God's secret "determination" to withdraw from Amaziah all further communications of his grace, was justly inferred from the measure of obduracy now visible in his conduct. And though we cannot certainly dive into the secrets of the Almighty, we may often form a very probable judgment respecting them from what we see with our eyes. We know how God has acted in former times, and how he has told us that he will act, "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me," says he, "so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust! [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12)." Repeatedly is the same awful truth declared respecting the heathen world, notwithstanding their sins were far less aggravated than those committed by people enjoying the light of Scripture revelation, [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).

What then must we expect, who dwell under the meridian light of his Gospel? Have not we reason to fear that he will say, "Ephraim is joined to idols—let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)." Yes, indeed, "His Spirit will not always strive with man, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3);" and if we continue to "rebel and vex his Holy Spirit, he will turn to be our enemy, and fight against us, [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10)." If once we prevail to quench the motions of his Spirit, our state will be awful beyond all expression, "Woe to them," says God, "when I depart from them! [Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 9.12)."

***~~3. As a prelude to destruction.~~***

Trace the conduct of Amaziah from this moment, and behold his end! He would not listen to the counsels of God, and he is instantly given over to other counselors, verse 17. He sends a challenge to the king of Israel, who dissuades him from entering into an unnecessary and destructive war. The parable used on this occasion intimated to him his insufficiency to cope with the nation of Israel, and the certain issue of so unequal a contest verse 18, 19. "But Amaziah refused to listen, for God was determined to destroy him for turning to the gods of Edom, verse 20." To battle he went, and was defeated, and captured; and his capital became an easy prey to the conqueror, who plundered it of all its wealth, and broke down a portion of the wall which had been erected for its defense, verse 21-24.

From that time he lost all the affection and confidence of his subjects, who at last conspired against him; and, when he "had fled to Lachish for safety, sent after him and slew him there." *The whole of this is traced to God as its author*, on account of his impious rejection of the divine counsels, verse 27.

And what may not be expected by us also, if we "reject the counsel of God against ourselves?" Surely we shall be left to follow the infatuated devices of others, or of our own deceitful hearts, until we bring upon ourselves the destruction we have merited. Hear how awfully this is declared by God himself, "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth, but have delighted in wickedness! [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12)."

And by us is this sentence more especially to be expected, because of the many and faithful warnings which we have despised; for "he who, being often reproved, hardens his neck—shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy! [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1)." *The gathering of clouds does not more certainly portend rain, than a contempt of God's messages gives reason to expect his everlasting displeasure!*

***~~Learn then,~~***

***~~1. In what manner we should attend the means of grace.~~***

We should "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, if we would not deceive our own souls, [James 1:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21-24)."

***~~2. What obligations we owe to God for his patience towards us.~~***

Long has "he stood at the door of our hearts, knocking, [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20)," and has been refused admission, [Song of Solomon 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.2-3).*O let us bless his name, that he has not yet given us over to judicial blindness, and final impenitence!*[Acts 28:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.25-27). Still has our Great Advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ, interceded for us, [Luke 13:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.6-9); and still does our "God wait to be gracious unto us." O that "today, while it is called today, we might hear the voice" that yet sounds in our ears, and that "the patience of our God might lead us to repentance! [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4)."

***~~#417~~***

***~~CONNECTION BETWEEN DILIGENCE AND PROSPERITY~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 26:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.5)~~***

"He (Uzziah) sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success."

The dispensation under which the Jews lived being of a *temporal*nature, their advancement in respect of temporal prosperity was, for the most part, proportioned to the regard which they and their rulers showed to God. The account given of Uzziah may serve almost as a general history of God's conduct towards them, [Leviticus 26:3-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.3-45). When he walked humbly before God, "he was marvelously helped until he was strong, verse 8, 15;" but when, by his pride and disobedience, he had provoked God's heavy displeasure, he was given over to "destruction." The dispensation under which we live is altogether spiritual; and God observes the same rule of procedure towards us in spiritual things, as he maintained towards them in temporal things.

Respecting the prosperity of our souls, the text calls us to notice two things:

***~~I. Our dependence on God determines the prosperity of our souls.~~***

However diligent Uzziah was in seeking the Lord, it was God, and God alone, that "made him to prosper," And whatever means we may use, our advancement in the divine life must be traced to the same source—God. Our first inclinations to godliness originate with him. The continuance and increase of holy dispositions is in like manner the effect of his grace. If he were for one moment to suspend his communications of grace to us, we would be as incapable of bearing fruit to his glory, as a branch is when severed from the tree. Let it only be inquired wherein prosperity of soul consists:  
in a subjugation of our passions;  
in a victory over the world;  
in an abiding sense and enjoyment of the divine presence;  
and it will immediately appear, that God must be the author of it in all its parts.

***~~II. The prosperity of our souls, in connection with our diligence.~~***

The fruits of the earth are given us by God; yet he bestows his bounties on those only who use the proper means for the attainment of them. Just so does he also require exertion on our part in order to our spiritual advancement. The *means*are inseparably connected with the *end*. They are connected:  
in God's decree, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37), [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8);  
in the very nature of things;  
and in the experience of all the saints;  
and the more diligently we use the means—the more will both "grace and peace be multiplied unto us."

***~~From this subject we may derive matter:~~***

***~~1. For reproof.~~***

How awfully does this reprove the careless sinner! For if all our prosperity of soul is inseparably connected with diligence in the ways of God—then it is obvious that those who neglect the Word of God and prayer must be in a perishing condition!

The backslider too must feel himself condemned by the fact recorded in the text. It is plainly intimated that Uzziah, through his remissness, experienced a sad reverse. And such a reverse will all experience who relax their diligence in the ways of God. Let us watch therefore against secret declensions. If we have already declined, let us "repent, and do our first works, [Revelation 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4-5)," and "strengthen, by exertion, the dying remnants" of grace within us! [Revelation 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.2).

***~~2. For encouragement.~~***

We cannot command success, either in temporal or spiritual pursuits; yet in both it is found true, that "the diligent hand makes rich." In some instances indeed, God is found by them that sought him not; and people may use the means of grace without receiving any sensible increase of grace or peace. Nevertheless this is not God's *usual*mode of proceeding; nor does he ever continue either to bless the indolent, or to withhold his blessing from the diligent. He never will allow any to seek his face in vain, [Isaiah 45:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.19). Let this then encourage all to persevere in the use of means, "knowing assuredly that their labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

***~~#418~~***

***~~THE BAD EFFECTS OF PROSPERITY~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 26:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.15-16)~~***

"Uzziah's fame spread far and wide, for the LORD gave him marvelous help, and he became very powerful. But when he had become powerful, he also became proud, which led to his downfall."

It frequently happens, that after the most promising appearances of abundance, the hopes of the harvestman are disappointed; some blast, or some destructive insect cuts off the fruits before they arrive at maturity, so that "the mower fills not his arms with them, neither he who binds up the sheaves his arms."

Thus also it is too often found in the moral and religious world; people begin to "run well, and continue for a season; but are at last hindered," and "come short of that rest" which they had professed to seek. This is particularly found in those whose hopeful conduct has been chiefly occasioned by external influence. We have seen in *Joash*, that "he did that which was right all the days of Jehoiada the priest;" but after his decease, he turned aside to wickedness, and brought the heavy judgments of God both on himself and all his people! [2 Chronicles 24:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.2); [2 Chronicles 24:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.17-18).

Thus it was also with his grandson, *Uzziah*. For many years "he sought after God, verse 5;" and was signally blessed, and prospered by the Lord during all that time; yet, through the influence of that very prosperity, he fell, and perished miserably under the hand of an avenging God.

The words of our text will naturally lead us to set before you,

***~~I. The usual tendency of prosperity.~~***

Doubtless, prosperity cheers the mind, but:

***~~1. Prosperity tends to puff up with pride.~~***

*It is difficult to succeed in any enterprise, or any labor, without arrogating to ourselves a considerable portion of credit on account of it,* "Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food, [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.16)." That this is the common influence of prosperity, appears from the cautions given to the Israelites respecting it, in an instance where it should seem to be impossible for them to do otherwise than give the whole honor to God! [Deuteronomy 8:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.11-14). But pride, though so unsuitable to a fallen creature, is, alas! too powerful a principle in every man. *Behold*Nebuchadnezzar in the summit of his glory! [Daniel 4:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.30-32); [Daniel 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.20). Behold *Uzziah*, when he had been "marvelously helped, until he was strong." How forgetful were they of the obligations which they owed to God! Even the pious *Hezekiah*fell, through the influence of pride, though afterwards he humbled himself for this transgression. Indeed *it is very rare that people elevated by the acquisition of wealth or honor retain their former humility and simplicity; they rise in their own esteem, in proportion as they are looked up to by others, and account the homage that is paid to them a tribute due to their superior worth.*

***~~2. Prosperity tends to harden in iniquity.~~***

It is not towards men only, that prosperity affects our conduct, but even towards God himself! We can scarcely attain any considerable advancement in the world, but presently we become "presumptuous, and self-willed;" we allow ourselves a greater latitude to follow the inclinations of our own hearts; and, if checked by any faithful monitor, we will not endure his expostulations or reproofs; but, like Uzziah, are "angry with him" for performing his duty, instead of being grieved at ourselves for transgressing our own duty! We think ourselves at liberty to act as we please; and that neither God nor man has any right to call us to account.

This is most justly depicted by the Psalmist, [Psalm 10:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-6); [Psalm 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.11); [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13); and is traced by him to prosperity, as its proper source, [Psalm 73:3-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3-9); [Psalm 73:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.11-12). Ah! how many such instances have we seen, of men once apparently modest and humble, but afterwards, like Jeshurun, "grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior!" [Deuteronomy 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.15)."

We are apt to envy such people, when we behold their prosperity; but we shall see little reason to do so, if we duly consider the effects produced by it on their minds, [Psalm 73:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.3); [Psalm 73:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.16-19).

Rarely indeed has any spiritual good arisen from prosperity; but how awful is it to reflect on,

***~~II. The frequent termination of prosperity.~~***

***~~Behold how it terminated in the case before us!~~***

Uzziah, not content with the pomp of royalty, would usurp also the priestly office; and, when reproved for his presumption, was filled with indignation against his reprovers. But "while he was angry with the priests, the leprosy rose up in his forehead! verse 19;" and immediately "they thrust him out of the temple; yes, himself also hastened to go out, because*the Lord had smitten him!*verse 20." Thus it is with many who "once made a fair show in the flesh;" "being lifted up with pride, they fall into the condemnation of the devil! [1 Timothy 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.6)." From their scenes of earthly happiness they are cast headlong into the lowest abyss of misery, like the rich man in the parable, whose surviving brethren, misled by his example, were following him there with hasty strides! [Luke 16:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.22-23); [Luke 16:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.27-28).

But, if we could conceive by any means that such a one as Uzziah had found his way into Heaven, the very transaction that took place in the temple would be renewed there; the inhabitants of those blessed mansions, indignant at his presumption, would instantly "thrust him out! [Luke 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.28);" yes, "he himself would hasten to go out," not being able to endure the countenance of his offended God! [Isaiah 33:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14-17); which show that the godly alone can dwell with God. Let it not be thought that this is an uncommon termination of prosperity; for both Scripture and observation teach us to regard it as its frequent and ordinary result! [Proverbs 1:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.32), with [Matthew 19:23-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.23-26).

***~~Let us learn then from hence:~~***

***~~1. Let us learn to be moderate in our desire after earthly things.~~***

We may desire prosperity, because it is a gift of God to men, verse 5; and is particularly promised to those who love him, [Psalm 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.3); [Psalm 122:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 122.6). But we should desire prosperity only in submission to the will of God. We know not what will be its ultimate effect upon our souls. We know not what advantage it will give to our corrupt nature to break forth, and to plunge us into everlasting misery! Let us be diligent in our earthly calling, whatever it may be; but, as to any anxious concern about it: "Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-4)."

***~~2. Let us learn to be patient and resigned under any trials that God may be pleased to send us.~~***

Trials are "not at the present joyous, but grievous;" but they are promised by God as the choicest fruit of his paternal love, [Hebrews 12:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6-8). Even Paul himself needed a *thorn*in his flesh, "lest he should be exalted above measure, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7)." Who then are we, that we should think trials unnecessary for us? Trials are the furnace that is to purify us from our dross! [Isaiah 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.9) Trials are the pruning-knife that is to render us more fruitful in good works! [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.2).

We know how profitable it was to Manasseh to be taken among the thorns, 2 Chronicles 33:11-12. Just so, we have reason to hope that our afflictions also shall be sanctified to our good, [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10), and that we shall at the close of them adopt the language of David:

"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey Your word!" [Psalm 119:67](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.67)

"It was *good*for me to be afflicted, so that I might learn Your decrees." [Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.71)

"I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in *faithfulness*You have afflicted me!" [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.75)

***~~3. Let us learn to be thankful for the high honor conferred upon us.~~***

To none of the Jewish kings was given the united honor of both royalty and priesthood. That was reserved for Christ alone, who was to be "a Priest upon his throne, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13);" who yet, though a king, "glorified not himself to be made a High-priest, but was called to it of God, as was Aaron, [Hebrews 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.4-5)." But that honor has our adorable Savior procured for us, "He has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto our God forever and ever! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)." Yes, we are "a royal priesthood 1 Peter 2:9;" and "by the new and living way which he has opened for us through the veil, we may draw near" even to the very throne of God himself! [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22). Our doing so in faith will rid us from the leprosy, instead of bringing the leprosy upon us; and, instead of arming the angels against us, will make them to rejoice! [Luke 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.10); [Luke 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.22). Let us then improve our liberty, and "offer up spiritual sacrifices to our God from day to day, assured, that they are acceptable to him through Jesus Christ! [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5)."

***~~#419~~***

***~~A SENSE OF SINFULNESS A GOOD CORRECTIVE OF EVIL PASSIONS~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 28:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.10)~~***

"Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?"

***~~In viewing the various dispensations of Providence, we should regard the Supreme Disposer of all events not merely as a mighty Sovereign ordering everything according to his own will, but rather as a Moral Governor, who has respect to the welfare of his creatures, and consults the best interests of the universe. Towards individuals, his dealings may not accord with our ideas of justice, because there is another world wherein the seeming inequalities of his present conduct towards them will all be rectified.~~***

But towards nations, as this is the only time when they can be dealt with in their national capacity, he conducts himself more visibly according to their moral habits, rewarding them when they walk agreeably to his will, and punishing them when their violations of his commands are general and flagrant. We must not however imagine, that the people whom he makes use of as instruments of his displeasure, are more righteous than those whom he sends them to correct; for he may, and does, use what instruments he pleases; but *the people corrected, will always be found to have brought upon themselves his judgments by their own willful and obstinate impiety*. This is a truth so obvious and incontrovertible, that even idolaters themselves receive it with the greatest facility, and are sometimes influenced by it to a great extent.

The Israelites, at the time that the Prophet Oded was sent to them, were sunk in the grossest idolatry; yet, when informed by him that their victory over Judith was the result of a divine appointment on account of Judah's sins, and that the excessive cruelty with which that victory had been accompanied would bring the divine displeasure upon them also, they instantly sacrificed both their interests and their resentments, and yielded obedience to the prophet's admonitions. The expostulation in our text came home with power to their consciences, "Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?" May we also feel its force, while we:

***~~I. Urge you to institute the proposed inquiry.~~***

The circumstances under which this inquiry was proposed naturally lead us to consider it:

***~~1. In reference to the nation at large.~~***

Doubtless there are great enormities in other lands; the grossest superstitions and the most flagrant impieties testify against the great majority of those who bear the Christian name. But while we of this land boast of our superior light and morals, what abominations are found among us! Let us not think that because the evils once perpetrated in the *slave-trade*have been in a measure suppressed, the blood of thousands and tens of thousands does not yet cry to God against us for our insatiable avarice, and our cruel injustice. For centuries yet to come, we need bewail the guilt that has been contracted by our impious traffic in human blood.

Besides, the light with which we have been favored beyond other nations, only renders our misimprovement of it the more criminal; for though certainly there are many in the land who highly value and adorn the Gospel, there is with the generality a neglect and contempt of serious religion; so that *real piety is branded with infamy among us, more than infidelity or ungodliness itself!*Truly, on a view of all ranks and orders among us, we have as much reason to be ashamed and confounded before God, as any who may have experienced his heaviest judgments.

***~~2. In reference to ourselves in particular.~~***

***~~We are all ready enough to mark what is amiss in others, and even to ascribe the calamities of others to the intervention of an offended Providence. But it would be well for all to search out and examine their own faults, rather than to be uncharitably condemning the faults of others!~~***

The self-righteous, self-applauding moralist can spy out the failings and infirmities of those who profess a stricter system of religion; but let me ask such a one, are there not in you, even in you, sins against the Lord your God? *Have you not a beam in your own eye, while you are noticing with such severity the mote in your brother's eye?*

Look and see whether your religion of which you think so highly is not a mere *form*of godliness without the power of it?

See whether the Bible is dearer to you than gold and silver, and be relished by you more than your necessary food?

See whether your heart is broken and contrite before God, so that you often weep before God on account of the sins you have committed against him?

See whether Christ is precious in your sight, so that all your hope, all your desire, all your delight are centered in him alone?

In a word, see whether all your faculties and powers are consecrated to the service of Him who lived and died for you?

Truly, if you would consult the records of your conscience in relation to these things, you would see little reason, and feel little inclination too, to cast stones at others.

On the other hand, professors of religion also are but too often guilty of this same fault, being filled with an excessive pride in their own excellencies, and a contemptuous disregard of their less spiritual neighbors. But I would ask the professed follower of Christ:

Are there not sins with you too, as well as with the Pharisaic formalist?

Are there not great and crying evils in the religious world, which prove a stumbling-block to those around them?

Are not a vain conceit, an obtrusive talkativeness, an inattention to domestic duties, and a disregard of just authority—often indulged under the cloak of religion?

Are there not often found among professors of religion the same covetous desires, the same fraudulent practices, the same deviations from truth and honor—as are found in people who make no profession?

Are there not many whose tempers are so unsubdued, that they make their whole families a scene of contention and misery? Yes; though the accusations which are brought against the whole body of religious people as hypocrites are a gross calumny, there is but too much ground for them in the conduct of many.

But where these observations do not at all apply, we must still renew the question, even to the most exemplary among us, "Are there not sins with you also," even such as would justify God in taking vengeance upon you? Think of your manifold short comings and defects. Yes, think of "the iniquity even of your holiest things;" and, instead of exalting yourself above others, you will call yourself "less than the least of all saints," or rather "the chief of sinners."

But, that the inquiry may be suitably improved, we will,

***~~II. Point out the ends for which the inquiry should be made.~~***

There is not any part of Christian experience which would not be deeply affected by the knowledge of our own hearts; but, as our observations on this subject must of necessity be few, we shall con fine ourselves to those which arise from the passage under our consideration.

We should inquire then into our own sins:

***~~1. To make us estimate aright the distinguished mercies given unto us.~~***

Let us reflect on the peaceful state of this nation during the whole period in which we have been engaged in war, while every nation in Europe has in its turn sustained the heaviest calamities; and how shall we adore that Providence that has protected us! [March 1814, when the North of Germany was desolated and distressed.]

Let us contemplate also the numbers who have from time to time been cut off in their sins, though they had neither attained to our age, nor committed our iniquities. O what reason have we to adore God's mercy that has spared us, and that still waits to be gracious to us! May we not well be astonished, that while so many have been taken, we are left; and that while they are gone beyond redemption, we are yet on praying ground? If we know little of ourselves, we shall feel but little gratitude for this mercy; but, *if we are duly sensible of our own extreme vileness, we shall be overwhelmed with a view of his goodness to us*, and shall be humbled under a sense of *our*unbounded obligations.

***~~2. To moderate our resentments to our offending brethren.~~***

The former idea was implied in the prophet's address to Israel; but this was plainly expressed. The cruelty exercised by them was extreme; and, to deter them from prosecuting their inhuman projects, was this suggestion made; for *how could they proceed with such rigor towards others, when they themselves deserved so much heavier judgments had experienced such mercy from the hands of God?*

Certain it is, that we feel keenly for the most part the injuries that are done to us; and that we are but too apt to indulge a vindictive spirit. But the evils that a fellow-creature can do to us are nothing in comparison with those which we ourselves have committed against God! How then can we proceed with severity against a fellow-servant for a few pence, when a debt of ten thousand talents has been remitted unto us? Surely we shall be afraid lest God should mete to us the measure which we have dealt out to others, and that, we "having shown no mercy to others, should have judgment without mercy ourselves! [James 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.13)."

***~~3. To stir us up to imitate the compassion of our God to us, in our dealings with our fellow sinners.~~***

What a marvelous exercise of compassion was that which arose from the prophet's admonition! The princes of Israel were led to protest against the measures now about to be adopted by the victorious army; and that army, with the spoils and captives in their hands, renounced immediately all their views of self-interest and resentment, and made use of the very spoils, whereby they had expected to be enriched, to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and comfort the distressed, and honor those whom they had so deeply degraded. They even put on donkeys the sick and feeble; and they themselves took them back to the borders of their own country. This was what they now saw to have been the conduct of God towards them, and they desired to tread in his steps.

And what has God done for us? Even when we were his enemies, he gave his only dear Son to die for us; yes, and notwithstanding all our continued impieties, he stretches out his hands to us all the day long, and importunes us to accept his offered salvation. Just so, if we know how contrary to our deserts, these mercies are—then we shall be ready to act towards our brethren. Instead of rendering evil for evil, we shall "feed our enemy, or give him drink," in hopes of melting him into love by heaping kindness upon him, just as the workman fuses his metals by an accumulation of fire upon them, [Romans 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.14); [Romans 12:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.17); [Romans 12:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.19-20). There is in this last verse an astonishing beauty in a word which imports the feeding him as a helpless infant; and corresponds exactly with the tender and respectful care exercised by the Israelites on this occasion, verse 15; he will not "be overcome of evil, but will overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)."

***~~Let this subject teach us,~~***

***~~1. To cultivate the knowledge of our own hearts.~~***

It is that, and that alone, which will bring us to act aright in any part of our duty. *Without a sense of sin we can never be humbled before God; and without humility we can never exercise a just measure of forbearance and of kindness to man.*Then only, when we are sensible of having "been forgiven much, shall we love much."

**2. To keep our minds open to conviction.**

It is surprising how soon this whole multitude was convinced of sin. Let us learn from them not to dispute with our reprovers, or to vindicate ourselves at the expense of truth; let us rather desire to find out our errors, that they may be rectified, than to cloak them, and hold them fast.

***~~3. To follow instantly the convictions of our own minds.~~***

The Israelites fulfilled to the uttermost what they apprehended to be the mind and will of God; they did not plead for their interest, on the one hand, nor were they deterred by a fear of shame, on the other hand. They saw their duty, and performed it instantly without reserve. O that our reproofs might thus meet always an obedient ear! This ready obedience was their highest honor; let us regard it as ours also; and let us beware, lest this host of benevolent idolaters rise up in judgment against us, to our utter confusion, and our eternal condemnation!

***~~#420~~***

***~~THE CONDUCT OF AHAZ IN HIS DISTRESS~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.22)~~***

"In his time of trouble, King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the LORD."

*It is a common sentiment with men while in health, that they will repent and turn to God in a time of sickness. They imagine that trouble will of course dispose their minds to seriously seek God, and that they may therefore safely postpone all serious attention to their eternal interests, until that hour of sickness shall arrive.* But there is no necessary connection between affliction and true piety; "the sorrow of the world works death;" and consequently must rather be adverse to, than productive of, "godly sorrow, which alone works repentance to salvation, not to be repented of! [2 Corinthians 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10)."

If indeed trouble is accompanied with the grace of God, it then operates like the ploughing up of fallow ground for the reception of the seed; but of itself, afflictions only harden the heart against God, and calls forth into activity the most malignant passions of the soul! This cannot be more strikingly illustrated than in the conduct of Ahaz; in speaking of which we shall notice,

***~~I. The evil of Ahaz.~~***

This was surely exceedingly great. Ahaz, having provoked God by his great and multiplied iniquities, was given up by God into the hands of the Edomites first, and then of the Philistines, as the just punishment of his sins. The Assyrians too, whom he had hired as his allies, eventually, "instead of strengthening him, increased his distress, verse 16-20."

And what was the effect of these troubles on his mind? Did he humble himself before his God, and implore mercy at God's hands? No! He renounced his God altogether, setting up the gods of Syria in opposition to him, and shutting up the doors of his temple, and destroying the vessels that had been consecrated to his service, and building altars in every corner of Jerusalem, and, in every city of Judah, making high places, to burn incense unto other gods! verse 23-25.

We must confess that such impiety far exceeds what is commonly found in the world at this day; but in lower degrees it is found to reign among us also. All of us have a measure of trouble inflicted on us by God on account of sin; and in a variety of ways have we misimproved the divine chastisements. The very evils of Ahaz of trespassing yet more in his distress, may be committed by us in our troubles:

***~~1. By indifference.~~***

*Nothing is more common than to overlook the hand of God in our trials—ascribing them either to chance, or to second causes, or to regard them as merely the usual events of life.*In such a state of mind we meet our trials with a kind of stoical apathy, making the best of existing circumstances, and trying, by the expedients of pleasure, business, company, or occupation of some kind, to divert our thoughts, and alleviate our pains, [Isaiah 22:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.12-13). This is, as the Scripture expresses it, to "despise the chastening of the Lord, [Proverbs 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.11)."

How offensive must such conduct be! When he speaks, and we will not hear? [Job 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.14). When God's hand is lifted up, and we will not see it? [Isaiah 26:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.11). What is this but, in effect, to say, "The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad, [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12)." This indifference is well described by the prophet, in relation to Israel of old, "So He poured out on them His burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart!

[Isaiah 42:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.25)." But, however such conduct may be countenanced by an ungodly world, it will surely be visited with God's heavy displeasure! [Psalm 28:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 28.5).

***~~2. By obstinacy.~~***

Some, while they are not altogether unconscious from whence their afflictions proceed, are yet determined to go on in their own way, "they refuse to receive correction, and make their faces harder than a rock, and refuse to return to God! [Jeremiah 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.3). [Isaiah 57:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.17)." Thus it was with the Jews of old, "The people turn not unto him who smites him; neither do they seek the Lord Almighty! [Isaiah 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.13). And on this ground it was that the prophet uttered that heavy complaint against them, "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted!

[Isaiah 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.4-5)."

Happy would it be if this rebellious spirit had been confined to them; but it is no less prevalent among us; there are many for whose reformation successive strokes have proved ineffectual; and who are yet as far from God as if no such means had ever been used to bring them to repentance. Yes, like Pharaoh, they seem only to have been hardened by the plagues inflicted on them. The Lord grant that they may see their error, before they be given over to judicial blindness and final impenitence and damnation!

***~~3. By murmuring.~~***

*How often do we hear people complaining of their lot, as if their sufferings were intolerable and undeserved!*However clearly God marks their sin in their punishment, they do not imagine themselves as the sinful causes of their misery, but on God as the severe and unprovoked author of them! [Exodus 16:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.35), [41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exodus 16.41). [Ezekiel 18:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.25); [Ezekiel 18:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.29). Thus Isaiah, foretelling the effect of God's chastisements on the Jews, says, "Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God! [Isaiah 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.21)."

And what shall we say of such a disposition? What shall we say of him who by "his own foolishness perverts his way, and then in heart frets against the Lord? [Proverbs 19:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.3)." This we must say, that he manifests the very dispositions of Hell itself; for of these accursed men that are there confined, we are told that, "They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of Heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done! [Revelation 16:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.9-11)."

***~~4. By despondency.~~***

As on the one hand we are apt to "despise the chastening of the Lord," so, on the other hand, we are ready to "*faint*when we are rebuked by him [Hebrews 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.5)." We don't understand that often God's chastisements proceeding from his love; and, beholding nothing but wrath in them, we conclude, that it is in vain to call upon God, and that he will never be entreated of us. Thus *even from despondency we derive arguments for continuance in sin*, "There is no hope; no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go! [Jeremiah 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.25)." Of this God himself complains [Jeremiah 18:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.12-13); and well he may, since it is a limiting of his power, as though he were not able to deliver, [Isaiah 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.2); or a denial of his mercy, as though he had "forgotten to be gracious, and his mercy were clean gone forever, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9)." True it is, that despondency is often indulged under an idea that it is an expression of humility; but it is as offensive to God as any of the dispositions before specified, and tends even more strongly than any of them, to bind our sins upon us.

That we may be the more afraid of following the steps of Ahaz, let us consider,

***~~II. The stigma fixed upon Ahaz.~~***

There is an extraordinary force and emphasis in the expression, "This is that king Ahaz, verse 22, KJV". It is as though God intended to point him out to the whole world as a prodigy of folly and wickedness; this is that infatuated man, who presumes to "strive with his Maker, like the clay quarreling with the potter! [Isaiah 45:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.9)," or "briers and thorns setting themselves in battle array against the devouring fire! [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.4)." This is that ungrateful man, who, when I have been chastening him with parental tenderness in order to prevent the necessity of executing my everlasting judgments upon him, has only multiplied his transgressions against me; breaking through every hedge which I made to restrain him, and throwing down every wall which I erected to impede his course! [Hosea 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.6). This is that impious man, who, in the madness of his heart, has determined to banish me from the world, and to blot out the remembrance of me from the earth!

As the expression is emphatic with respect to him, so it is most instructive with respect to us.

It clearly shows us that "sin is a reproach to any people! [Proverbs 14:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.34)." We may vindicate it, and applaud it; but we only "glory in our shame, [Philippians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.19);" for it makes a man as loathsome "as a sepulcher that is full of filth, [Matthew 23:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.27)." Sin is fitly characterized as "filthiness of the flesh and spirit, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1);" and in that light it is viewed, not by God only, but by all who are taught of God.

Examine the fore-mentioned sins, of *indifference*, of *obstinacy*, of *murmuring*, and *despondency*; and they will all be found odious in the extreme; so that a man under the dominion of them may well be pointed out as an object of universal abhorrence, "This is that king Ahaz! verse 22, [Psalm 52:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 52.7)."

It is possible indeed that an ungodly man may pass through life without any such stigma fixed upon him; but he will not escape it in the last day, when all the most secret sins shall be revealed; then will that declaration of Solomon be fully verified, "The wicked man is loathsome, and comes to shame! [Proverbs 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.5);" however cautiously he may have veiled his wickedness from the eyes of men, or even obtained the applause of man for his pretended virtues, he will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt! [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2)."

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The great design of God in our afflictions.~~***

God does not willingly His redeemed children. He is a tender Parent, who seeks the welfare of his children, and "chastens them for their profit," to humble them, and to prove them, and to make them "partakers of his holiness, [Isaiah 27:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.9). [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10)." Hence it is said, "*Blessed*is the man whom you chasten, O Lord, [Psalm 94:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.10)."

Let us then contemplate our trials in this view. From whatever quarter they may come, let us acknowledge the hand of God in them; and bless his name, as well when he takes away, as when he gives! [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21).

***~~2. Our duty under afflictions.~~***

Every *rod*has a voice to us, which we should endeavor to understand, [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9); and, if we cannot immediately discern its true import, we should go to God, and say, "Show me why you contend with me, [Job 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 10.2)." And, when we have found out "the accursed thing that troubles our camp, [Joshua 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.11)," then we should "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of our God [James 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.10)," and with meek submission say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him! [Micah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.9)." *We should even be thankful for the fire that purges away our dross, and not so much as wish to be delivered from it until we can come out of it purified as gold!*

***~~#421~~***

***~~THE USE OF COVENANTING WITH GOD~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 29:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.10-11)~~***

"Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, be not now negligent. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and to burn incense."

*A truly pious man will not be satisfied with serving God in his prayer-closet. He will exert his influence to bring others also to a sense of their duty.* The public exercise of the ministry indeed belongs to those only who are duly called to it [Hebrews 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.4); but all who are possessed of authority (parents, masters, magistrates and kings) should use it for the promoting of virtue and religion. Christians of every rank and description should exhort one another, [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13). We have a noble example set before us in the conduct of Hezekiah. As soon as he came to the throne, he set himself to restore the service of the temple, and called upon all, both ministers and people, to make a solemn covenant with their God.

The royal proclamation for the observance of this day Fast-day, March 1798, speaks, in effect, the language of the text. From which I will take occasion to show,

***~~I. When we have reason to apprehend that God's anger is waxed hot against us.~~***

We cannot in all cases determine how far a divine dispensation may be sent in anger or in love; but in general we may say:

**1. God is incensed against us, when our sins are multiplied against him.**

*Sin is the invariably object of God's abhorrence!*[Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13). [Psalm 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.5). This truth is so evident that it needs not any confirmation. For, what lamentable depravity pervades every part of our nation! There is no iniquity, however heinous, which is not practiced without remorse.

If we look into our own bosoms, what reason for humiliation may we find!

What ingratitude for mercies received.  
What impenitence for sins committed.  
What rebellion against God.  
What contempt of his Son.  
What resistance of his Spirit,  
—have we not occasion to deplore!

And shall not God be avenged on such a nation as this? Yes, there is not one among us that does not deserve to be made a monument of his wrath!

***~~2. God is incensed against us, when his judgments are multiplied upon us.~~***

God often sends temporal afflictions to his people in love, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6). But spiritual judgments are a certain token of his wrath. Blindness of mind, obduracy of heart, and obstinacy in sin—are among his heaviest judgments! [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10). And have none of us reason to fear that these are now inflicted on us?

But *it is by temporal judgments chiefly that he punishes nations*. It was from these that Hezekiah judged of God's anger against the Jews, verses 8, 9. And are not these multiplied upon our land at this time? Surely the displeasure of God can scarcely ever be more strongly displayed, than it is in the calamities under which we now groan. Of course, these strong expressions must be modified according to circumstances.

But that none may yield to desponding fears we shall point out,

***~~II. How God's judgments can be averted.~~***

*Repentance*towards God and *faith*in Christ are the means prescribed by God. But it is not a slight and superficial use of these means that will suffice; we should solemnly devote ourselves to God in a perpetual covenant.

Not that we should attempt to renew the covenant of works. That would make void the Gospel, and seal our eternal condemnation! [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). Nor should we think to add anything to the covenant of grace. That was once made with Christ, and is ordered in all things and sure, [Hebrews 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.6). But we should patiently and deliberately renounce all our former ways. We should seriously give up ourselves to God as his redeemed people; and entreat him to perfect us in any way which he shall see fit.

**Such covenants as these have often been made by the most eminent saints.**

Under the Old Testament dispensation they were judged acceptable to God. Omitting many other instances, we may notice the solemn covenant of Asa, 2 Chronicles 15:12-15. We may notice also that which was entered into by Josiah, 2 Kings 23:3. Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of the making of such covenants as characteristic of the gospel times, [Isaiah 44:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.5). [Jeremiah 50:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.4-5). Paul highly commends the conduct of the Macedonians on account of their having thus given themselves up to God, [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5); and recommends a similar practice to all Christians of every age and nation, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

**Nor can we doubt of their acceptableness to God.**

Hezekiah manifestly supposed that God would accept him in this duty. It was recommended to Ezra in circumstances where there was but little hope remaining, [Ezra 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 10.3). And God himself expressly enjoined it as the means of averting his displeasure, [Jeremiah 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 4.4); not that we are to suppose that there is anything meritorious in such an act; but it tends, of itself, to the humiliation and confirmation of our souls, and will be both accepted and remembered by our covenant God and Father, [Deuteronomy 29:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.12-13).

These *means*being at once so scriptural and so important,

**Let me now in conclusion urge upon you the adoption of them.**

We admire the tender and affectionate address of Hezekiah to the priests. And with similar concern would we now invite you to the performance of your duty. "Let this now be in all your hearts;" for,

***~~1. There is no time for delay.~~***

Many are "negligent" at present in expectation of a more convenient season; but who can assure himself that he shall be alive on the morrow, [James 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.14); or that, if he is, he shall have an inclination to that from which he is now averse? or that God will grant him the aids of his Spirit, which are now despised? The voice of God to every one is: Seek me today, while it is called today! [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13); [Hebrews 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.15).

With respect to the nation, who can tell how soon the cloud that hangs over us may burst, and overwhelm us utterly? Let us follow the example of the repenting Ninevites, [Jonah 3:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.5-9). If "it is in our hearts to make a covenant," let it *instantly*be done [Psalm 119:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.60).

Let me address all of you as a father, and entreat all of you as "my sons" and daughters to "neglect your duty no longer;" but "now" while we are yet speaking, to surrender up yourselves to God with full purpose of heart!

***~~2. If we neglect this duty, we cannot hope to escape the wrath of God!~~***

Sodom was destroyed, because they laughed at God's threatenings as idle tales. Just so, the strongest empires, in succession, have fallen a sacrifice to their sins. Who then shall protect us, if we continue to provoke the Majesty of Heaven?

But, whatever be the fate of the nation, we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ; and there none will be acknowledged as his people, who have not sincerely taken him for their Lord and Savior. If then you have any regard for your eternal welfare, neglect him no longer; but, in the penitent language of the prophet, devote yourselves to his service! [Isaiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.13).

***~~3. If we heartily engage in this duty, we have nothing to fear.~~***

Were such a covenant general through the nation, God would soon remove his judgments. But whatever comes upon the land, God's faithful people shall be objects of his favor. Though they may be involved in the general calamities, they shall be comforted with the divine presence, [Psalm 34:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.18-19). They need not therefore be agitated with fear on account of God's displeasure in this world; nor have they anything to dread in the eternal world, [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17). Let us then enter into this matter with our whole hearts, and pray day and night for grace to perform our vows. Unfaithfulness to our engagements will incense God still more against us, and provoke him to inflict yet heavier judgments upon us! [Jeremiah 34:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 34.18-20). It were even better never to have vowed, than to vow and not pay! [Ecclesiastes 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.5). [2 Peter. 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet. 2.21). He however, who puts it into our heart to make, can enable us to keep, our covenant, Jude verse 24.

Let us then engage simply in dependence on the divine strength; but found all our hopes of acceptance on that better and unchangeable covenant, which Christ has entered into on our behalf.

***~~#422~~***

***~~RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE WORSHIP BY HEZEKIAH~~***

**[2 Chronicles 29:20-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.20-29)**

Early the next morning King Hezekiah gathered the city officials together and went up to the temple of the LORD. They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs and seven male goats as a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary and for Judah. The king commanded the priests, the descendants of Aaron, to offer these on the altar of the LORD. So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar; next they slaughtered the rams and sprinkled their blood on the altar; then they slaughtered the lambs and sprinkled their blood on the altar. The goats for the sin offering were brought before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. The priests then slaughtered the goats and presented their blood on the altar for a sin offering to atone for all Israel, because the king had ordered the burnt offering and the sin offering for all Israel. He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets. So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed. When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped."

Among the most eminent of the kings of Judah was Hezekiah. Of several indeed is it said, that they did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; but it was a high commendation of Hezekiah, that he did so "according to all that David his father had done."

Hezekiah came to the throne under the greatest disadvantages. His father had exceeded in wickedness all the kings that had been before him; and had caused all public acknowledgment of Jehovah to cease from the land. Under such circumstances it might have been supposed that Hezekiah, at the age of twenty-five, would have been infected with the prevailing impieties of his father's court, or, at all events, that he would not have dared to stem the torrent of iniquity that had borne down all before it; but no sooner was he placed upon his father's throne, than, even in the first year, and the very first month of his reign—he ordered the temple to be opened, and all the defilements that were in it to be removed, and the worship of the Most High God to be restored. Though there was not that alacrity among the priests that might have been expected, the work was soon executed, and in sixteen days the temple, with all its vessels, was prepared and sanctified for the service of God.

The very next day, Hezekiah, having his heart set upon the blessed work, "rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord." The service which they performed on this occasion is related in the words which we have read; and it will serve as an excellent pattern for us on this occasion. [On the re-opening of a Church after it had been shut up for repair, in 1802.]

There are three things in particular to which we would call your attention:

***~~I. Their humiliation, as manifested in their numerous sacrifices.~~***

For the sin of a priest or of the whole congregation, only one bullock was prescribed to be offered by the law, [Leviticus 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.3); [Leviticus 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.14). But the impieties of the nation having exceeded all bounds, and been of long continuance, Hezekiah judged that seven bullocks, and an equal number of rams, and lambs, and he-goats, should be sacrificed as a sin-offering to the Lord; and of all of them in succession it is particularly recorded, that "their blood was sprinkled on the altar." When the he-goats were offered, it is further noticed, that "the king and the congregation (by their representatives) laid their hands upon them." Such was the way in which "an atonement was offered, and reconciliation made for all Israel."

And who does not here see the gospel method of reconciliation with God through the great Sacrifice which was once offered on Mount Calvary? This it was which the sacrifices under the Law shadowed forth; and this it is which opens a way for our restoration to the divine favor. "We are reconciled to God through the blood of the cross." By this one offering there is a new and living way consecrated for us through the veil; and by it sinners of every description may draw near to God with full assurance of faith!

But here let me particularly call your attention to those two points:  
1. the sprinkling the blood upon the altar,  
2. the laying of their hands upon the victims.

Never must we draw near to God on any occasion without adverting to these significant emblems, or rather without realizing that which was here figuratively proclaimed.

**1.** We must sprinkle the altar of our God with the Redeemer's blood; we must actually bear in mind, and expressly declare before God, that all our hope of acceptance with him is through the sin-atoning death of Christ. That sentiment must be so fixed in the mind, and rooted in the heart, as never to be lost sight of for one moment. The repetition in our text shows us what must be continually repeated by us in every approach of our souls to God. As "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," so without an express trust in that blood as the only ground of our hopes there can be no application of that remission to our souls. O that this might be duly borne in mind by every one of us!

**2.** The laying of their hands upon the victims. Just so, we must also with deep penitential sorrow transfer our sins to the sacred head of Jesus. "On him were the iniquities of all laid by God himself;" and we also must lay our iniquities upon him in the exercise of humble faith. It is by the mutual transfer, if I may so speak, of *our sins to him*, and of *his righteousness to us*, that we are to be freed from all our guilt, and to be made righteous in the sight of a holy God, "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we (who had nothing but sin) might be made the righteousness of God in him! [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21)."

When Christ is thus kept in view in all our transactions with God, we need not fear but that God will be gracious unto us, and seal upon our souls a sense of his forgiving love.

Let us next notice,

***~~II. Their joyful praises.~~***

Together with their humiliation, they offered unto God their praises and thanksgivings agreeably to the laws which had been prescribed by God himself. In this also are they worthy of our constant imitation, "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)," says the Apostle; and what God has so joined we ought not to put asunder.

But here also there are two things worthy of more particular notice, "When the burnt-offering began, then the song of the Lord also began;" and "all this continued until the burnt-offering was finished." There was no need to wait; their hearts might well be tuned to praise the very moment they looked to their burnt-offerings as the means of reconciliation with God. Nor, as long as they continued so to do, was there the smallest occasion for relaxing in the expressions of their joy.

Just so, the very moment we look to the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, and plead with God the merit of his blood, we may begin to rejoice in God as our reconciled God and Father. It is said, "All who believe are justified from all things;" not all that are strong in faith, or, all that have exercised faith for such a length of time; but all who believe (provided their faith is sincere) are from that very moment justified from all things, and may instantly "rejoice in hope of the glory of God, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39) with [Romans 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1-2)."

John, speaking not to fathers only, or to young men, but to the weakest babes in Christ, says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake! [1 John 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.12)." There are many who think it a mark of humility to put away from them all joy, until, as they imagine, the progress of their sanctification shall justify the entrance of joy into their souls. But this is altogether founded on ignorance and error. A sinner is not to look into himself for his warrant to rejoice in God; the mercy, the love, the truth, and faithfulness of God, together with the ability and willingness of Christ to save all who come unto God by him, are the proper grounds of joy, irrespective of any change actually wrought in us.

We do not say that a believer may not afterwards have much joy in the testimony of his own conscience that he has made a progress in the divine life; (for Paul himself experienced this joy, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12);) but the affiance of his soul on Christ interests him in all that Christ has done and suffered for him, and gives him an immediate title to partake of the fatted calf, which his heavenly Father has prepared for him! "Being delivered from the horrible pit, and having his feet set upon the rock, a new song instantly should proceed from his mouth, even praise and thanksgiving to our God! [Psalm 40:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.2-3)."

Nor should that song ever cease; because the efficacy of his Redeemer's sacrifice will never cease. We are bidden to "rejoice in the Lord always," yes "again and again to rejoice."

*Indeed, humiliation and joy must be united in all our services to the very end of time; as they will be united even in Heaven itself, where we shall cast our crowns at the Redeemer's feet, and sing to all eternity*, "To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever and ever! Amen."

At the close of that solemn service we particularly notice,

***~~III. Their reverential bowing.~~***

When they had made an end of offering, "the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshiped." This remarkable termination of their worship indicated a grateful sense of the inestimable privilege which they had enjoyed of drawing near to God—a humble acknowledgment that they, and all that belonged to them, were the Lord's; and a determination of heart henceforth to dedicate themselves unreservedly to his service.

And thus it is that we should close our worship, whenever we draw near to God in his public ordinances. See that admirable pattern, [1 Chronicles 29:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 29.14). It is painful to see people going from the house of God without a due sense of the solemnities in which they have been engaged. The light and airy manner with which people renew their conferences with each other upon the common topics of the day, demonstrates, that their worship has been by no means such as God requires. Had they really felt as redeemed sinners ought to feel, the savor of that fellowship with Heaven would not so soon be lost. O, if men did but reflect on the mercy given to them, in being permitted to sprinkle the blood of Christ upon the altar, to transfer all their guilt to him, and to receive from him the gift of his unspotted righteousness; if they duly considered what a right the Lord Jesus Christ had acquired over them in having bought them with his blood, and how much they are bound to glorify him with their bodies and their spirits which are his—methinks they would depart from the house of God with a holy solemnity upon their mind, and would continue in their way homeward secretly to commune with their God, and to *harrow in*by meditation and prayer the seed which has been sown upon their hearts. For lack of this, religious people often lose all the benefit of the ordinances which they have been privileged to enjoy.

Earnestly would we entreat all people to attend to these suggestions; and to bear in mind, whether they enter into the house of God or depart from it, that it is the God of Heaven and earth with whom they have to do, and to whom they must shortly give an account of all these privileges which by the generality are so lightly esteemed!

How the people remembered the vows that were upon them, was evident from the zeal and liberality of the worshipers, verse 32, 33—may well be proposed as a pattern for us.

From the example of the Priests, and of the Levites in particular, we should exert ourselves in our respective callings to serve and honor God.

O let us give up our whole selves to him as a living sacrifice; and from a constraining sense of redeeming love, let us henceforth live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again.

***~~#423~~***

***~~AFTER CONFIRMATION~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 29:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.31)~~***

Then Hezekiah said, "You have now dedicated yourselves to the LORD. Come and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple of the LORD."

So the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings.

["In certain Protestant traditions where infant baptism is practiced, confirmation is a rite administered to children, usually around age thirteen, to allow them to formally affirm the baptism they received as infants." *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*.  
Editor's note: We do not find any support for either infant baptism or confirmation in Scripture. Indeed, one must have very keen eyes to see things that are simply not there. These unbiblical practices are harmful in that they give false assurance to those who have never been born again.]

True religion is the brightest ornament of every state. Solomon was never more truly encircled with glory, than when he led the devotions of his people at the dedication of the temple; nor was Hezekiah at any period of his reign more honorably employed, than when he was purifying that temple from the abominations which had been introduced into it by his father Ahaz. The exhortation in our text was delivered by him to the whole congregation of Israel, then after that the sacrifices for the purification of the temple had been offered. And to you who are of the younger part of our audience they may with great propriety be addressed, after the services which you have this day been called to perform.

With a more immediate view to your benefit, we will consider,

**I. The act in which you have been engaged.**

You have been to the bishop to be confirmed; and this is,

***~~1. A solemn act.~~***

From the levity of too many who attend on these occasions, it may be thought to be a ceremony of no importance. But it is a most solemn transaction between God and your souls. You have this day been taking upon yourselves the vows which were made in your behalf at your baptism; and have been devoting yourselves to God as his servants; and, whether you have been sincere or not in the performance of the duty, the consequences of it will be very important; if you have given yourselves to the Lord in sincerity and truth, he has accepted you to his favor, and numbered you among his children; but, if you have lied unto God with your lips, you have riveted upon your souls your former iniquities, and provoked God to give you up to greater obduracy, [Isaiah 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.22). [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21).

***~~2. A reasonable act.~~***

The first-fruits of everything were the Lord's; nor could any man appropriate them to his own use without the greatest impiety. Thus are the first-fruits of your time and strength to be given up to God.

It is generally thought that the Jewish children at about twelve years of age went up to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord in a more solemn manner; and we know that our blessed Lord went there at this age, that he might in a more peculiar way than he had ever before done, engage in the services of "his Father's house." We cannot do better than follow his example in this particular. As soon as we have arrived at an age when we are capable of understanding and executing the vows that are upon us, we should go up to the house of the Lord, and there solemnly acknowledge our obligations to serve our God, and implore from him the grace and strength that shall be needful for us. This, we are expressly told, is "a reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

***~~3. An irrevocable act.~~***

It was an established law, that if anything whatever had been devoted to the Lord, it could not be recalled. Least of all then can you be liberated from the engagement which you have this day entered into, and which would have been binding upon you, even though you had never obeyed the call of your diocesan in relation to it.

But confirmation is to be the commencement of a new and more determined course of devotedness to God. I will therefore proceed to mark,

***~~II. The duty which yet remains to be performed.~~***

The act in which you have this day been engaged must be,

***~~1. Continued.~~***

The whole remainder of your lives is the time for the performance of your vows. There never will arrive a period when you are absolved from them, or when you are at liberty to relax your attention to them. Every morning and evening were the sacrifices offered in the temple, and a double number on the seventh day; so must every day begin and end with fresh surrenders of yourselves to God; and the Sabbath in particular must be a day of more than ordinary communion with him. "If you look back, after having put your hand to the plough, you are not fit for the kingdom of God;" yes, "if you draw back, it is to certain and everlasting perdition! [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62). [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)."

**2. Progressive.**

After all had been done that was necessary for the purification of the temple, Hezekiah called on the people to present sacrifices and thank-offerings unto the Lord; and, in consequence of this exhortation, they were presented in great numbers. The sacrifices which God desires of you, are, not sheep and oxen, but the offering of a free, a contrite, a devoted heart. See [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). And, as the first offerings which were presented, were from duty and necessity, and the last from a superabundant zeal for God, and gratitude to his name, so are *your surrenders of your hearts to God to be daily more willing, more grateful, more entire*,[Isaiah 44:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3-5). [Jeremiah 50:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.4-5).

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

**1.** To the young, we recommend the counsel of Hezekiah.

Never think you can do enough for Him, who has bought you with his blood.

**2.** To the more advanced we recommend his admirable example.

Whatever influence you have, use it diligently for the Lord.

***~~#424~~***

***~~HEZEKIAH'S ZEAL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 30:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.1-11)~~***

"Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month. They had not been able to celebrate it at the regular time because not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem. The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly. They decided to send a proclamation throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, calling the people to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. It had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written. At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read: "People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. Do not be like your fathers and brothers, who were unfaithful to the LORD, the God of their fathers, so that he made them an object of horror, as you see. Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the LORD. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. If you return to the LORD, then your brothers and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will come back to this land, for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him." The couriers went from town to town in Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun, but the people scorned and ridiculed them. Nevertheless, some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem."

Influence is a talent of vast importance; but it is often most abused, where it exists in the highest degree. Kings and princes are rarely to be found among those who are foremost in the work of reformation; and, where their exertions are used, they are most often actuated as much by political principles as by those which are religious.

Here however we see a monarch uniting with all his princes in a work of piety, in which politics bore no part at all. Hezekiah, not content with calling on his own subjects to serve the Lord, sought to bring his very enemies to the same blessed state, even those enemies who not long before had "smitten them with a great slaughter," even "with a rage that reached up to Heaven, 2 Chronicles 28:5; [2 Chronicles 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.9)."

The account is so circumstantial and so beautiful, that I have comprised it all in my text; which will lead me to show,

***~~I. The efforts which Hezekiah used in the service of his God.~~***

***~~The object he sought to accomplish was one of primary importance.~~***

The Passover was the greatest of all the Jewish feasts, as the mercies which it was intended to commemorate were the greatest that had ever been given to that people. The destruction of the Egyptian first-born was confined to them. The Israelites throughout the whole land were exempt from the judgment inflicted on all others without exception. In order to their deliverance, they were to kill a lamb, and sprinkle the posts and lintels of their doors with its blood; and then the destroying angel was to pass over their houses without inflicting a stroke either on man or beast that was so protected.

In commemoration of this wonderful event the Passover was to be kept with great strictness in all future ages. But it had been shamefully neglected during the reign of his father Ahaz; and was now therefore appointed to be kept with peculiar solemnity.

This ordinance above all others typified our redemption through the blood of Christ. The appointment of God was, that it should be kept at Jerusalem; and this command was as binding upon the ten tribes of Israel as it was upon Judah and Benjamin. Hezekiah summoned all therefore, as well the tribes of Israel who were not under his government, as the two tribes who were his immediate subjects, to engage in this holy duty; and he spared neither trouble nor expense to attain his end.

***~~The way in which Hezekiah endeavored to accomplish his end was peculiarly amiable and praiseworthy.~~***

Though a king, he used not so much the language of authority as of affectionate counsel and entreaty, "Return," said he, "unto the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel." "Be not stiff-necked, as your fathers were." He reminds them of the bitter consequences of their past departure from God, consequences which they could not but trace to that source, since the very judgments which God's prophets had denounced against them were actually visible in the desolations that had come upon them, a great part of their nation having been already taken captive by the king of Assyria. He then urges every argument that could influence a sincere mind. He assures them, that God would still be gracious to them, if they would but return to him; yes, that he would even restore to their own land those who had been taken captive, if they would but seek him with their whole hearts.

In a word, he entreats them to "yield up themselves unreservedly unto God," in an assured expectation, that,*if they returned to him in a way of penitential sorrow, he would return to them in a way of love and mercy*.

Now the whole of this affords as bright a pattern of wisdom, and piety, and love, as is to be found in all the Jewish records.

Let us then proceed to contemplate,

***~~II. The success with which those efforts were attended.~~***

This was far from being so complete as might have been expected.

***~~Some only "scorned and ridiculed Hezekiah's messengers."~~***

However closely we examine the message which he sent, we shall find in it nothing that could give just occasion for ridicule or contempt. But *ungodly men deride everything which savors of piety*. They have done so in every age. When Lot entreated his sons-in-law to escape out of Sodom, "he seemed," we are told, "as one who mocked to his sons-in-law," so ridiculous were his exhortations in their eyes. In precisely the same way were all the messages delivered by the prophets regarded; until God was provoked to give up his people to utter desolation, [2 Chronicles 36:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.16).

It might be supposed that the infinite perfections of our blessed Lord Jesus should disarm such malice; and that his words at least would be universally received. But many who heard them regarded him only as a deceiver and a demoniac. The very Pharisees, who from their knowledge of the Scriptures might have been supposed to form a more correct judgment, derided him as much as others; because they were addicted to the sins which he reproved, [Luke 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.14).

The holy Apostles shared the same fate with their Divine Master; and when most "speaking the words of truth and soberness" were most virulently derided as babblers and as fools, [Acts 26:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.24-25).

And thus it is at the present hour. Every man who seeks to reclaim those who dwell in wickedness, will be reproached and persecuted, and, generally speaking, will be persecuted in proportion to his fidelity.

***~~Some however complied with Hezekiah's exhortations.~~***

Among the tribes of Judah and Benjamin there was a great unanimity in turning to the Lord, because "the hand of God was with them, to give them" an obedient heart. And from among the tribes of Israel also many "humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem." These kept the feast with great joy and gladness, verse 21. Yes, so did they delight in the pious work, that when they had fulfilled the week which God had appointed for the celebration of the feast, they were anxious to continue it another week, verse 23, notwithstanding the protracting of the period interfered with the pressing engagements of the harvest.

Say whether this was not a rich compensation to Hezekiah for all the ridicule which the despisers of his piety had cast upon him? Yes, if one soul is of more value than the whole world, no doubt but that the welfare of so many souls was in his eyes an abundant recompense for all his toil and labor.

That we may not confine our thoughts to the events of that day, but may render them profitable to our own souls, I shall consider myself as a messenger sent on a similar occasion to you, not from an earthly monarch, but from the King of kings.

I would call you to keep a Passover unto the Lord; for "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." O consider the benefits you derive from his blood sprinkled on your souls!

Think of yourselves as the very first-born whom he has redeemed unto God, and who are Lord's peculiar portion.

Think how grievously this mystery has been neglected by you and by all around you.

Think how manifest is his indignation against the despisers of his love and mercy!

See, and tell me: are not the great mass around you enslaved by sin, and carried captive by the devil at his will? Have not you yourselves too much reason to fear his displeasure on account of your multiplied iniquities? Turn then unto him in penitence and prayer; yes, turn unto him with your whole hearts! I would urge this by every consideration that is proper to influence the human mind.

Think how gracious your Redeemer is, and ready both to receive you to mercy, and to deliver you out of the hands of your spiritual enemies.

Think too how awful will be the consequence of continuing to rebel against him, "Be no longer stiff-necked," but turn to him, and "yield yourselves entirely to him." "This is your reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." If ungodly men deride and mock your piety, let it suffice that you shall at least have the approbation of your God.

And to you who have influence let me say: Exert that influence in behalf of all to whom it can extend. Use it abroad as well as at home; among enemies, as well as friends. Seek to recover the dispersed of Israel and of Judah to the service of their God, that they may participate with you in the mercies purchased for them by the blood of the Paschal Lamb.

***~~#425~~***

***~~GOD'S CONDESCENSION TO THE UPRIGHT~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 30:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.18-20)~~***

"Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written.

But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone who sets his heart on seeking God--the LORD, the God of his fathers--even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary."

And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people."

Here is the fruit of holy zeal. Not a month had Hezekiah been invested with royal authority, before he set himself to repair the evils which had been committed by his father Ahaz. Almost incredible were the abominations which had been wrought by that wicked prince, "destroying the vessels of the sanctuary, and shutting up the very doors of the temple, and erecting altars in every corner of Jerusalem! [2 Chronicles 28:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.2-4); [2 Chronicles 28:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.24)."

And now Hezekiah, his son, gave orders for the re-opening of the temple, and sanctifying it afresh in all its parts; and in the short space of eight days it was accomplished. He then determined to keep the Passover, which had been neglected and suspended for many years; and, not content with summoning his own subjects to observe that blessed ordinance, he sent messengers to all the ten tribes of Israel, to invite them to unite with him in the observance of it. The greater part of that apostate nation poured contempt upon his message; but a large number yielded to his entreaties, and came to join in that divine service. God had appointed, that, if any, by being on a journey, or sick, were incapacitated to attend that ordinance on the fourteenth day of the first month, he might come with the same acceptance on the fourteenth day of the second month. Of this concession Hezekiah availed himself, to bring together as many as possible from among the ten tribes, as well as of his own subjects.

But multitudes from among the ten tribes, being called so suddenly, had not time to sanctify themselves from the pollutions which they had contracted; and no alternative was left to them, but to serve God in a less acceptable manner, or to neglect his service altogether.

To the former they were encouraged by King Hezekiah; but, perceiving God was offended with them for coming in so unfit a way, he prayed to God for them, that his judgments might be removed from them, and that they might be restored to the divine favor. This prayer was heard and answered; and the answer given to it will afford me a fit occasion to consider,

***~~I. The leading features of this history.~~***

They are two:

***~~1. The jealousy of God respecting his own ordinances and appointments.~~***

It was ordained by God that none who were, by whatever means, in a state of ceremonial impurity, should eat of the paschal feast. But from the suddenness of the invitation given to those of the ten tribes, it happened that many were ceremonially unclean. This was ascertained after they had come up to Jerusalem; and, as this was the second month, no other opportunity would be afforded them to celebrate that ordinance for nearly a whole year; so that they must either be sent back to their own country, under a state of grievous disappointment, or be admitted without a suitable preparation. The latter was the alternative adopted; and God, in some way not known to us, but fully known to Hezekiah and the people themselves, expressed his displeasure against them on account of it. God executed judgment on the Philistines who had taken captive the ark ([1 Samuel 5:6-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 5.6-12).); and similar judgments were inflicted on the Church at Corinth, for an irreverent attendance on the Lord's Supper, [1 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.30).

And this he did, in order to show, that no man can be justified in the commission of presumptuous sin; and that no ordinance of his should ever be willfully violated by any man with impunity. (I apprehend that Hezekiah erred in not consulting Jehovah, as Moses and others had done, to obtain specific directions in this emergency.) It was no excuse to say, that this was a mere ceremonial enactment; it was ordained of God; and that was sufficient; for the history of all former ages had proved beyond a possibility of doubt, that it was at the peril of man to violate, knowingly, any, even the least, of God's commandments!

It was but a positive injunction (not a moral one) that *Adam*in Paradise [Genesis 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.17), and that the *Sabbath-breaker*(who was stoned for his offence) [Numbers 15:32-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.32-36), transgressed; and that *Uzzah*also, who was struck dead upon the spot, presumed to violate, [1 Chronicles 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 15.13). These instances abundantly demonstrated the evil and danger of departing from any ordinance of God, however trifling that ordinance might be thought.

Just so, we have the very same intimation given to us under the Christian dispensation; for our blessed Lord has left it as his unalterable determination, that "whoever shall break one of the least of God's commandments, and shall teach others so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven, [Matthew 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.19)," that is, be accounted the furthest from it.

We must never, therefore, consider any commandment of God as small; for whatever it may be, his authority is vested in it; and it must be obeyed at the peril of our souls, [James 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10-11). If ever there was an occasion on which an ordinance of God might be overlooked, methinks, it was that very occasion to which my text refers; but if that could not be, without bringing on the transgressors the divine displeasure, much less can any be overlooked at this day, when only two ordinances are left for our observance.

***~~2. The condescension of God towards the upright, under their manifold short-comings and defects.~~***

The people had really "set their hearts to seek God, the Lord God of their fathers, though they were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." Though, therefore, God showed that this was no excuse for their transgression, he heard the prayer of Hezekiah in their behalf, and healed them, precisely as he healed Abimelech and his servants, when the general integrity of the offender was made known, [Genesis 20:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 20.17-18). Thus does God show, that he is "not extreme to mark what is done amiss;" for, if he were, "who could ever stand before him?"

Our blessed Lord apologized for his disciples at the very time that they were guilty of the most criminal neglect, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!" And the same tender regard he will show to us also, under our manifold infirmities. He knows, that, though "the spirit lusts against the flesh, the flesh still continues to lust against the spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17);" and that, even when "we delight in the Law of God after our inward man," there is yet a law in our members warring against the law in our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members; so that even the best of men are often constrained to cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death? [Romans 7:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.22-24)."

Were God "to regard iniquity in our hearts, then no prayer, whether of others or of our own would be accepted by the Lord, [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18)." "The retaining of even a right hand or a right eye," with deliberate determination, would exclude us from all hope of his favor, [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48). But if we are really upright before him, and with sincerity of heart bemoan our defects, "he will be our Advocate with the Father, and approve himself to us as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1)." He is appointed by God to "bear the iniquity of our holy things, [Exodus 28:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.38);" and he will so bear it, that, if mourned over and resisted, it shall never prevent our ultimate acceptance before God!

These being the principal features of the history, I proceed to notice,

***~~II. The leading instructions to be derived from it.~~***

I will here confine myself to two:

***~~1. That we are not to trust in our duties, however well we perform them.~~***

The Israelites on this occasion did what they could; but this did not justify them before God. And, for argument sake, I will suppose that we also, in our respective spheres, have done the same. Still I must say, that, if this were the case, "we are only unprofitable servants," and have nothing to boast of in the sight of our Divine Master!

But who, I would ask, has done as well as he could? The paschal feast, which commemorated the redemption of Israel from Egypt, typified our redemption from a far sorer bondage, by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; as the Apostle says, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, 1 Corinthians 5:7-8."

Inquire then, I beg you, whether, in remembering this stupendous mercy, at the Lord's Supper or in the daily habit of your minds, you have been so careful to purge out all the old leaven of your corrupt nature, that, when inspected by the eye of the heart-searching God, you will be found "cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary!"

Who must not shrink back from such an examination as this? Who can ever stand such a test as this? And, if we cannot, what remains for us, but shame and confusion of face in the presence of a holy God! If even holy Job could not endure such a scrutiny, if not even he could answer God for "one action in a thousand," and was constrained to acknowledge, that, "if he were to justify himself, his own mouth would condemn him, [Job 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.2); [Job 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20)," assuredly nothing is left for us but, with the convicted leper, to put our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, crying, "Unclean! Unclean! [Leviticus 13:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.45)."

Let me, then, affectionately guard you, my brethren, against "trusting in yourselves as righteous," because of your diligence in any duties whatever. Do not mistake me; I would not decry diligence in duties; on the contrary, I would have everyone among us as diligent and abundant in them as ever the Apostle Paul was; but if we place any *dependence*on them before God, we totally destroy all their value, and render our very obedience a stumbling-block over which we shall fall to our eternal condemnation! If we possessed all the righteousness of the Apostle Paul, we must renounce it all in point of *dependence*, and "seek to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but his! [Philippians. 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil. 3.9)."

***~~2. That we are not to be discouraged from duties, because we cannot perform them as well as we would.~~***

*A truly pious man can be satisfied with nothing short of absolute perfection.*But this is no reason that he should be discouraged in, and still less be diverted from, the path of duty. If God himself "does not despise the day of small things," then much less should we, [Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.10).

Under the Law, it was forbidden to offer to the Lord, honey, or leaven, or any beast that was mutilated; yet, as a votive-offering, every one of them might be presented with acceptance. See [Leviticus 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 7.13); [Leviticus 22:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 22.23); [Leviticus 23:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.17). This shows how *God will condescend to the infirmities of those who endeavor to honor him according to their power*.

A burnt-offering, of whatever kind it was, must be perfect; because it could not otherwise atone for sin, or shadow forth the Savior, who was to die for the sins of the world; but, as a voluntary offering, its imperfections were overlooked; and the offerer was accepted of the Lord. Know then, brethren, that, as where people had not a lamb to offer, God accepted "two turtle-doves or young pigeons," and even a small portion of meal, [Leviticus 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.7); [Leviticus 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 5.11)—so will he receive at your hands the imperfect services you present, "accepting them according to what you have, and not according to what you have not, 2 Corinthians 8:12."

A clear distinction is to be made by you between the sins of infirmity, which still cleave to the most pious soul, and those which were committed in an unregenerate state with the full consent of his will. Respecting a person under the influence of the latter, Christ says, "If I wash you not, you have no part with me!" But respecting one that, in despite of all his exertions, is overtaken with the former, Jesus says, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean." That is, a man who has been bathing, does not need again the same total immersion which he has just recently experienced; but, however few his steps have been from the bath, he has contracted some defilement, from which he requires a fresh ablution.

Thus a saint, that has been washed in "the Fountain opened for sin and for impurity," is cleansed, in a general view, from all his guilt. But, *from his remaining infirmities, every step he takes in this corrupt world will more or less defile him*. But if he habitually applies to himself the blood of Christ for that end, and cries to God for pardon in the Savior's name—then he shall be regarded as pure in the sight of God, and shall to all eternity be accepted by him!

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

Thus, then, you see brethren, the just medium between *presumption*and *despondency*. You are no more to trifle with sin than if there were no mercy attainable by transgressors. On the other hand, you are no more to despair of mercy than if no judgment whatever had been at any time denounced against transgressors. Your faith must never so prevail as to exclude fear. Nor is your fear ever to reign so as to prevent the exercise of faith. In the whole of your deportment, you are ever to keep in combined exercise, confidence with humility, and vigilance with composure.

***~~#426~~***

***~~DELIGHT IN ORDINANCES~~***

**[2 Chronicles 30:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.22-23)**

"For the seven days they ate their assigned portion and offered fellowship offerings and praised the LORD, the God of their fathers. The whole assembly then agreed to celebrate the festival seven more days; so for another seven days they celebrated joyfully."

In this chapter, and in that which precedes it, we are informed that Hezekiah, as soon as he came to the throne, set himself to repair the temple, which during the reign of his father Ahaz had been greatly neglected; and to restore the worship of Jehovah, which had been utterly superseded by the worship of idols. He lost no time in sanctifying the vessels which had been desecrated and defiled; and he appointed a feast unto the Lord, to be observed by all his people.

Now here we have,

***~~I. A most valuable record.~~***

That we may view it in all its parts, let us distinctly notice:

**1. The feast appointed.**

It was the Passover, and the feast of unleavened bread which was invariably connected with it.

The feast of Passover commemorated the redemption of Israel from Egypt.

The feast of unleavened breadintimated the holiness which befit the people who had been so redeemed.

But the time for observing these feasts was past. The Passover should have been killed on the fourteenth day of the *first*month, [Exodus 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.6); and on the same day, at evening, should the feast of unleavened bread have commenced [Exodus 12:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.18). But it was not practical to get the temple prepared by that time; and therefore Hezekiah applied to the nation at large the liberty conceded to individuals; in case they were incapacitated for the observance of the feast at the proper time, to observe it in the *second*month, verse 1-4 with [Numbers 9:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 9.10-11). Even this delay was not sufficient for all who were desirous of observing the feast; so that many came up to it without that measure of purification which the law required; and it was only in answer to Hezekiah's prayer that this violation of the law was pardoned verse 17-20.

But the zeal of Hezekiah was truly commendable. Indeed, he was not satisfied with summoning his own subjects to the feast; he sought to bring also his brethren from the ten tribes to a participation of the same holy exercises and heavenly enjoyments; and, though "his messengers were laughed to scorn" and mocked by many—there were many who accepted his invitation, and availed themselves of the opportunity afforded them of serving and honoring "the Lord God of their fathers, verse 10."

***~~2. The observance of the feast.~~***

A spirit of piety prevailed to a very great extent; all, king, princes, priests and people, seemed to vie with each other in their endeavors to exalt and honor God; and in their services we behold that which gives to every service its highest value—a due mixture of humiliation with their gratitude and joy, "they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace-offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers, verse 22."

This is a point deserving of most especial notice. *Humility is the characteristic feature of the worship in Heaven; for all, whether saints or angels, fall upon their faces before the throne*, while with united voices they sing praise to God and to the Lamb! [Revelation 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8); [Revelation 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.11). Such was the worship of all the assembly at this time; and it was productive of the most exalted joy verse 26; for every prayer they offered entered into the ears of the Lord Almighty, and descended in blessings on the heads of those who offered it, verse 27.

***~~3. The continuance of the feast.~~***

According to the original institution, the feast was to last but seven days; but so full of joy were their souls, that the whole assembly took counsel, after the example of Solomon, to protract it seven more days ,verse 23 with [1 Kings 8:65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.65). And not only did Hezekiah and the princes concur in this proposal, but by their extraordinary liberality, they enabled the congregation to carry it into effect; for Hezekiah gave them one thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave one thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep. During the whole of this time, even fourteen days, were the same holy exercises continued, none grudging the time that was lost to their worldly occupations, or becoming weary of an employment so foreign to their former habits.

And who does not see in all this,

***~~II. A most instructive lesson?~~***

***~~1. Surely here is a lesson for the higher ranks of society.~~***

Behold the king and the princes exerting all their influence to diffuse throughout the land a spirit of piety; and not in their own land only, but throughout a nation that was hostile to them, [2 Chronicles 28:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.6); [2 Chronicles 28:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.8). What an example was here to all, however exalted their rank, or powerful their authority! *Can wealth or power be better employed than in such acts as these?*But let it not be supposed that this example is instructive to kings and princes only; whatever is the measure of our property or influence, our obligation to improve them for the diffusion of true religion is still the same; and our liberality should be "according to our power," whether it be more or less.

True, indeed, if we engage with holy zeal in the service of our God, we may expect that an ungodly world will "laugh us to scorn and mock us." But we should rise superior to such treatment, and rejoice that we are "counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake." *Our only thought should be how we may honor God*; and, if only He is glorified, we should not regard any sacrifice which we may be called to make for so desirable an end.

***~~2. Surely here is a lesson to the community at large.~~***

Here we see how we should perform our Christian duties. Not that it would be advisable for us to protract them to an inconvenient length; or to neglect our worldly callings, for the sake of prosecuting beyond reasonable bounds the services in which we are engaged. *There is a season for everything; and every duty should be attended to in its season*. We are to labor six days, so far as the necessities of ourselves and our families may require it, and to rest on the Sabbath-day; but we may, and must, *carry the spirit of religion into everything, and in that sense protract our Christian services to the last hour of our lives*.

Nor should we grudge a reasonable portion of our time to Christian ordinances, whether public or private. Beyond all doubt, we should consecrate a portion of every day to the immediate service of our God; and be willing, also, to it. But it is the service of the *heart*which God now chiefly requires; and that can never be carried to excess. We must, however, especially take care to combine with every service a due measure of penitential sorrow. We must never for a moment forget that we are sinners; nor must we ever offer to God any sacrifice of which penitential sorrow does not form a very essential part.

And now, what shall I say to you, my brethren? Would to God that I could see you all in the very frame in which the whole people of Israel were on this occasion! And is there not abundant reason for it? Is not the restoration of divine ordinances, after so long a suspension of them, a blessing? Above all, Is not "Christ our Passover sacrificed for us? And is not this a call to keep the feast?" Let us, then, "keep it, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Then may you hope, that "your joy, like Israel's, shall be full;" and shall be not only a preparation for future blessedness, but also a pledge of Heaven in your souls!

***~~#427~~***

***~~HEZEKIAH'S CHARACTER~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 31:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 31.20-21)~~***

"This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered."

*Religion, when set before us in the precept, is thought to be extreme and impractical; but, when it is embodied in the life of some eminent saint, it commends itself to us as in the highest degree estimable, and its yoke appears to us both light and easy.*

In a person like Hezekiah, at the early age of twenty-five, (when the mind is too generally carried away by thoughtless gaiety,) presiding over a kingdom, with all possible means of sensual gratification at his command, piety does indeed approve itself to us as lovely, and as worthy to be cultivated by every man. For the purpose of elevating your souls to the pursuit of it, I will propose to your consideration,

***~~I. The character of Hezekiah as here drawn.~~***

Many of the saints were eminently distinguished above their brethren by some peculiar grace which they exercised in an extraordinary degree. Hezekiah excelled in faith, "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him, 2 Kings 18:5." But in the passage before us, his character is drawn more at large. We behold,

***~~1. The objects of Hezekiah's attention.~~***

Placed at the head of an empire, he labored to promote the benefit of his subjects by a wise and just administration of his government. But his views were not confined to objects of temporal importance merely; he sought to repair the mischiefs of his father's reign, and to bring back his people to the knowledge and enjoyment of the only true God. He did not neglect what was politically "good and right and true;" but he also strove to accomplish whatever was "good and right and true before the Lord his God."

The Passover, which had been instituted to commemorate the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and had been ordained of God to be observed every year at an appointed time, had long been neglected. He therefore called the priests and Levites to the performance of their duty, [2 Chronicles 29:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.4-5); he ordered them to sanctify the house of God, which had been profaned by all manner of abominations, [2 Chronicles 29:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.15-16), and to prepare all the offerings which were necessary for the occasion; he himself setting them an example by a most munificent contribution of cattle for that end, [2 Chronicles 30:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.24).

Nor was he content with effecting this among his own people. He exerted his influence to bring also the ten tribes of Israel, over whom he had no control, to a sense of their duty, and to a concurrence with him in this holy work. In a word, he considered himself as a servant of the Most High God; and for the advancement of his glory he exerted all the influence which his high station gave him.

**2. The manner of** **Hezekiah's exertion.**

This is particularly specified; and, indeed, it deserves especial notice, "in every work that he began, he did it with all his heart." He did not satisfy himself with giving commands to others; he himself led the way, and enforced by his example, the precepts which he issued.

In the very first month after his coming to the throne of Judah, he set to work with all his might; and in the second month, the fourteenth day of the month, all was ready for the observance of the ordinance; and though his zeal brought upon him much obloquy and contempt from ungodly men, [2 Chronicles 30:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.10), he persevered with undiminished ardor, and kept such a Passover as had not been seen from the time of Solomon to that day, [2 Chronicles 30:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.26).

It was in this way that he *began*the work of the Lord; and in this blessed course he *continued*to the end of life. In fact, it was his zeal for the service of God which caused him to weep so bitterly, when he was informed by the prophet that the time was come for him to die, [2 Kings 20:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.1-3). It was not that he was afraid of death; for he could "appeal to God that he had walked before him in truth and with a perfect heart;" but he saw that the reformation which he had begun was likely to be stopped as soon as he should die; and therefore he implored a prolongation of his term on earth, that he might consolidate and complete the work he had begun.

**3. The outcome of Hezekiah's labors.**

In my text we are told, "And so he prospered." The kingdom, when he first assumed the reins of government, was in a most desolate condition; subjected, in fact, to the Assyrian monarch, [2 Chronicles 29:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 29.8); from whose power, however, he delivered it, [2 Kings 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 18.7); and, from being grievously impoverished, he raised it to a high degree of wealth and power, [2 Chronicles 32:27-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.27-30).

The moral change effected in it was most remarkable; at the time of his father's death, the land was wholly given to idolatry and all its attendant abominations; but in a short time, through God's blessing on his endeavors, all the vestiges of idolatry were swept away, not only from his own dominions, but from the tribes of Ephraim also and Manasseh, who were independent of him.

Having viewed the character here drawn, let us contemplate,

***~~II. The personal instruction we can gather from it.~~***

Surely we may learn from hence,

***~~1. The extent of our duty.~~***

All of us should, doubtless, be peculiarly attentive to the offices to which, in our respective stations, we are called. From the king upon the throne, to the lowest subject in his dominions, this is required. As in the natural body, so also in the body politic, all, from the head to the foot, have their proper functions, which

it befits them diligently to discharge.

But all, without exception, are bound, in the first instance, to serve their God, and to do whatever is good and right and true in his sight. "Whatever things are true," says the Apostle, "whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, if there is any praise, think on these things [Philippians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.8)."

Nor should our efforts terminate on ourselves; we should seek the best interests of all around us; and labor especially to bring them to the knowledge and enjoyment of God. As Hezekiah called his people to the observance of the Passover, so should we endeavor to call men's attention to the Gospel, and to "Christ as our Passover that has been sacrificed for us." Never can influence be used for a more beneficial end than this; and every one of us, according to the measure of influence that he possesses, is bound to exert it in this way for the Lord his God.

**2. The proper mode of engaging in** **our duty.**

"Whatever our hand finds to do, we should do it with all our might, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)." It is not by listless endeavors that we can hope to succeed.

We must "*strive*for the mastery," if we would overcome our corruptions.

We must "*fight*a good fight," if we would subdue our spiritual enemies.

We must "*run*, as in a race," if we would obtain the prize that is held forth to us in the Gospel.

All of these images imply the most strenuous exertion in the Christian life. Nor will it suffice to "begin" well; we must go on, and continue to the end, if we would secure the approbation of our God, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9).

***~~3. The certain outcome of our endeavors.~~***

Never did anyone thus labor, without obtaining a successful outcome. To those who strive to do the whole will of God, and prosecute their object with their whole heart, a failure is impossible. They must "prosper;" God will never allow such people to run in vain, or "labor in vain, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)." As far as respects the benefitting of others, he may not indeed attain all he proposes to himself; but as far as respects his own soul, he cannot but flourish; he will necessarily grow in grace, "his peace also will flow down like a river;" "his joy will become unspeakable and full of glory;" and his weight of glory will be in proportion to his attainments and his services!

***~~Reflections.~~***

***~~1. How rare is this character!~~***

People attending to their worldly callings, and prosecuting them with their whole hearts, and prospering in them, are to be found in every place. But where do we find people laboring thus in spiritual things, and making "their profiting to appear unto all?" Look at the generality, and you behold no progress in them from year to year; and even among those whom, in the judgment of charity, we would call believers, there is, alas! far less of holy zeal and spiritual advancement than their profession requires.

***~~2. How honorable is this character!~~***

Let a person be really zealous for the Lord his God, and profane sinners will be sure to mock and deride him, as they did Hezekiah and his agents. But still they will honor him in their hearts, even as "Herod feared John," at the very time that he consigned him to prison and to death. But if not, still, at his departure, his loss will be felt and mourned as a public calamity.

The Jews built the sepulchers of departed prophets, at the time that they persecuted and put to death the living ones. And it is no uncommon thing, in this day, to behold a repetition of that farce. As for the honor itself, it is of no value to the saints, whether dead or living; but it is a testimony for God, that his servants are indeed "worthy of all honor," and that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor."

***~~3. How blessed is this character!~~***

Compare Hezekiah with his father Ahaz, or his son Manasseh. They possessed the kingdom, even as he; but how differently did they exert their influence! *They*lived but for the gratification of their own malignant passions; whereas he lived only for the welfare of his people, and the honor of his God. Can anyone doubt which of them was the happiest? Hear the mournings of Manasseh, and they will satisfy your mind; or, if you could now behold the state of Ahaz, it would leave no doubt who is the happier man: he who lives for God, or he who lives only for himself.

***~~#428~~***

***~~HUMILIATION FOR THE SIN OF THE HEART~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.26)~~***

"Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart."

***~~The holiest of men are liable to fall through temptation, but they will deeply bewail any sin into which they have been betrayed.~~***

Hezekiah was a man of very distinguished piety [2 Kings 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.3); but *he was not sufficiently aware that his piety and integrity were the effect of divine grace, and not of human power. God therefore left him for a moment to the influence of his own heart*, verse 31. In consequence of this he soon gave a proof of his inherent depravity; but, on discovering his sin, he instantly humbled himself for it before God.

We shall show,

***~~I. What were the grounds of Hezekiah's humiliation.~~***

The sin committed by him does not in human estimation appear great.

The princes of Babylon sent to congratulate him on his recovery; he received them with all the kindness and courtesy that he could express, and showed them "everything in his dominions" that could afford them entertainment, [2 Kings 20:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.13).

But his conduct was exceeding sinful in the sight of God, for in it:

***~~1. Hezekiah sought his own glory.~~***

Hezekiah evidently thought of nothing else at that time. *He wished to show how great a man he was*, in order that his alliance might be courted, and his power feared. Now this would have been highly criminal in any man, [Proverbs 25:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.27), but it was especially so in him, at that particular juncture. He had just been at the borders of the grave; and therefore should have been more impressed with the vanity of earthly grandeur, and should have seen the folly and wickedness of *priding himself in things so empty, so worthless, so transient*.

***~~2. Hezekiah sought his own glory, in preference to God's honor.~~***

He had now a happy opportunity of magnifying the God of Israel. He might have told the ambassadors what God had done for his nation in former times; he might have recited the wonderful restoration which God had at this time afforded to himself in particular, together with the stupendous miracle with which the promise of that recovery had been confirmed, [2 Kings 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.11). It is worthy of remark, that the ambassadors were sent on purpose to inquire into the miracle wrought in the land in making the sun go back ten degrees. His neglect therefore was the more sinful. [2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.31); he might have commended Jehovah as an answerer of prayer, [2 Kings 20:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.4-5); and in this way have exalted him above all the gods of the heathen. Surely the mercies that had been given unto him, demanded such a tribute; but he was pitifully occupied about self, and basely preferred his own honor before God's.

***~~3. Hezekiah sought his own glory, before the good of his friends.~~***

The ambassadors were showing great kindness to him; Hezekiah should therefore have recompensed them in the best way. He should have instructed them in the knowledge of the God of Israel, and have told them how willing he was to become their God; thus, perhaps, he might have converted and saved their souls, and have spread the knowledge of the true God in Babylon; yes, eventually, he might have been instrumental to the salvation of thousands. But *he utterly forgot the necessities of their souls, and was offering incense to his own vanity, when he should have been promoting their eternal welfare*.

This was his sin—and God denounced a heavy judgment against him on account of it!

His riches were all to be taken away by the Chaldeans, his own children were to be made eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace, and the whole nation to be led into a miserable captivity!

But, if his *offence*was great, his *humiliation*also was remarkable.

He heard with trembling the judgments which God threatened to execute. Instead of palliating his sin, he acknowledged at once the justice of God in inflicting such a punishment on account of it. In concert with all his subjects, he implored forgiveness at God's hands; and, having obtained a respite of the sentence, meekly, and even thankfully, Hezekiah acquiesced in the determinations of Heaven, [Isaiah 39:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 39.8).

While we see in him much to shun, and much to imitate, let us show,

***~~II. What grounds there are for similar humiliation among us.~~***

***~~Pride is deeply rooted in the heart of fallen man. We are prone to be puffed up on the slightest occasion.~~***

We are vain of any natural endowments of body or mind.

The strong love to display their strength.

The beautiful love to display their beauty.

A penetrating mind, or a tenacious memory--are made grounds of self-admiration and self-glorification.

Any acquired distinctions also become food for our vanity. The man of wealth, of honor, or of power--assumes a haughtiness from his elevation, and demands homage from others as his due. Those proficient in any art or science or ability--court applause, and delight to have their talents admired.

Even the gifts of grace, through the depravity of our nature, become occasions of pride. An ability to speak or pray with fluency, is often exhibited more for the purpose of attracting admiration than of glorifying God!

Whatever we are or have that elevates us a little above our fellow-creatures--our proud hearts are fond of displaying it, and we are pleased with the flattering attentions which it procures for us!

"Who makes you different from anyone else?  
 What do you have, that you did not receive?  
 And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" 1 Corinthians 4:7

***~~We indulge this prideful disposition too, to the neglect of God's honor, and of the eternal welfare of those around us.~~***

How many glorious opportunities have we of speaking for God! What grounds of praising him might we find in the sacred records! especially the wonders of redeeming love! How many too might we find in our own experience! And what unspeakable benefit might arise to mankind, if we carefully improved these opportunities! But how rarely is our interaction with each other made subservient to these holy ends! We for the most part waste our time in flattering attentions and unprofitable civilities, and are as intent on gratifying the vanity of ourselves or others, as if our social converse were capable of no better improvement.

***~~How much then do we need to imitate Hezekiah's humiliation!~~***

However innocent we may think such conduct, it is highly criminal in the sight of God; it renders us justly liable to God's heaviest judgments! [Matthew 12:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.36-37). Should we not then humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes? Should not the forbearance he has exercised call forth our devoutest acknowledgments? And should we not adore his goodness even if he only delays to execute his threatened vengeance? Let us not attempt to palliate this common, but vile, iniquity, but rather unite in deprecating the wrath we have deserved.

***~~Inferences:~~***

***~~1. How watchful should we be against what are called little sins!~~***

Hezekiah at first probably intended only to show civility to his friends; but through inattention to the prideful motions of his heart, he fell into grievous sin, and brought on the whole nation the heaviest judgments.

Let us learn then to mark the first risings of sin in our hearts.

Let us bear in mind how greatly we may offend God by a neglect of our duty.

Let us remember, too, that *God notices and abhors sin in the heart, no less than when it is brought forth into open act*.

Let us guard especially against the workings of pride and vain-glory.

Let us entreat God to sanctify our inward man, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23), and never to leave us to ourselves for one single moment!

***~~2. How great is the efficacy of fervent prayer and intercession!~~***

The judgment denounced against Hezekiah was to have been speedily inflicted; but he and Judah sought the Lord by humble and fervent prayer, and the Lord deferred the evil until the next generation.

Thus will he do also in answer to our prayers. If we turned to him as a nation, he would prolong our national prosperity, and would blot out forever the personal guilt of every true penitent. Let us then humble ourselves for our abominations both of heart and life; so shall we find God as gracious unto us, as ever he was to his people of old.

***~~#429~~***

***~~THE WEAKNESS AND DEPRAVITY OF MAN~~***

**[2 Chronicles 32:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.31)**

"God left Hezekiah to test him and to know everything that was in his heart!"

***~~There is no character so excellent but there is some "blot" to be found in it. The most illustrious saints that ever lived, not only manifested their weakness and sinfulness, but showed themselves defective in those very graces for which they were most eminent.~~***

We must not wonder therefore that king Hezekiah, who was in some respects as distinguished a character as any that either preceded or followed him, became at last *a monument of human frailty!*It is probable that the peculiar manifestations of the divine favor towards him had excited an undue degree of self-delight in his mind. God therefore saw fit to test him, and, "in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who had sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land," *God left him to the natural workings of his own heart*. The consequence was such as might be apprehended, he gave way to pride and vanity, and brought on himself the divine displeasure.

The words which we have read, will naturally lead us to observe, that,

***~~I. Until we are tested, we have very little idea of the evil of our hearts!~~***

Though we feel no difficulty in admitting that we are sinners, yet we can by no means acknowledge the truth of the sinful representations given of us in the Scriptures. If we were told that *we are all by nature haters both of God and man*, [Romans 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.30); [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7); [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3)—we would consider it as a libel upon human nature.

When we read the history of the Jews, we are ready to think that *they*were incomparably more perverse than *we*would ever be; though if we had been in their situation, there is no reason at all to believe that we would have shown ourselves in any respect more obedient than they.

***~~If we have never fallen into any gross sin, we imagine that our moral conduct has arisen from the superior goodness of our hearts; and we suppose that we have no disposition to those heinous iniquities which are practiced by others. We are not aware that, if we had been subjected to the same trials as others without the restraining grace of God, we would have fallen like them.~~***

How was *king Hazael*shocked when he was told what enormities he would commit! "Is your servant a dog, that he should commit this monstrous thing!" Yet no sooner was he tried, than he did commit all the enormities that had been foretold.

Just so, if we were told that one of us would becomea thief, another an adulterer, and another a murderer, we would revolt at the idea as though we were not capable of such atrocious wickedness. But the more we know of our own hearts, the more we shall be ready to say with David, "My heart shows me the wickedness of the ungodly." See also [Mark 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21-23) and [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9). Yes, *our heart is a repository of all the wickedness that is committed upon earth!*

***~~II. If God left us to ourselves, we would soon give some awful proof of our depravity.~~***

*That any are preserved from great enormities, is owing to the providence and the grace of God.*It has pleased God to encompass them, so that they should be screened from any violent temptation; or else he has endued them with a more abundant measure of his grace, whereby they have been enabled to withstand the tempter. *Who that sees how others have fallen, will ascribe his own steadfastness to his own goodness?* We need only set before us those deplorable monuments of human depravity: David, Solomon, and Peter—and we shall need nothing more to enforce that admonition, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." We perhaps may have maintained a good conduct for a considerable time; but can we not look back to some moment wherein we have been *left by God, to follow the bent of our own corrupt hearts?*We must be lamentably ignorant of what has passed within us, if we have not long ago learned our need to use that prayer, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

Yet we must not view such proofs of depravity merely as insulated and detached acts,

**III. For one single act of wickedness, if duly considered, will serve as a clue to find out all the iniquity of our hearts.**

God did not design to show Hezekiah one imperfection only, but "all that was in his heart," and his fall was well calculated to give him this knowledge; for in it he might see, not only his pride and creature-confidence, but:  
his ingratitude for the mercies he had received,  
his unconcern about the souls of those who came to visit him,  
his indifference about the honor of his God,  
and innumerable other evils which were comprehended in his sin.

Just so, *if we will take any one sin of our lives, and make use of it as a light to search the dark corners of our hearts—we shall find out a most astonishing mass of wickedness that has hitherto escaped our observation!*

Take, for instance, any single act of pride, anger, lewdness, covetousness, or even deadness in prayer—what a scene will it open to our view!

What unmindfulness of the divine presence!

What unconcern about our own souls!

What preferring of carnal ease or worldly vanities to the happiness and glory of Heaven!

What contempt of that adorable Savior who shed his blood for us!

Alas! alas! We would never come to an end, if we would attempt to declare all the evil in our hearts which by such a scrutiny we might discover.

This then we would most earnestly recommend as the means of becoming acquainted with our hearts. Let us not consider any sin as though it were unconnected with any other; but rather regard every sin as a *fruit*of an immense tree, or as a *little stream*flowing from an inexhaustible fountain!

***~~Application.~~***

***~~From this dereliction of Hezekiah, and his fall consequent upon it, we may further learn,~~***

***~~1. Thankfulness to God for the preservation we have experienced.~~***

*None of us have perpetrated one thousandth part of the iniquity which we would have committed—if God had not restrained us by his providence and grace!* Let us acknowledge that *by the grace of God we are what we are*, and say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise!" And let our dependence be altogether on God, that he who has kept us hitherto, will "preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom."

***~~2. Tenderness and compassion towards those who have fallen.~~***

We are apt to look on a fallen brother with indignation and contempt; but if we considered our own extreme sinfulness more attentively, and how often we would have fallen if outward temptations had sufficiently concurred with our sinful dispositions—we shall find less readiness to cast a stone at others. We should rather *see our own picture in their depravity*, and extend that compassion to them which in similar circumstances we would desire to meet with at their hands.

***~~3. Vigilance against the assaults of our great adversary.~~***

Satan combines in himself the *subtlety*of a serpent, and the *strength*of a lion. Well therefore does the Apostle say to us, "Be sober, be vigilant." If we do not watch against his assaults, we, in fact, *tempt him to tempt us!*Besides, we cannot expect that God should preserve us, if we do not endeavor to preserve ourselves. It will be to little purpose to pray that God will not lead us into temptation, if we presumptuously rush into it of our own accord! Let us then shun every occasion of sin!

Let us avoid the company, the amusements, the books, yes the very sights that may lead us into sin!

Let us commit ourselves continually to God's care and protection; and beg of him never to leave us or forsake us.

In this way we may hope to experience his unremitting care, and to be "kept by his power through faith unto everlasting salvation!"

***~~#430~~***

***~~MANASSEH'S REPENTANCE~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 33:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.10-13)~~***

"The LORD spoke to *Manasseh*and his people, but they paid no attention. So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.

In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God."

***~~In histories written by men, our attention is continually directed to second causes; but in the inspired records we see every event traced up to the first Great Cause of all. The rise and fall of empires or of individuals are equally appointed by God for the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes, and for the manifestation of his own glory. However casual or contingent any circumstances may appear to be, they are as much under his control, and as certainly fulfill his will, as the stated courses of the heavenly bodies.~~***

In confirmation of this, we need go no further than to the words before us; in which we see,

***~~I. The means by which Manasseh was brought to repentance.~~***

King Manasseh was perhaps the most wicked of the human race. He was piously educated, yet he totally eradicated from his own mind, and from the bosoms of his people, all remembrance of the instructions which his father Hezekiah had given them.

[2 Chronicles 33:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.2-6) "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever." In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger!" Compare with 2 Kings 21.

To reclaim Manasseh, God had sent many holy men and prophets to warn and exhort him; but "neither he nor his people would hearken unto them."

At last, determined to overcome him, and to make him an everlasting monument of grace and mercy, God stirred up the king of Assyria against him. "Therefore the LORD brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon! [2 Chronicles 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.11)."

However the king of Assyria might be actuated by ambition or avarice, he was certainly no more than an *instrument*by whom God himself acted! Compare [Psalm 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.13) and [Isaiah 10:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-6); [Isaiah 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.15) with [2 Kings 24:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 24.2-4); and caused Manasseh to be vanquished, to be dragged from the thicket where he had hidden himself, [1 Samuel 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 13.6), and to be carried as a poor miserable captive in fetters to Babylon.

This prevailed, when all other means had been used in vain. And is it not by these means that God has often subdued, and yet subdues many stout-hearted sinners to himself! [2 Samuel 24:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.10); [2 Samuel 24:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.17). How many perhaps among us must say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; for before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept your word! [Psalm 119:67](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.67); [Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.71); [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.75)."

We are further informed concerning,

***~~II. The way in which Manasseh's repentance manifested itself.~~***

Affliction does not *necessarily*produce repentance. Ahaz trespassed yet more in his distress, [2 Chronicles 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 28.22). *The wicked in Hell, so far from being softened by their pains, blaspheme their God while they gnaw their tongues in anguish!*[Revelation 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.10). *But in Manasseh, God's afflicting rod was effectual, through the grace of God, to bring him to repentance*. In his prosperity he was hardened, [Jeremiah 22:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 22.21), and would not hear, [Zechariah 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 7.11-12); [Jeremiah 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.3); but "in his affliction he besought the Lord."

Two things more especially are noticed, "he humbled himself greatly;" and "he prayed unto God" earnestly. He called his sinful ways to remembrance and confessed his guilt, and justified God in all that had come upon him, and in all that ever should come upon him, declaring it was far "less than his iniquities deserved." Then he poured out his soul in fervent prayer, "offering his supplications with strong crying and tears," and wrestling, as it were, with God, to obtain a blessing. His prayer is repeatedly noticed, verse 18, 19, surely on account of its fervor.

Thus will repentance show itself wherever it is found; whether we be brought to it by afflictions, or not. Yes, whether we have committed such wickedness as Manasseh, or not—these will be the leading features of our experience, if we are truly penitent. The first mark of Paul's repentance was, "Behold, he is praying!" and what his thoughts of himself were, we may judge from his calling himself "the chief of sinners."

Inquire then, beloved brethren, whether you have ever been brought to humble yourselves before God; and that not a little, but "greatly?" Inquire, whether your cries to God are humble, fervent, constant, believing? Consider, "that without repentance you must all perish;" and that this alone will warrant you to conclude your repentance to be genuine and "saving."

Its efficacy will appear from,

***~~III. The blessed outcome of Manasseh's severe trials and his subsequent repentance.~~***

As horrible as Manasseh's iniquities had been, they did not prevent his prayers from coming up with acceptance before God.

Behold the outcome of Manasseh's repentance:

First, in respect to his TEMPORAL comfort! God restored him again to the possession of his kingdom. Just so, it may be that innumerable judgments would be removed from men, provided the offenders were duly humbled by means of them, and sincerely repented. We do not say that God will always remove the afflictions he has sent, even though we should be ever so much humbled under them; because he may see that the *continuance*of judgments is as necessary for our welfare as the first sending of them was; but he will convert them into blessings, and make them subservient to our best interests.

Next, observe the outcome of Manasseh's repentance in respect to his SPIRITUAL advantage. He neither knew God, nor concerned himself about him in the day of his prosperity; but now he "knew that Jehovah was God."

Manasseh saw that he was a *just*and *holy*God, yes, a God of *truth*also, who sooner or later would punish sin. Manasseh felt that he was a *powerful*God, "able to abase those who walk in pride," and able also to deliver those whose situation was most desperate. Above all, Manasseh knew experimentally that God was a God of *infinite mercy and compassion*, since he had attended to his prayer, and given mercy to his guilty soul.

Under this conviction Manasseh strove to the last hour of his life, to remedy all the evil he had ever done, and to glorify his God, as much as he had before dishonored him.

And did ever anyone repent, and not find his repentance outcome in clearer manifestations of God's love to his soul, and in a richer experience of his power and grace? No! As long as the world stands, "God will comfort all who mourn in Zion, and give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness!"

***~~We may learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. The importance of submitting to God's Word.~~***

The contempt poured on *God's messengers* was one principal means of bringing down those judgments on Manasseh. And does not God speak to us by his ministers, and notice how we receive the Word? And will not that "Word be a savor of death unto us, if it is not a savor of life unto life?" Lay this to heart, all you who have heard the Word in vain; and know that if you slight the message which God sends you by his ministers, he will consider you as pouring contempt upon Himself! [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8).

***~~2. The use and benefit of afflictions.~~***

*Afflictions, of whatever kind they are, proceed from God! He intends then for our good,*[Hosea 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.15). [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10). They have a *voice*, and it is our duty to "*hear*the rod, and Him who appointed it! [Micah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.9)." *Do not quarrel then with any afflictions that God may send to you, but receive them as tokens of God's love, and as messengers of his mercy!*

"The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God! [2 Chronicles 33:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.10-13)."

***~~What reason had Manasseh to adore his God for the loss of an empire; yes, for cruel captivity, for galling fetters, and a loathsome dungeon! Without them he would now be in chains of darkness and the prison of Hell!~~***

Just so, your trials probably are no less necessary for your eternal welfare. Improve them then for the humbling of your soul, and for the furtherance of your everlasting salvation.

***~~3. The wonderful mercy of our God.~~***

***~~Who would have thought that such a heinous sinner as Manasseh could ever have obtained mercy? Yet God has pardoned him, and set him forth as a pattern, in order to magnify the exceeding riches of his own grace!~~***

Let none then despair. If we were as vile as Manasseh himself, we should go to God with an assurance that he would not cast us out, provided we were truly contrite, and sought for mercy through the sin-atoning death of Jesus.

On the other hand, let us not presume upon this mercy, and go on in sin under the hope that we shall at last repent and be saved. *Today*God calls us. *Tomorrow*the door of mercy may be shut. May the Lord grant that we may now repent like Manasseh, and henceforth like him devote ourselves entirely to the service of our God!

***~~#431~~***

***~~JOSIAH'S PENITENCE~~***

***~~[2 Chronicles 34:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 34.27)~~***

"Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD."

It is scarcely to be conceived how great a benefit has arisen to the Christian cause from the invention of printing. The Word of God is that whereby the work of salvation is principally carried on in the souls of men; and the multiplying of copies of the Holy Scriptures, in such a form as to be conveniently portable, and at such a price as to be within the reach of the poor—has tended more than any other thing to keep alive the interests of religion, both in the hearts of individuals, and in the community at large.

If we look back to the condition of the Jews in the time of King Josiah, we shall find it truly deplorable. Through the influence of the two preceding kings, the very remembrance of God's law was almost obliterated from the minds of men. Every king was, by God's appointment, to copy it for himself, [Deuteronomy 17:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.18); yet not a copy of it was to be seen in the land; so that if God himself had not interposed in his providence to raise up to the Jews a pious king, and by him to bring back the people to some sense of their duty—it is probable that the whole nation would before long have been immersed in heathen darkness!

From the traces of divine knowledge which yet remained by means of the temple and its furniture, and through the operation of God's Spirit on his soul, Josiah was induced to repair the temple, in order to the restoring of God's worship there; and Hilkiah the priest, while executing his orders, found a copy (perhaps the original copy) of the Law, which had been lost amidst the rubbish and ruins of the place.

On hearing its contents, Josiah was filled with great anguish, and sent to Huldah the prophetess to know whether the judgments which God had denounced against that apostate nation might by any means be averted; in reply to which he was informed that the calamities would surely come upon them; but that, in consideration of his penitence, the awful period would not arrive until he himself should be removed to the eternal world.

From the words before us we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. What state of mind the threatenings of God should produce in us.~~***

The conduct of Josiah on this occasion will serve to guide our thoughts.

***~~1. The threatenings of God should produce in us a fear of God's judgments.~~***

If men can sneer "at God's judgments, [Psalm 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.5)," it is because they have never considered how tremendous they are. Let any man once think seriously of "dwelling with everlasting burnings" and we will defy him not to tremble, like *Felix*, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25) and *Belshazzar*, [Daniel 5:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.5-6). See also [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14). See also [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).

Josiah "tore his clothes" with horror, when he heard only of temporal calamities; *how much more therefore ought we to fear, when we hear of the miseries that will be endured in "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!"*

***~~2. The threatenings of God should produce in us a sorrow of heart for those sins against which his judgments are denounced.~~***

We are ready to acknowledge that those who have committed heinous sins should repent of their iniquities. But we should remember that *the judgments of God are also denounced against pride, unbelief, impenitence, worldly-mindedness, and numberless other secret sins which are overlooked, or even commended, by the world.*For these therefore must we "weep, and humble ourselves before God," yes, and loath ourselves for them in dust and ashes.

***~~3. The threatenings of God should produce in us a turning unto God in holy and unreserved obedience.~~***

This is the true test of sincerity; *fears and sorrows are of little avail, if they do not produce a radical change of heart and life.*

Josiah, from the first moment that he heard the threatenings of God, set himself to accomplish a national reformation, and prosecuted it with zeal to his dying-hour. Thus must we be zealous for our God. We must not pretend to be sorry for our sins, and still continue to live in them; but we must put away the accursed thing, whatever it is, and devote ourselves to God without reserve. It is only he who "confesses and forsakes his sins, who shall find mercy, [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)."

To promote such a state of mind among, you, we proceed to show,

***~~II. The acceptableness of sincere repentance to God.~~***

The message sent to Josiah sufficiently marks this. God assured him that his prayer was heard in consideration of his penitence. But that such a state of mind is at all times acceptable to God, will more clearly appear, if we consider that,

***~~1. By sincere repentance, all the perfections of God are glorified.~~***

Repentance is often called "a giving glory to God, [Joshua 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.19). [Jeremiah 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.16);" and the propriety of this expression is evident; for, exactly as the *impenitent*man pours contempt on all the divine perfections, denying the power and majesty, the justice and holiness, the love and mercy, the truth and faithfulness or God—so, on the contrary, the *penitent*man brings glory to them all, inasmuch as he acknowledges his liableness to the divine displeasure, and his ardent desire to obtain a saving interest in the promises of the Gospel. If then God is concerned for his own glory, he cannot but be pleased with those who, in his appointed way, are laboring to advance it.

**2.** **To sincere repentance, all the promises of God are made.**

Many are the judgments denounced against the stout-hearted; but in all the inspired volume there is not one word to "break a *bruised*reed." On the contrary, the weary and heavy-laden are invited to come to Christ without any distinction on account of the particular sins with which they are burdened. God assures the contrite soul, while it is yet trembling at his Word, that he will look upon it with peculiar pleasure and delight, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2). And that though a man's conduct may have been such as to fix indelible disgrace upon him in the world, God will never despise him, provided he is of a broken and contrite spirit, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17).

Not even the transient humiliation of Ahab was allowed to pass without some favorable regard, [1 Kings 21:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.29); much less shall that repentance be overlooked which is sincere and permanent, [Psalm 34:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.18).

It is indeed not for any merit that there is in our repentance, but for the merits of Jesus Christ, that we shall find acceptance; *nevertheless all true penitents, and none other, shall be saved by him*.

***~~Inferences:~~***

***~~1. How desirable it is to be well-acquainted with the Holy Scriptures!~~***

The Word of God denounces vengeance against many things that are thought innocent among men; nor will our ignorance of these threatenings avert or delay the execution of them. Let us then study the sacred oracles with an express reference to ourselves, that we may know what God says in them respecting us. Perhaps we may find many passages, which, when applied to our hearts, will give us just occasion to mourn like the pious monarch before us. *It is far better to know the full extent of our sin and guilt, and thereby to be stimulated to repentance, than through ignorance of our state to continue impenitent, until the wrath of God shall come upon us to the uttermost!*

***~~2. How enviable is the condition of a true penitent!~~***

Every prayer of a real penitent is "heard" of God. Let him "open his mouth ever so wide, God will fill it! [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7)." Let him but plead what the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for him, and God will never cast out his prayer. Surely then there is no man so truly blessed as he who "walks humbly with his God." Indeed our Lord himself repeatedly tells us this, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted, [Matthew 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-4)."

But it may be thought that such an abject state of mind would be unsuitable to a man of power and opulence. Josiah, the Jewish monarch, however entertained no such vain conceit; he judged it not unfitting even his high station to feel, yes to manifest also to all around him, a fear of God.

Let all of us then, the rich as well as the poor, seek to have "a tender heart." Let us beg of God "to take away from us the heart of stone, and to give us hearts of flesh," well knowing, that the more exquisite our sensibility is with respect to sin, the more pleasing will be our state before God!

***~~#432~~***

***~~PATIENCE OF GOD BROUGHT TO A CLOSE~~***

**[2 Chronicles 36:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 36.15-16)**

"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."

In speaking of the *divine perfections*, it is common to represent them all as infinite, because they do not admit of any increase; but perhaps it would be more correct to speak of them as limited, because they *all so limit each other as to produce one harmonious agency in all their operations*; every perfection being exercised so far, and so far only, as is consistent with the glory of the whole Deity.

*Justice*, for instance, never exerts itself to the disparagement of mercy. Nor does *mercy*ever triumph over the rights of justice. Neither does *patience*interpose for the arresting of judgment, any longer than consists with the claims of *holiness*; as soon as ever patience's protracted influence would reflect dishonor on God as the Moral Governor of the universe, it recedes, and leaves the sword of vengeance to execute its heavenly commission.

The truth of this statement fully appears from the words before us; from which we are naturally led to notice,

***~~I. God's patience exercised.~~***

***~~God's patience was exercised to a most astonishing degree towards his people of old.~~***

The Scripture frequently speaks of God, not only as sending messengers to his people, but as "rising early" and sending them. This intimates, that as soon as ever they went astray, he commissioned his servants to reclaim them. Yes, many hundred years before the final execution of his judgments upon them, he *forewarned*them how he would proceed, and cautioned them against driving him to such extremities, [Leviticus 26:14-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.14-39) and [Deuteronomy 28:15-68](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 28.15-68).

When these warnings were disregarded, he sent them *prophets*, to bring these things to their remembrance, and to plead with them in his name. Sometimes he raised up prophets for particular occasions; at other times he continued them for many rears in their office, in order by any means to turn the people from their sins. Full of "compassion towards his people," and averse to forsake the land which he had given them for a "dwelling-place," God bore with all their frowardness and perverseness, "many a time turning away his anger," when he might justly have broken forth against them, and made them monuments of his everlasting indignation! [Psalm 78:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.38); [Psalm 106:13-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.13-48).

But how did they requite his tender mercies? We are told that, "They mocked his *messengers*, and despised his *Words*, and killed his *prophets*." Even against Moses himself did their resentment frequently burn, insomuch that on one occasion they were ready to stone him! [Exodus 17:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.4). Their prophets in every successive age were treated with all manner of indignities, threatened, imprisoned, martyred, according as the wrath of their rulers was permitted to prevail! "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" said ,Stephen in [Acts 7:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.52); and our blessed Lord, to comfort his disciples under the trials which they would meet with, reminded them, that "so had the prophets been persecuted, who were before them [Matthew 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.12)."

***~~In like manner is God's patience exercised in reference to us.~~***

God is yet sending his ambassadors to us, not merely to reprove and warn, or to encourage us with a hope of temporal rewards, as he did to the Jews—but to offer us redemption through the blood of his dear Son, and to beseech us to accept of reconciliation with him, [2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.18-20). And such is his "compassion towards us," that he cannot endure the thought of giving us up, as long as a hope remains of converting us to himself, [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11). [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.27). [Hosea 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8).

And what return do we make to God? Do we not act precisely as the Jews before us did? There is no faithful messenger that addresses us in Jehovah's name, but we call him an extremist; however temperate and kind, and reasonable his exhortations may be. See particularly the temperate message sent by Hezekiah in [2 Chronicles 30:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 30.6-10), we mock and deride him as "a babbler, [Acts 17:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.18). [Ezekiel 20:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.40)," "a deceiver, [John 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.12)," and "a fellow that ought not to be tolerated, [Acts 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.22); [Acts 24:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.5)." Our blessed Lord himself; who "spoke as never man spoke," was accounted a madman and a demoniac! [John 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.20); And every faithful servant of God, from his day even to the present hour, has been made an object, though not of equal—yet certainly of similar, reproach.

One would suppose that men, with the sacred volume in their hands, seeing how the prophets and Apostles were all treated, would avoid treading in the steps of former persecutors; but *the enmity of the human heart against God is the same as ever*; and the messages of God are therefore treated with the same contempt as ever. If there is any difference as to the mode in which that enmity betrays itself, it is owing to the excellence of our laws, and not to any superiority in us above the Jews. Our dispositions are the same as theirs, and our abuse of God's tender mercies is the same.

In the sequel of our text we see,

***~~II. God's patience exhausted.~~***

***~~He was at last constrained to execute upon them his threatened vengeance!~~***

After bearing with their frowardness many hundred years, his wrath against them was kindled, and he gave them up into the hands of their enemies, verses 17-21. Every effort for their preservation had been tried in vain, and "no remedy now remained;" the people therefore were sent into captivity; and both their city and temple were destroyed.

***~~Thus also will God do with respect to us.~~***

If we go on incessantly "grieving the Holy Spirit," we shall at last "quench" his sacred motions, [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30). [1 Thessalonians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.19). There is a time beyond which God will bear with us no longer, [Matthew 23:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37-38). There is a day of grace wherein he will be found, [Luke 19:41-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41-44); an accepted time in which salvation may be secured by us, [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.2). [Isaiah 55:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.6). There is a time when he will say, "Let them alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17);" "Let their eyes be blinded and their hearts be hardened! [Acts 28:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.25-27);" "though they cry I will not hear, though they make many prayers I will not regard them! [Proverbs 1:24-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-31)."

Doubtless if a person were truly penitent, he would be heard and accepted at the last hour; but it is God alone who can give repentance; and, if we continue obstinately to resist his calls, he will cease to strive with us, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3), and will give us over to final impenitence! [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12). This he has done in unnumbered instances; and this he warns us to expect at his hands, "He who being often reproved hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy! [Proverbs 29:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.1)."

***~~ADDRESS.~~***

God speaks to men by his Word and ministers at this day, as truly as ever he did either by Prophets or Apostles; and our word, as far as it is agreeable to the Scriptures of Truth—is to be "received, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God! [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13);" and, if any man "despises it, he despises not man, but God! [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8)." Happy would it be if this matter were duly considered; for certainly there are many of a proud and contemptuous spirit, who instead of "trembling at the Word," as they ought, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2), and "humbling themselves before the ministers" of Jehovah verse 12, make light of all they hear, [Matthew 22:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.5), and turn it to derision! [Jeremiah 20:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 20.7-8).

But to such God says, "Now stop your mocking, or your chains will become heavier! [Isaiah 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.22)." There is great danger lest they "be held with the cords of their own sins, [Proverbs 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 5.22)," and be given up to their own delusions! [Isaiah 66:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.4). [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12).

On the other hand, let not any imagine that an attachment to faithful ministers, or a love to the ordinances as dispensed by them, will necessarily prove us to be in a state of acceptance with God. For Ezekiel's hearers were delighted with his discourses, while yet they were by no means conformed to the precepts delivered by him! [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32).

Inquire then whether you are really obedient to the Gospel: *receiving*Christ as the gift of God to your souls, *relying*on him as your only hope, *rejoicing*in him as your all-sufficient Savior,  
and *devoting*yourselves to him in all holy obedience.

The tree must be judged of by its fruits alone. If your fruits are not yet such as might be wished, apply the "remedy"—go to Christ for the remission of your sins, and seek from him the gift of his Holy Spirit; then shall the Gospel have its due effect, and be "the power of God to the salvation of your souls."

**EZRA**

***~~#433~~***

***~~THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE~~***

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

With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away."

To put a fanciful interpretation on any part of God's blessed Word is highly inexpedient; and to found a doctrine upon any such interpretation would be injudicious in the extreme. But certain it is, that there are many explanations given us by the Apostles, which we would never have admitted, if given by uninspired men; such as the termination of the Levitical priesthood, as deduced from Abraham's giving to Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils which he had taken; and the reservation of God's inheritance to regenerate people only, as deduced from Abraham's repudiation of Hagar and her son Ishmael. Where these things are explained by the inspired writers, we may follow without fear; but in any interpretations of our own, the utmost self-distrust befits us.

These observations I make, lest, in the passage before us, I should be misunderstood as intimating that the construction put upon it was really designed by the event itself. I am far from intending to assert that. I merely bring forth the subject as both curious in itself, and *calculated to convey important instruction to our minds, if judiciously and temperately considered*. That an exuberance of joy and of sorrow should be excited at once by the same event, is undoubtedly a curious fact; and it will be profitable to show you,

**I. What there was at that time to call forth such strong and widely different emotions.**

The Jews, after their return from Babylon, had just laid the foundation of the second temple, and this was:

***~~1. To some an occasion of exalted joy.~~***

It was not the mere circumstance that a magnificent building was about to be raised, but the thought of the use to which that building was to be appropriated, that proved to them such a source of joy. The erection of it was justly regarded by them as a restoration of God's favor to them, after the heavy judgments which he had inflicted on them during their captivity in Babylon. In this light they had been taught to consider their return to their native land; and the very song which they now sang, had, at the commencement of their captivity, been provided for them by the Prophet Jeremiah, as proper to be sung on that occasion, [Jeremiah 33:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 33.10-11), as compared with the words immediately preceding the text. This event opened to them a prospect of again worshiping Jehovah according to all the forms prescribed to them by the Mosaic ritual.

In reference to this, also, the same song had been provided for them by David; in singing which they could not but "make a joyful noise unto the Lord, [Psalm 100:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 100.1-5)." Nor could they fail to view it as tending to advance the honor of their God; in which view pre-eminently it must of necessity fill them with most exalted joy. As the bringing up of the ark to Mount Zion, so this event also called for songs and acclamations from every creature under Heaven, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; the world, and those who dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord; for he comes to judge the earth; with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity!" Compare [1 Chronicles 16:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 16.8-10); [1 Chronicles 16:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 16.31-34) with [Psalm 98:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 98.1-9).

I think, with such views of the event before them, the people could not but shout for joy; and "if they had been silent, the very stones would have cried out against them!"

***~~2. To others, an occasion of the deepest sorrow.~~***

Commentators have condemned this sorrow, as expressive of discontent; and as showing that the people so affected did in reality betray an ungrateful spirit, and "despise the day of small things, [Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.10)."

But I am far from thinking such an interpretation of their conduct just. The people who manifested such pungent grief were "the priests, and Levites, and the chief of the fathers who were aged men, that had seen the former temple." It is true, they wept, because they well knew how infinitely this structure must fall below the former in point of magnificence. Whether it was of smaller dimensions than the former, we do not know; but as, of course, it could not be so splendidly furnished as the former temple was—so, of necessity, it must lack many things which constituted the glory of that edifice, and could never be replaced. The Shechinah, the bright cloud, the emblem of God himself, was forever removed. The ark was lost, along with the copy of the Law which had been preserved in it. The Urim and Thummim too, by which God had been accustomed to communicate to his people the knowledge of his will, was irrecoverably gone; and the fire which had descended from Heaven was extinct, so that they must henceforth use in all their sacrifices nothing but common fire.

And what but their sins had brought upon them all these calamities? Would it have been right, then, in these people to lose all recollection of their former mercies, and of the sins through which they had been bereaved of them; and to be so transported with their present blessings as not to bewail their former iniquities? No! I think that the mixture of feeling was precisely such as the occasion called for; and if there appeared a preponderance on the side of grief, it was only such as the glorified saints in Heaven are expressing continually in the very presence of their God; for while singing, with all their powers, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb," they are all prostrate on their faces with self-abasing shame, and *casting their crowns down before the throne, from a conscious unworthiness of the honor conferred upon them*.

But I think that the Prophet Ezekiel, and I may add too the experience of all the most eminent saints that ever lived, will put this matter in its true point of view. By Ezekiel, God says, "Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign LORD. [Ezekiel 16:60-63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.60-63)."

And Job, Isaiah, Paul, yes, every real saint, in proportion as he is humbled before God—evinces precisely the feeling which was here so strongly marked; *they loath themselves in proportion as they are favored and honored by God*,[Job 40:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.3-4). [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5). [1 Timothy 1:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.12-13).

That this subject is not uninteresting to us, will appear, while I show,

***~~II. How far similar emotions befit us at the present day.~~***

***~~Certainly there is at this time great occasion for joy.~~***

We are not, indeed, constructing a material temple for the Lord; but the whole nation is engaged in endeavors to erect a spiritual temple to him throughout the world. Never was there a period, since the apostolic age, when the exertions were so general, so diversified, so diffusive. To spread the blessed Word of God, and to send to every nation under Heaven those who shall impart the knowledge of it to the unenlightened, whether of Jews or Gentiles, seems at this time the one great labor of all who love and fear God. And is this no ground of joy?

But to come home more nearly to ourselves: Is there no reason to rejoice in what, we trust, is going on among us? If the Gospel is "glad tidings of great joy unto all people," is it no cause for joy that it is brought to our ears; and that it is effectual among us, as it has been throughout the whole world, to convert men to God, and to save many souls from eternal destruction?

But, not to dwell on matters of general concern, let us bring it home to our own business and bosoms: Are there not among you, who hear me this day, some at least who have been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" Yes, I trust, there are here present some at least, who, having been taken from the quarry by the great Master Builder, are now "as living stones built up a spiritual house," to be "the habitation of God, through the Spirit," forever and ever. Do I speak too much if I say, that not only those individuals themselves, but all who are interested in their welfare, have reason to burst forth into songs of praise, as loud and fervent as those that were uttered on the occasion which we have been considering?

If even the very angels before the throne of God are not so occupied with contemplating the divine glory, but that they have derived a great accession to their joy from their views of every individual among you that is truly converted to God—then surely we, who are all looking for the same salvation, and hoping to be partakers of it, have reason to rejoice.

***~~Yet is there among us abundant occasion for grief also.~~***

The people whose anguish of heart forced from them such bitter lamentations, were those who remembered the former temple, which had far exceeded in glory every edifice which the world had ever seen.

Now, if we suppose the Apostle Paul, who witnessed the state of God's Church in its primitive and purest age; if we suppose him, I say, to come down in the midst of us—then what would be his feelings at the present hour? That he would not "despise the day of small things," or be indifferent about the salvation of ever so few, we are well assured; but what would he say to the state of this parish, this town and neighborhood, or of the individuals who are most looked up to in the midst of us as professing and adorning the faith of Christ? Would not his joy be mixed with sorrow? Would he, recollecting what pure Christianity is, and what the preached Gospel produced in his day, and what advantages we have enjoyed? Would he, I say, be satisfied with what he saw? Would he not rather burst out into floods of tears? Yes, as much as many are rejoicing at what exists among us, would not his lamentations equal in loudness and intensity the joys that are expressed by others in our behalf? I think that no one who knows what the Apostle was and what he himself is, can doubt of this.

On the occasion referred to in my text, the noise of the joy and of the sorrow could not be distinguished from each other, by reason of the intensity of both; and I am well persuaded, that, if an assembly of primitive saints were at this moment blended with us, they would equal in their wailings the joys which any of us feel, or which others can feel in our behalf.

It was with "weeping" that Paul contemplated many of the Philippian converts, [Philippians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18); and for many of the Galatian Church he "agonized as in the pangs of childbirth, until Christ should be more perfectly formed in them, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19)." And was this from a lack of charity, or from a contempt of piety in its lower stages of existence? No, but from love, and from a desire that God should be honored to the uttermost, wherever his Gospel came, and wherever its blessings were experienced in the soul.

***~~See then,~~***

***~~1. What, above all things, should interest our souls.~~***

I do not say that anyone should be indifferent about the things relating to this present world; but I say, that the interests of piety in general, and in our own souls in particular, ought to swallow up, as it were, every other concern. As the rebuilding of the temple filled the minds of those at that time engaged in it, so *nothing under Heaven should transport us with joy like the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world and in the soul*. On the other hand, *nothing should produce in us such acute sensations of grief, as a consciousness that God is not glorified in the midst of us as he ought to be*.

Truly, it is a shame to the Christian world, that they feel so little on these subjects, while every vanity of time and sense is sufficient to excite in them the strongest emotions. But, Beloved, learn, I beg you, what *ought*to be the state of your minds in relation to the cause of God; and never cease to cry unto God, until you have obtained grace to serve him as it befits those who have received saving mercy at his hands.

***~~2. What use we should make of our knowledge and experience.~~***

Many would think that the unmixed joy of the younger classes was more befitting than the grief of the elder. But if, as I suppose, the cries of the elder were a mixture of joy and sorrow arising from a more enlarged view of the whole matter, a decided preference must be given to their feelings above those of their younger brethren.

It is not the *fruit*which exhibits the brightest colors that will prove the most grateful to the taste, but that which, under the influence of warmer suns, has acquired somewhat of a darker and more mellowed tint. So, in like manner, *it is not so much an unqualified effusion of joy that is pleasing to the Most High God, as that which is moderated with shame, and tempered with contrition*.

In truth, as long as we are in this world, we must have occasion for shame and sorrow; it will be time enough to lay them aside, when we have arrived within the portals of Heaven. There our happiness will be without alloy; as the prophet says, "We shall have gladness and joy; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!" Cultivate, then, my brethren, this depth of feeling, this tenderness of spirit, this humility of mind. Never forget your great and multiplied transgressions; but "walk softly before your God" in the remembrance of them; contented to "sow in tears, that you may reap in joy;" and to "humble yourselves now, that you may be exalted in due time."

***~~#434~~***

***~~SERMON ON THE KING'S ACCESSION~~***

**[Ezra 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 6.10)**

"Offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of Heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons."

[This sermon was preached on the occasion of the Accession of King George the Fourth, 1820.]

On the last occasion of our assembling in this place, we were called to pay a respectful tribute to the memory of our late beloved and revered sovereign, whose mortal remains were then committed to the tomb. The vision which the Apostle John beheld of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, in which Jehovah, with all his hosts and angels, grants to dwell—was then submitted to your attention, as offering peculiar consolation to us under the loss we have sustained; for there "the spirits of the just are made perfect," and enter into the complete fruition of that glory, which here they apprehended only by the weak and imperfect grasp of faith. Of such as shall be admitted to those blissful mansions, it is said, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

That our sorrows in this valley of tears might be alleviated, and our consolation in the prospect of that happy state be the more abundant, Jehovah, having said, "Behold, I make all things new!" added, "Write, for these words are true and faithful;" and the truth of them shall be experienced by every saint in due season. Then the same Almighty Being yet further added, "It is done! [Revelation 21:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.1-6)." This very blessedness is already experienced by millions, who, in successive ages and generations, have been gathered to their spiritual fathers, and liberated from the pains and troubles of this mortal life! Millions, who "have come out of great tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are already before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and neither hunger any more, nor thirst any more, neither does the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne feeds them, and leads them to living fountains of waters; and God has wiped away all tears from their eyes! [Revelation 7:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-17)."

Here our minds were irresistibly led to contemplate the state of our departed sovereign. "It is done!" Yes, "It is done!" to his unspeakable joy, and to the comfort of every reflecting mind. Embittered as his life has been by great and heavy trials, by the loss of a considerable portion of his empire, by the subjugation of Europe to the dominion of an insatiable and ruthless tyrant, and by having to contend for the very existence of his kingdom as an independent state; having also, during the latter years of his life, been visited with the heaviest afflictions of which our frail nature is susceptible, with the loss of vision, not only corporeal, but mental.

I say, embittered as his life has been, how sweet the thought, that now "all former things are passed away; that pain and sorrow are known by him no more; that all tears are forever wiped away from his eyes"; that, at the instant of his departure hence, "joy and gladness came forth" to welcome him as his inseparable attendants; and "sorrow and sighing," which had followed him so closely during his long and eventful life, "fled away forever."

Truly this thought may well reconcile us to a dispensation, which, according to the course of nature, was to be expected soon, and which, if it has *bereaved us*, then it has also greatly *benefitted and enriched him*,[Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.10).

It seems proper now that our attention should be turned to his son and successor, our present most gracious sovereign; and that we should contemplate the duties which his accession to the throne imperiously calls for at our hands.

With this view I have selected the passage before us, in which King Darius expresses his wish that the Jews, who were then under his dominion, and whom he was greatly favoring, would serve their God with all fidelity, and unite their supplications "for him, and for his sons."

I propose to consider the words before us in a two-fold point of view:

I. As the desire of a heathen prince; and,  
II. As the duty of a Christian people.

***~~I. Let us consider these words as the desire of a heathen prince.~~***

If the occasion on which the words were spoken be duly considered, it will appear that the desire expressed in them was a just and reasonable desire, and at the same time a wise and politic desire.

**True, it was a just and reasonable desire**; as the history will clearly show. The Jews, by the permission of Cyrus, had begun to rebuild their temple, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had destroyed. But, when Artaxerxes had succeeded to the throne of Persia, the *Samaritans*, filled with envy at the progress which the Jews made in the erection of their city and temple, sent to him, to apprise him of the danger that would ensue to his government, if they should be permitted to proceed with their building. Upon this, Artaxerxes commanded that the work should be stopped, until further orders should be issued by him for the prosecution of it.

This so discouraged the Jews, that they abandoned the public works for many years, and attended only to their own personal accommodations. But at last, after Darius had succeeded to the throne of Persia, the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the Jews to resume the work; and, having succeeded in exciting among the people a holy zeal to prosecute it with vigor, they had the joy of beholding it advance with great rapidity. But, behold, the enemies of Judah and Benjamin, being again filled with envy, applied to the governors whom Darius had placed over them, to execute and enforce the orders of the late king Artaxerxes, and to put an entire stop to the building. But these governors, being more candid than those to whom the complaint had been before made, allowed the Jews to state their own case, and transmitted it faithfully to Darius, with a request for instructions how to act. Upon this, Darius consulted the records of his kingdom; and, finding their representations to be just, he issued a decree, that no obstacle should any more be put in their way; that the most liberal aid should be afforded them out of his revenues, for the establishment and support of the temple worship; and that, if anyone in future should attempt to reverse this decree, his house should be pulled down, and the timbers of it be erected as a gallows, whereon he should be hanged! verses 11, 12.

Now, consider the obligations which this benevolent monarch was conferring on the Jews; and then say whether the desire which he expressed was not just and reasonable. He had ordered, that "whatever they had need of, young bullocks and rams and lambs, for the burnt-offerings of the God of Heaven, together with wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which were at Jerusalem, should be given them, day by day, without fail."

Was it not reasonable that he should expect these things to be applied to their destined use, and that, when he was showing such a paternal regard for the welfare of their nation, he should be remembered by them in their devotions, and have an interest in their prayers? Surely, this was the least return which they could render to him for his extreme kindness. And if he who was a heathen, had such confidence in Jehovah, as to believe that there was efficacy in prayers addressed to him, and to desire that intercessions should be offered to him in his behalf—then it befit them, who knew that Jehovah was a prayer-hearing God, to be very urgent with him in their supplications, and to entreat, day and night, that God would recompense into the king's bosom all the favors which he had so liberally heaped upon them.

**But we have said, that the desire expressed in our text was also a wise and politic desire.** Religion and loyalty are inseparable. It is possible that a pious man may be misguided, as was surely the case with many in the days of Charles the First; but their errors must not be imputed to religion; for, if it was the duty of Christians to submit to, and to pray for, such a tyrant as Nero, the point is determined at once. "The powers that be are ordained by God; and are to be obeyed, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."

To inquire whether any, or what, circumstances would justify a departure from this rule, is no part of the author's design; it is ground which a minister of the Prince of Peace is not called to occupy. It cannot be, that a man who truly fears God should fail essentially in honoring the king. The godly ever have been, and ever must be, "the quiet in the land." It is not possible for them to be entering into cabals, and stirring up a spirit of rebellion to the throne.

On the other hand, a man who has no fear of God before his eyes has no principle sufficiently strong to keep him faithful to his king, if he is drawn either by self-interest or inclination to oppose him. The probability is that the very same principle which leads him to cast off the yoke of God, will impel him to resist and overthrow all human authority also, as far as his own safety will admit of it. The *throne*and the *altar*will for the most part stand or fall together, as in the affections, so also in the efforts and exertions of mankind. Hence, then, it was wise in Darius, though a heathen prince, to encourage piety among the Jews.

Nor was he less politic in desiring a remembrance in their prayers. Pray for a man—and still hate him, if you can. There may be faults in the monarch, and errors in his government; but the man who prays devoutly and constantly for him will cast a veil over the one, and use none but constitutional methods of correcting and remedying the other. Intercession will induce a habit of mind friendly to the person for whom it is offered, and, if offered in sincerity by a whole nation, would prove a bulwark around the throne, stronger that all the fleets and armies that could be raised for its defense.

***~~II. But let us pass on to the second head of our discourse; in which we proposed to consider the text as declaring to us also, the duty of a Christian people.~~***

Our first duty, beyond all doubt, is to our heavenly King. Our next duty is, to the monarch whom, in his providence, he has placed over us: we must first "Fear God," and then "Honor the King."

In the service of our heavenly King, "the offering of sacrifices to him of a sweet savor" may well be considered as comprehending our duty to him; whether as sinners, who stand in need of his mercy, or as saints, who desire to glorify his name. The *Jewish sacrifices*, which were offered from day to day, were presented as an atonement for the sins of the people; and they *prefigured*that "Lamb of God, which, in his eternal purpose, was slain from the foundation of the world." These we are not required to bring; because that adorable Savior, in whom all the types and shadows of the Mosaic Law were to be fulfilled, has come; even Jesus, of whom it is said, "He loved us, and 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)." This sacrifice we must ever bring before the God of Heaven and earth. We must never presume to come into his presence without it. We must lay our hands on the head of that blessed victim, and transfer to him all our guilt, and expect forgiveness solely through his atoning blood. To this the whole Scriptures direct us, as the sure and only means of acceptance with God. Consult the Law and the Prophets; and they will all point to Jesus, as "the way, the truth, and the life! [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6). [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.21-22)." The Apostles also declare, that "his is the only name whereby any man can be saved! [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12)." The voice of all, without exception, is the same as that of this heathen prince, "Offer sacrifices to the God of Heaven!"

But there are other sacrifices also, which, as saints, we are to offer, and which have a sweet savor before God. Our whole person, body, soul, and spirit, is to be presented to the Lord, as the Apostle tells us, "I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." And, if only we come to God through Christ, there is not a service which we can render to him which shall not come up with acceptance before him, as a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor.

Such are our alms, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16);  
such our prayers, [Psalm 107:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.22);  
such our very sighs, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17);  
such is our every service, of whatever kind, [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5).

Do not imagine that your attention to this duty is unimportant as it respects the welfare of the state. *There is a far closer connection between national piety and national prosperity than men generally imagine.*Hear, I beg you, the admonition given us in the very next chapter: Whatever is commanded by the God of Heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of Heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king? [Ezra 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 7.23).

Let then a heathen prince, my brethren, teach and admonish you; and forget not henceforth your indispensable duty, to "offer sacrifices of a sweet savor unto the God of Heaven."

To this must be added your duty to your earthly prince, to be instant in prayer to God on his behalf.

This is your duty; for the Apostle says, "I exhort that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, [1 Timothy. 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim. 2.1-3)."

And let me add: It is your interest also; for the welfare of every individual in the nation is bound up in the welfare of the king. If God, in his mercy, directs his counsels, and prosper his endeavors, the whole empire will reap the benefit. While, on the other hand, if God were to give the king up to infatuated counsels, or to blast his best endeavors, the whole body politic would suffer, from the greatest to the least. As every member of the human frame participates in the sufferings of the head, so should we all, without exception, have reason to deplore any evil which befell the king on whom the destinies of the nation so essentially depend.

But to the performance of this duty we have an especial call at this time. The illness with which his Majesty has been visited, and from which he is at this time scarcely recovered, speaks loudly to us all, and should make us extremely urgent with God in his behalf, that his valuable life may be spared to us. Call to mind how suddenly one of his royal house, in the very prime of life, and in the utmost vigor of manhood, has been snatched away (the Duke of Kent) and then say, whether we have not reason to unite in unwearied supplications to the God of Heaven, to restore his health, and to preserve to us a life so justly dear, so transcendently important.

But further, reflect upon the state of the nation at this time; what a spirit of insubordination and impiety has prevailed, and would yet show itself in the same daring attitude that it has already assumed, if the firmness of our king, and the wisdom of the legislature, had not repressed it. We must not imagine that the rebellious disposition of those miscreants, who, for so long a time, and to so awful a degree, have agitated the nation, has changed. No; it is only waiting for an opportunity to burst forth; and, like water that has been dammed up, it would quickly deluge the whole kingdom, if only it could bear down the barriers with which its progress has been stopped.

See what this same spirit of impiety and of anarchy accomplished in a neighboring kingdom, and, if it had not been withstood by the wisdom and firmness of our late revered monarch, would have accomplished here also!

See what a horrible deed this demoniacal spirit has just perpetrated in France, in order to effect the extirpation of the royal family there. And is not the same spirit alive in this country? Look back to the former reign; no less than three times was the murder of our late gracious sovereign attempted. Yes, and our present sovereign too: his prime minister has been assassinated; the life of another of his ministers has been attempted. If this and the foregoing instance be supposed to have occurred on private, rather than public, grounds, still they show the spirit that has existed, and yet exists, in the nation; which is the point here chiefly to be noticed; the lives of many of them have been threatened; and his own life also has been sought by the hands of an assassin.

Scarcely have a few weeks elapsed, since several who were engaged in executing the laws, were either murdered, or delivered, as it were by miracle, out of the murderers' hands; and apologies have been made by those who would direct the public mind, in extenuation of these enormities. Tell me, Is there not a call on the whole people of the land to "pray for the life of the king?" (Little did the author think, when he sent this to the press, what weight all his observations were speedily to derive from the horrible conspiracy just brought to light—the Cato-street conspiracy.) Surely there will not be found many in the land, who will not bless and admire that gracious God, who has so mercifully interposed to defeat it!"

But I must add yet further: We have a special obligation to pray for our king. Consider the obligations which we owe to his august family! What liberty, both civil and religious, have we enjoyed, since the house of Brunswick came to the throne! No person whatever is molested, if he does not molest others. But why speak I of obligations to the family of our sovereign? Think what we owe to the sovereign himself, who, under God, has brought us through all the difficulties and dangers of the late conflict, and placed this nation on a pinnacle of glory, which no human being could have ventured, a few years ago, to anticipate, or even think of!

See too, the manner in which he has proceeded in suppressing the atrocities which, from the excess of our liberties, licentious blasphemers and agitators have been able to effect! Not one atom more of restraint has he imposed than was necessary for the occasion; so far has he been from wishing to stretch either his own prerogative or the rigor of the law beyond what necessity required, that there is scarcely a person in the whole nation that is not impressed with the wisdom, and moderation, and equity of the enactments which his servants have proposed and his authority has sanctioned.

I say, call these things to remembrance; and then ask yourselves whether the praying for the life of such a king is not the least that we can do to requite the benefits that we have received from him? Surely you need not to be instructed by a heathen; you need not a Darius to inform you of your duty. To all of you then, as Christians, I would say, "Offer sacrifices of sweet savor unto the God of Heaven, and pray for the life of the king."

In my text it is said, "Pray for the life of the king and his sons." Would to God I could urge upon you your duty to the same extent; or that I could say, Pray for the king and for his daughter! But it has pleased God, in his mysterious providence, to deprive us of her who was the hope and joy of the whole nation; and of her infant offspring too, to whom we fondly looked as to the future sovereign of these realms. Still does the nation mourn, and for many years will continue to mourn that overwhelming bereavement. In a moment when every heart was ready to leap for joy, and every tongue to utter the language of congratulation and thankfulness, the sad tidings came, and plunged the whole nation into an abyss of woe! It is not permitted us, therefore, any longer to pray for her. But this should interest us the more in behalf of all the royal family, for whom our prayers should ascend with unceasing earnestness, that God may bless them in all their concerns, both temporal and spiritual, and render them blessings, both by their influence and example, to this whole nation.

**To conclude:**

Let us, from the example of this heathen prince, learn how to employ our influence. He was the mightiest monarch that day upon the face of the earth; and there were in his dominions a poor and despised people, who were zealous for the honor of their God, but whose zeal in the cause of religion was misrepresented, and made a subject of complaint. But the king, so far from wishing to interfere with them in the conscientious discharge of their duty, gave them every possible encouragement, as well by financial aid as by his effectual protection; thus showing himself to be the father of his people, and the patron of all that was good.

In like manner, whether our influence has a wider range, or be contracted within a narrower sphere, let us use it for "the God of Heaven;" let us employ it to protect the oppressed, to encourage piety, and to maintain the honor of God in the world.

On the other hand, let us learn also how to improve the privileges we enjoy. No doubt the Jews felt their obligations to Darius, and acknowledged with gratitude the hand of God who had caused them to find favor in his sight. No doubt, also, the pious among them, at least, earnestly poured forth to God their supplications in behalf of their gracious benefactor.

Let us then, who enjoy such privileges, not merely through the favor of our monarch, but through the established constitution of the realm; let us, I say, abound in praises to our heavenly Benefactor, in affectionate loyalty to our earthly king, and in every work, whereby God may be glorified, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures may be advanced.

***~~#435~~***

***~~THE NECESSITY OF A FAITHFUL MINISTRY TO THE ERECTION OF GOD'S SPIRITUAL TEMPLE~~***

***~~[Ezra 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 6.14)~~***

"So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia."

*The purposes of God, whatever difficulties may seem to obstruct the execution of them, are all accomplished in due season.* The deliverance of his people from Babylon, and the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, though in themselves the most improbable events, were effected with the most surprising facility. God moved the heart of Cyrus to give the orders that were requisite; and though the constructing of the temple was retarded by unforeseen obstacles—yet afterwards, through the exhortations of the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah, that laborious work was finished in the space of four years.

We shall offer a few remarks upon,

***~~I. The building of the temple through the instrumentality of the fore-mentioned prophets.~~***

***~~Many difficulties obstructed the progress of the work.~~***

Scarcely was the foundation laid, before an attempt was made to impede the work through the hypocrisy of pretended friends. The Samaritans offered to co-operate with the Jews in raising the intended fabric; but their design was to frustrate, rather than promote, the completion of it. And though this appears at first sight to be a strange mode of showing hostility—yet it is indeed most common, both in political contests, and in the concerns of religion. Many will profess to desire the same objects, and will offer to concur in prosecuting them to a certain point, who, if their offers were accepted, would only defeat the ends proposed. The Jews, however, aware of the snares thus laid for them, determined to prosecute their work alone, [Ezra 4:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 4.1-3).

That device having failed, they were assaulted by the hostility of open enemies. Complaints were made against them to the governing powers, and they were represented as plotting to regain their liberty and independence. Their former endeavors to cast off the Babylonish yoke were referred to as proofs of their present disposition to rebel against the king of Persia, [Ezra 4:4-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 4.4-16).

It is in this way that the servants of God have been assailed in all ages; our blessed Lord was calumniated as an enemy to Caesar; and his Apostles, as "movers of sedition;" and, if at any period of the Church an occasion can be found against the people of God, the record of it shall be brought against them in all future ages, and the evils of one party shall be made to characterize religion itself, and all who profess it; and a sense of duty and of regard for the public welfare shall be artfully pleaded as an apology for the measures, which in reality were dictated by nothing but a rooted aversion to the cause of God, [Ezra 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 4.14).

This plan having too fatally succeeded, the Jews yielded to despondency, and for the space of fifteen years suspended the work in which they had engaged, [Ezra 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 4.23-24). A spirit of indolence and supineness soon prevailed among them, and would have operated to a total dereliction of the work, if God had not sent his prophets to rouse them from their lethargy. And indeed this is the greatest obstacle to every good work, since the longer it continues, the more entire is the ascendant which it gains over us.

***~~Through the preaching of the prophets, however, these difficulties were overcome.~~***

The Prophet *Haggai*justly reproved them for attending so carefully to their own accommodation, while the temple and the service of their God were altogether forgotten; and bade them carefully to "consider their ways! [Haggai 1:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 1.2-5); [Haggai 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 1.7)."

The Prophet *Zechariah*also urged them to bear in mind how awfully their fathers had suffered for their neglect of God, [Zechariah 1:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 1.1-6); and then, by a variety of images which he had seen in visions, encouraged them with assurances of success in their labors. Read attentively the four first chapters of Zechariah in this particular view.

Thus were the people stimulated to exertion. But behold, no sooner did they resume their work, than their enemies renewed their application to the government to issue again their mandate to discontinue it, [Ezra 5:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 5.1-10). While they were occupied only in building ceiled houses for themselves, no notice was taken of them; but as soon as they began to serve their God, their enemies were up in arms!

And so it always is; *zeal is approved in everything except true religion*; but, as soon as ever it discovers itself in that, every effort will be made to repress it. This effort, however, was overruled, as similar efforts have often been, for the furtherance of the work it was intended to destroy. Compare [Ezra 6:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 6.1-10) with [Philippians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12); and in the short space of four years the edifice was completed, verse 15.

The history thus viewed leads us naturally to notice,

***~~II. The subserviency of a faithful ministry to the erection of God's spiritual temple.~~***

*The temple of old was a shadow of that spiritual temple which is erected for God in the hearts of men*, "being built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, and Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, [Ephesians 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20-22)."

***~~1. The erection of this spiritual temple is attended with the same difficulties.~~***

Who that begins truly to surrender up his soul to God, does not find many impediments from pretended friends? They will profess to approve of religion, and will propose to go with us to a certain length, so that they may have the greater influence to keep us from "following the Lord fully," and from serving him with our whole hearts.

If we are enabled to withstand their efforts, then we shall be assailed by open enemies, who will accuse us of evil designs against both the Church and State; and will call forth the power of the civil magistrate, or of our more immediate governors, to suppress our zeal. Frequently they will become our greatest foes, who by their relation to us ought rather to become our firmest protectors. And too often do timidity and sloth induce us to relax our efforts, until, if God does not by some special act of providence or grace awaken us, we lose the time for working, and, like the foolish virgins, experience forever the fatal effects of our remissness.

***~~2. But the work of God in the soul is carried on and perfected by the same means.~~***

God has established an order of men on purpose to carry on this spiritual building in the world, [Ephesians 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.11-13). Paul and the other Apostles may be called "master-builders, 1 Corinthians 3:10;" but every pastor and teacher is engaged in the same work, according to the peculiar office that has been assigned to him. "To impart to you some spiritual gift, to the end that you may be established," and "to perfect that which is lacking in your faith," and in every way to be "helpers of your joy," is the great end of all our ministerial labors; and, if we would labor with effect, we must use the very same means as Haggai and Zechariah did.

We call you then, brethren, to "consider your ways!"

Consider what has hindered you hitherto; and what has been the consequence of intermitting your exertions in the service of your God. *Have you not reason to blush and be confounded for the little progress that you have made in the divine life?*

Consider too, as Zechariah so largely recommends, the promises of God. What assurances of success are given you by your gracious God, if only you will put your hands to the work in good earnest, "Up then, and be doing," every one of you; and "your God will be with you." Do not yield to discouragements of any kind; for "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." And *beware how you give way to carnal ease and indolence*; surely it ill befits you to be so intent, as most of us are, on earthly things, while the spiritual edifice advances so slowly. Let all inquire, what yet remains to be done in their own hearts, and, what may be done for God in the world at large; and let us, by "coming daily and hourly to Christ as the living foundation-stone, seek, as living stones, to be built up into a spiritual house, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5)," that shall be "the habitation of God, through the Spirit," forever and ever.

***~~#436~~***

***~~THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES~~***

**[Ezra 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 7.23)**

"Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and of his sons?"

In divine ordinances we are accustomed to sit at the feet of Prophets and Apostles, and to learn of them; but this day we will take for our preceptor a heathen monarch; in following whose directions we shall not fail to approve ourselves faithful servants to our God.

It was no less than fifty-nine years since the temple at Jerusalem had been rebuilt; but still the people, who had returned there, were at a very low ebb, both in morality and religion. *Ezra*, who was yet remaining in Babylon, in the service of Artaxerxes, greatly lamented the lack of piety among his own countrymen; and made request to the king, that he might go to Jerusalem for the purpose of inquiring into their state, and rectifying the abuses which reigned among them. In answer to his requests, Artaxerxes issued a decree, authorizing Ezra to go there with as many of his countrymen as chose to accompany him, and encouraging all his subjects in the province of Babylon to assist him in his pious enterprise. The words before us breathe a spirit which we should scarcely have expected to find in a heathen prince; but it is remarkable that some of the richest effusions of piety in the whole Scriptures proceeded from heathen monarchs Darius and Nebuchadnezzar.

To make a due improvement of the words before us, we shall consider them,

***~~I. In reference to the Jewish Church.~~***

***~~The state of the Jewish Church at this time is not unlike to that in which it was in the days of Ezra.~~***

Though the temple worship was restored, it was carried on by the Jews without any zeal for God's honor, or any of that spirituality of mind which is the very essence of all acceptable worship. Nor was the Law of God regarded among them with any just measure of submission; for, in direct opposition to its most authoritative dictates, they formed connections with the heathen round about them, and thus defiled and dishonored the holy seed which were separated for the service of Almighty God, [Ezra 9:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.1-9).

Just so, at this time the Jewish people are at a very low ebb, both in respect of morals and religion. They are indeed, by the providence of God, placed in a situation in which no other people upon earth stand; for they alone, of all people upon the face of the globe, are incapable of serving their God according to the directions of their own Law, and the dictates of their own conscience. But, at the same time, they show no sense of privation on this account, nor any desire to honor God in the services which they do render; for there is universally among them, in all their synagogues, a degree of irreverence, which we would scarcely expect to find among heathens in the worship of their idols. *It is impossible to behold them in their religious services, and not see how thick a veil is yet upon their hearts.*Nor do they manifest any respect for their own Law, especially in its sublimer precepts. *Of some superstitious rites they are observant with pertinacity and zeal*; but of real holiness of heart and life they are ignorant in the extreme; and beyond the gains and pleasures of this present world, the great mass of their nation appear scarcely to entertain a thought.

***~~But to us is given, no less than to Ezra, a command to advance their welfare.~~***

Ezra received a commission from Artaxerxes to go and rectify the abuses which reigned at Jerusalem, and to place the worship of God on a footing more consonant with his Law, and more worthy of his divine majesty. And have we no command to seek the welfare of that degraded people? Are we not told what God's purpose is respecting them; namely, to "raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, and to close the breaches thereof; to raise up its ruins, and to build it as in the days of old, [Amos 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.11)."

Are we not told, also, who the builders are to be, and how strictly God enjoins us to execute his work? This is God's express command to us, even to us, strangers of the Gentiles, "The sons of strangers shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister unto you; for in my wrath I smote you, but in my favor have I had mercy on you. And the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; yes, those nations shall be utterly wasted [Isaiah 60:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.10); [Isaiah 60:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.12)."

With their material temple we have indeed nothing to do; but for the erection of God's spiritual temple among them we are bound to labor; removing all the obstacles to their salvation, [Isaiah 62:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.10), and proclaiming to them the advent of their Messiah, saying, "Behold your salvation! Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him, [Isaiah 62:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.11)." Yes, "to all the cities of Judah we should cry, Behold your God! [Isaiah 40:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.9)."

***~~In this work we should engage with all diligence.~~***

It is not to be effected by good wishes merely, but by great and laborious exertions. It was not without great exertions on the part of men that the Gentiles were converted to the faith of Christ; and the same kind of efforts which the Apostles made for the conversion of the Gentiles we are to make for the restoration of the Jews to the favor of their God. We must feel compassion towards them; and go forth in dependence upon God to search them out in the cloudy and dark day, and to bring them home to the fold of the great and good Shepherd.

In this work all should engage, according to their power. As "the Jews, when scattered abroad upon the persecution of Stephen, went everywhere preaching the Word, [Acts 11:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.19)," so should we avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded by the dispersion of the Jews, to draw their attention to the sacred oracles which testify of Christ, and to make known to them the Messiah whom their fathers crucified.

I do not hesitate to say that this is our duty. It is not merely enjoined in that general commission to "go and preach the Gospel to all nations," but it is devolved upon us as an office which it is at the peril of our souls to neglect. God has told us, that he has made us the depositories of his Gospel, not for our benefit merely, but for the benefit of his outcast people, "As you in times past have not believed God, but 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)." It is, therefore, not only a duty to rebuild the desolated Church of Zion, but our duty, even the duty of every one who has himself obtained mercy from the Lord; and it is a work in which we should engage, no less from a sense of our own obligations to God than from compassion for the necessities of our Jewish brethren.

But, as the Jewish Church was typical of that which exists under the Christian dispensation, it will be proper to consider the words of our text,

***~~II. In reference to the professing Christian Church which is among us.~~***

The edifying of the Christian Church should be an object near to all our hearts; and it is remarkable that Peter applies to this subject the forfeited expressions of the Prophet Amos, respecting the tabernacle of David; which, if not so interpreted, we should have been led to confine to the Jewish Church. And, beyond all doubt, it is our duty to labor in this field, and to exert ourselves both among nominal Christians and the heathen world, for the enlargement and establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth.

But I propose rather to limit my observations at this time to individuals among ourselves.

***~~You, brethren, need to have God's work advanced in the midst of you.~~***

"You are God's house," as God has said, [Hebrews 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.6); you also are expressly called the temples of God, in which he lives and dwells, [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16). But in whom is God honored as he ought to be? In whom are found sacrifices so pure, so spiritual, so abundant, as God calls for at our hands? Truly there is much amiss in all of us; much evil to be rectified, and much defective to be supplied. Who has not reason for self-condemnation, when he reflects on this injunction which is given by a heathen king? Instead of being alive to "everything that is commanded by the God of Heaven," there are many of the divine precepts which we are apt to overlook; and, instead of doing everything "diligently" as unto "the God of Heaven," how listless are we, and heartless in the greater part of our services! And instead of living only for the Lord, to how great an extent do we live rather to ourselves! Truly the temple of our God needs to be purged again and again of the corruptions that prevail within it; and a more entire devotion of all that we have and are unto the Lord may justly be required at our hands.

**I call you, then, to engage in the Lord's work with your whole hearts.**

We will suppose that you are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the foundation which God has laid in Zion, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16). [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11). But there is much to be done by every one among you.

No man is contented with having laid a foundation; he proceeds to build upon it; and never considers his work as finished, until he has brought forth the top-stone. So it must be in this spiritual building which is begun within us; we must "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ;" or, to keep to the figure which is more appropriate to our subject, we must come to Christ daily "as living stones, that we may be built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-6)." Our profiting ought to appear, so that every one who sees us may acknowledge that God is with us of a truth.

To this, then, would I call you; and this duty would I impress upon your minds, if ever you would honor God, or walk worthy of your high calling. And remember, I beg you, whose *command*this is; it is the command of the God of Heaven. Remember, too, whose *work*it is; it is the work of the God of Heaven. O! learn of a heathen to venerate the divine authority, and to exert yourselves to the uttermost to promote the divine glory.

***~~And now let me call you to obey this imperial mandate:~~***

**1. In a way of personal reformation.**

At the time of the Passover, the Jews swept every corner of their houses, in order to purge out from them every particle of *leaven*which might have escaped their more general and superficial search. And this is what we also are called to do. Alas! there are many evil dispositions which lurk within us, and which a superficial survey will not enable us to detect. *Pride, envy, discontent, selfishness, sloth, are deeply implanted in our nature, and, along with many other corrupt propensities, spring up from time to time.* O be diligent in "purging out this old leaven, that you may be a new lump;" since by profession "you are," and in reality you ought to be, "unleavened!" And let spiritual sacrifices abound within you, even the "sacrifices of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

***~~2. In a way of ministerial exertion.~~***

Here I come to that which the occasion peculiarly calls for, and which is more immediately referred to in my text. The efforts which are to be made for the restoring of God's worship and service in the Jewish Church. Surely this is the duty of all; and it should be performed by us with all diligence.

In this, people of rank and influence ought to take the lead. Who can see a heathen monarch, the most powerful monarch in that day upon the face if the earth, thus interesting himself for his Jewish subjects, and not wish, that all monarchs, with "their counselors" (for all the counselors of Artaxerxes concurred with him in this act) were embarked in this holy cause, and exerted all their influence for the promotion of it?

In this the clergy, also, should be most distinguished. Ezra was what, in modern language, would be called a great divine; and he was in a post of honor at the court of Artaxerxes; but he did not satisfy himself with the luxury of strenuous idleness and learned ease; he sought to improve his talents and influence, for the honor of God, and the welfare of his people. Gladly, therefore, did he avail himself of the liberty accorded to him of going to Jerusalem for the purpose of remedying the evils which reigned there, and of establishing, on a more becoming scale, the ordinances of divine worship. It was an office of great labor; yet he willingly undertook it. Does not this show, how those who are distinguished for rank and learning among the clergy should employ their talents and influence for the Lord? Surely they could not render unto God a more acceptable service, or perform one more honorable to themselves, than by laboring, according to their respective abilities, for the advancement of God's worship among the Jews.

The very first work of Ezra, too, may furnish them with a profitable hint; for he immediately sent forth people to find "ministers," and "men of understanding," who would co-operate with him in this labor of love, [Ezra 8:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 8.16-18). And, truly, such instruments are wanting at this time; and, until such are found, we cannot hope for any great success in our undertakings. Let us "pray, then, to the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest;" for "the harvest truly is great; but the laborers are few."

The readiness with which all the people of Babylon concurred in this good work shows how all classes of the community among ourselves should unite in the work that is now proposed to us. They contributed no less than eighty thousand pounds in silver, and one hundred and fifty thousand pounds in gold, besides a vast abundance of wheat, and wine, and oil, and salt, for the purpose of honoring God in his temple at Jerusalem. This was done, I say, by *heathens*, to honor the God of the Jews.

What, then, should not be done by us Christians, who profess to serve the God of the Jews, and to feel our obligations to him for all the wonders of redeeming love? Should not we, according to our power, be alike liberal? Should not all ranks and orders among us concur in this good work? And should not "our merchandise (whether in 'wheat, or wine, or oil, or salt,' or any other article,) be holiness to the Lord, [Isaiah 23:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 23.18)."

Surely I shall not call upon you in vain. You will not allow the recommendations of an earthly monarch to be of more avail with his subjects than the edict of Almighty God with you. Ezra was authorized to "accept all the silver and the gold which he could find in all the province of Babylon" for this great object, and to "lay it out" to the best of his judgment "for the honor of his God, verses 16-18." And whatever the liberality of the Christian public shall commit to the disposal of those who have the direction of this great concern will be expended, I trust, with economy and wisdom, in such a way as most to advance the glory of God, in the restoration and salvation of his outcast people.

***~~#437~~***

***~~EZRA'S HUMILIATION FOR THE SINS OF HIS PEOPLE~~***

***~~[Ezra 9:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.5-6)~~***

Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God and prayed: "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens."

***~~It is common both for individuals and Churches to appear hopeful before men, when a nearer acquaintance with them would furnish us with abundant cause of grief and shame.~~***

At Ezra's coming to Jerusalem, about fourscore years after the Babylonish captivity, he found the temple built, and the ordinances of religion statedly performed. But on inquiring more particularly into the state of those who now inhabited the Holy Land, he received such information as filled him with the deepest anguish.

We propose to consider,

***~~I. The reason of his sorrow.~~***

Many of the people had connected themselves in marriage both with the Canaanites and other heathens around them. This Ezra justly regarded as a most heinous evil:

***~~1. As being a violation of an express command.~~***

Ezra himself speaks of it in this view, verse 10-12 compared with [Deuteronomy 7:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.2-3). It is possible that, while the generality sought only the gratification of their own corrupt appetites, "the leaders and officials, who were chief in this matter," justified their conduct on the ground of expedience. They might urge, that, being few in number, it was desirable for their own preservation to make alliances with those whose hostility they feared.

Just so, it is certain that in this way *many today set their own reasoning in opposition to God's revealed will. But reason is altogether out of its place on such occasions.*God's authority is not to be trampled on by us. We are not at liberty to sit in judgment on his commands, and to determine how far it is expedient to obey them. When once we are told, "Thus says the Lord!" then we have no option, no alternative left. A cheerful and unreserved compliance is our bounden duty, and our highest wisdom.

***~~2. As having an evident tendency to bring the people back to idolatry.~~***

It was for their idolatries more especially that the nation had been sent into captivity; and a recurrence of the same evils was most likely to result from so intimate a connection with idolaters. This danger had been particularly pointed out, when the prohibition had been originally given in [Deuteronomy 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.4); and their disregard of this danger showed how little they had profited by the *judgments*that had been inflicted on them, or the *mercies*that had been given unto them.

But thus it is with all who seek the friendship of the world; God has told them that "friendship with the world is enmity with God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4);" that it is impossible to maintain communion with both, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24), and [2 Corinthians 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-15); and that therefore all who cultivate the friendship of the world will be regarded and treated as the enemies of God, [1 John 2:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-17); yet they will run the risk, and for the sake of gratifying their corrupt wishes, will endanger the everlasting salvation of their souls.

O that those who are inclined to take worldly people for their associates, and especially those who are tempted to unite with them in the indissoluble bonds of marriage, would consider the guilt and danger of such measures, before they bring upon themselves the wrath of an offended God! If only they would look around them and see the injury which others have sustained in their souls by such conduct, they would pause, and not venture to purchase any imagined good at so great a price.

How great Ezra's sorrow on this occasion was, we may judge from:

***~~II. The expressions of his sorrow.~~***

***~~That which first calls for our notice, is the expression of his grief the instant he was informed of their misconduct.~~***

This was more violent than any of which we read in the Holy Scriptures. Often have men rent their mantle and their garments; but of him alone we are told that "he plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard." In the first paroxysm of his grief he was almost distracted; yes, he was so overwhelmed as to be incapable of speech or action; hence "he sat down astonished," as one altogether stupefied through excess of sorrow.

Shall we think all this extravagant? No truly, if we duly estimate the evil they had committed, and the danger to which the whole nation was reduced, verse 14. We are told of *David*, that "horror took hold upon him," and that "rivers of tears ran down his cheeks, because of those who kept not God's law." *Paul*appeals to God himself, that he had "great sorrow and continual heaviness in his heart for his brethren's sake, [Romans 9:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-3)." We may be sure therefore that the grief which Ezra manifested was no more than what the occasion called for.

***~~But his humiliation before God is that which more particularly demands our attention.~~***

"At the time of the evening sacrifice," as if revived and encouraged by the consideration of the great atonement, "he arose from his heaviness, and fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands unto the Lord his God," and confessed with shame and anguish of heart both his own sins and the sins of all the people. What a just view he had of national transgressions! Many would have thought, that, because he disapproved of the evils that had been committed, he had no share in the guilt contracted by them, nor any occasion to humble himself before God on account of them; but the members of the body politic are, in their corporate capacity, like the members of the natural body, all to a certain degree responsible for those evils, which generally, though not universally, prevail among them.

At the day of judgment indeed, none will have to answer for anything but what they themselves were personally guilty of; but in this world, where alone nations can be dealt with as nations, we should consider ourselves as participating in whatever relates to the nation at large.

And here we cannot but admire the *humility*with which he confessed the sins of the nation before God, and the *fervor*with which he implored the forgiveness of them. O that we felt even for our own sins, as he felt for the sins of others! However "fools may make a mock at it," sin is no light evil; there is no contrition too deep for us to feel on account of sin, nor any earnestness too great to use in order to obtain the remission of it!

Let the view then of this holy man put us all to shame; let us blush and be confounded at the thought that our repentance from day to day is so cold and superficial; and let us tremble for ourselves, lest we be found at last to have been hypocrites and dissemblers with God. We are told plainly enough what is that repentance which godly sorrow will produce, [2 Corinthians 7:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10-11); let us therefore look to it that we "approve ourselves to be clear in this matter."

***~~APPLICATION.~~***

And now, methinks the *evening sacrifice*is just offered, "now once, in the end of the world, has Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, [Hebrews 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.26)." O let our eyes be fixed on that "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Let us spread before him both our national and personal transgressions; and let us lay them all on the head of that heavenly victim; not doubting but that, "if we confess our sins, God is faithful 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)."

***~~#438~~***

***~~USE OF GOD'S DIVERSIFIED DISPENSATIONS~~***

**[Ezra 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.13-14)**

"What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?"

*The intention of God in all his dispensations, whether of providence or of grace, is to deter men from sin*; and it befits all his people to co-operate with him in this important work. Rulers in particular are invested with power by God himself for this very end; nor do they ever appear to more advantage than when they exert themselves to the uttermost in the support of God's authority, and in promoting the best interests of those over whom they are placed.

Ezra, perhaps about eighty years after the return of the Jews from Babylon, was permitted by Artaxerxes king of Persia to go and visit his brethren in Judea, and was empowered by him to rectify all abuses that he might find among them. After his arrival, he heard, to his unspeakable grief, that many of them had joined in marriage with heathen women. He therefore humbled himself before God on their account; and looking back upon all that they had suffered for their iniquities, and on the marvelous deliverance which God had given unto them—he expressed his surprise, his horror, his indignation at their great impiety!

From Ezra's words we shall take occasion to consider:

***~~I. God's diversified dispensations towards us.~~***

God visited his people of old with alternating mercies and judgments; and thus he has dealt with us also.

***~~God has visited our sins with judgments.~~***

The judgments which we have of late experienced, have been exceedingly heavy. It is of the utmost importance that we should acknowledge the hand of God in them. They spring not out of the dust; they arise not merely from the ambition of our enemies, or the errors of our own government.

God uses men as instruments, just as he did the Assyrians and Chaldeans, to punish his people; but still it is His hand alone that inflicts the stroke! [Psalm 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.13). [Isaiah 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-7); [Isaiah 10:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.13-15); [Isaiah 37:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.24-26); [Genesis 45:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.8)*. If we do not trace His displeasure in all that we have suffered, it is not possible that we should ever make a proper improvement of it.*

We must confess, however, that our sufferings have by no means equaled our deserts! [Psalm 103:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.10). Take any one of our national sins—our contempt of the Gospel, our open profaneness, our traffic in human blood, etc, and it might well bring down upon us all that we have endured. If God had proceeded against us according to the tremendous aggregate of our iniquities, we would have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah!

***~~God has now also given us a deliverance.~~***

The "deliverance" granted to the Jews in their return from Babylon, was not inferior to that which they had formerly experienced in their departure from Egypt.

And has not our deliverance also been exceeding great? In this too must we view the hand of God. Whoever were the means, God was the author of it. It is he who produces all the changes that arise in the state of *individuals*, [1 Samuel 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.6-8), or of *kingdoms*,[Jeremiah 18:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.6-7); [Jeremiah 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.9). And as the *discerning of God's agency*in our afflictions is necessary to effect our humiliation, so the beholding of it in our mercies is necessary to excite our gratitude.

To promote a suitable improvement of these dispensations, let us consider:

***~~II. The effect that these dispensations should have upon us.~~***

If the destruction of sin is the end which God proposes to himself in all his conduct towards us—then we should endeavor to make everything subservient to that end. The pointed interrogation in the text strongly shows in what light we should view a violation of God's commandments, after he has taken such pains to enforce the observance of them.

***~~1. How unreasonable it would be if we did not make any improvement from these dispensations!~~***

No man can read the account of Pharaoh's obstinacy in the midst of all his successive judgments and deliverances, and not stand amazed at his more than brutish stupidity! Yet it is precisely thus that we shall act, if we do not now put away our sins and submit ourselves entirely to God's revealed will.

And how unreasonable, or rather we should say irrational, such conduct would be, God himself tells us. He even calls Heaven and earth to express their astonishment at it, as not only leveling us with the beasts, but reducing us to a state far below them! [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.2-3). And if we are guilty of it, he will justly vent his indignation against us, as he did against his people of old, "They are a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus requite the Lord? O foolish people, and unwise! [Deuteronomy 32:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.5-6)."

***~~2. How ungrateful it would be if we did not make any improvement from these dispensations!~~***

Ingratitude is considered as one of the greatest aggravations that can be found in any offence of man against his fellow-man; and how much more must it enhance the guilt we contract in our disobedience to God! See what stress God himself lays upon this in the transgressions of David, [2 Samuel 12:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.7-9); and Solomon, [1 Kings 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 11.9); and Hezekiah, [2 Chronicles 32:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.25); and will it not stamp a ten-fold malignity also on our offences. See what construction God himself puts upon such conduct, [Jeremiah 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.9-10).

***~~3. How dangerous it would be if we did not make any improvement from these dispensations!~~***

This is particularly noticed by Ezra, in the words following the text; and the state of the Jews at this moment is a solemn commentary upon it! We are yet in the hands of our God; and if we still rebel against him, he can easily bring again upon us the calamities which he has just removed, or send other calamities far more afflictive. He tells us, that, as the impenitence of the Jews was the reason of his continuing to afflict them, [Isaiah 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.12); [Isaiah 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.17); [Isaiah 9:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.21); [Isaiah 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.4).

Just so, he will "punish us seven times more for our sins, [Leviticus 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.18); [Leviticus 26:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.21); [Leviticus 26:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.24); [Leviticus 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 26.28)," if we now continue in them. To what a state of misery and dereliction we may in that case expect to be reduced, we may judge from what was actually experienced by the Jewish nation, [Judges 10:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 10.11-14). But may the Lord grant that we may not so provoke the Majesty of Heaven!

***~~ADDRESS.~~***

Remember that *God is not an indifferent spectator of our conduct!*Sin is "that abominable thing which his soul hates! [Jeremiah 44:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.4)," and he will surely destroy either it, or him who retains it. And if his judgments are not inflicted on the sinner in this life, there still is a future day of retribution, when every man shall give account of himself to God, and receive the just recompense of all his actions.

Let this then be the improvement which we determine, through grace, to make of God's present dispensations. Let us reflect upon them as means of exciting us to holy obedience; and let every one of us shudder at the thought of ever again breaking the least of God's commandments.

**NEHEMIAH**

DISCOURSE 439

THE ZEAL OF NEHEMIAH

[Nehemiah 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.20). The God of Heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build.

WHOEVER engages diligently in the work of God, must expect trials: as it is said in the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus, "My son, if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for temptations [Ecclesiastes 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.1)." The ungodly will deride our efforts, and put the most unfavorable construction upon them, that the most ingenious malice can invent. The pious labors of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, though sanctioned by the monarch himself, were regarded by his enemies as indications of folly, and as preparatives for rebellion verse 19. But Nehemiah, as David had done before him, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God [1 Samuel 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.6)."

It is my intention,

**I.**To set before you the graces he exercised—

In the words which we have just read, we behold,

**1.**His confidence—

I am not aware that Nehemiah received from God any particular commission to engage in the work he had undertaken, or any direct promise of success: yet did he assure himself that God would prosper him. And this displayed a proper confidence in God. For he felt a consciousness, that in all that he had undertaken, he was seeking no interest of his own, but simply the honor of his God. In any matter that was purely personal, he would not have been justified in indulging so confident an expectation: but in a work like that in which he was engaged, and to the prosecution of which he was impelled by a high principle of love to God, he could have no doubt but that he should receive from Heaven such a measure of support as should bring his labors to a happy issue. The desire to embark in it had been stirred up in him by the Spirit of God: he trusted, therefore, that the blessing of God would accompany his endeavors.

This confidence, though right to be indulged, by no means warrants us to limit God as to the time, or manner, or measure of the success which he shall grant unto us. These things must be left to his all-wise disposal: for he alone knows what will tend most to the advancement of his own glory. But so far as the attainment of our objects will bring glory to him, we may assure ourselves, that we shall never be suffered to labor for him in vain.

**2.** His zeal—

Great were the difficulties which he had to encounter. For an hundred years since the return of the Jews from Babylon, had the walls of Jerusalem continued in a most dilapidated state, and all the gates had been destroyed by fire. No attempt had yet been made even to remove the rubbish verse 13, 14. Nor were the princes among the people at all disposed to cooperate with him in an effort to repair the ruins: they, alas! "would not put their neck to the work [Nehemiah 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.5)." His brethren of Judah, also, who should have been foremost in the work, discouraged it, by representing the task as hopeless and impracticable [Nehemiah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.10). His enemies at the same time exerted themselves to defeat his enterprise, by pouring contempt upon it, and conspiring, by all possible means, to counteract it [Nehemiah 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.8). But Nehemiah was determined to execute the purpose which he had conceived: and for that end set all hands to work, every one in his own proper district, that, by a great and simultaneous effort, the desired object might be attained. And whereas he was menaced by armed bands who threatened to destroy him, he armed the laborers, each with his sword or spear, that they might be ready at an instant to repel any assault that might be made upon them; so that, as it were, they held the sword in one hand, and carried on the work with the other [Nehemiah 4:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.16-18). This was a conduct worthy of a servant of the Most High God. In fact, the confidence he expressed, and the determination he formed, had a strict reference to each other. A servant of God was authorized to maintain the confidence, and was bound, in dependence on God, to form and execute the determination: "The Lord God, he will prosper us; therefore we, his servants, will arise and build," neither regarding difficulties, however great, nor fearing enemies, however powerful.

Admiring the virtues of this eminent saint, I proceed,

**II.**To commend them to your imitation—

Be you, my Brethren, followers of him,

**1.**In reference to God's work in the world at large—

The world is one great kingdom that belongs to Christ. But far is it from being in a state worthy of its Great Proprietor! Truly it is, as it were, in ruins; one great and shapeless mass of desolation, bearing upon the whole face of it the relentless efforts of the destroyer. And should not we, when informed of its miserable condition, be filled with grief, as Nehemiah for Jerusalem, and implore mercy for it, as he did for that ruined city? Should we not improve our influence for its good; and be ready, by our own personal exertions, to promote to the uttermost its welfare? What, if they who should take the lead are careless and supine? What, if many of our own brethren are lukewarm and desponding? What, if our means for helping forward its concerns are very narrow and contracted? What, if those who are hostile to such an attempt, exert themselves to intimidate and counteract us? Should we therefore sit down in listlessness and despair? No: we should encourage ourselves in God, and put forth all our energies in his service. In the incredibly short space of fifty-two days, Nehemiah, in the midst of all his discouragements, accomplished his work: for, we are told, "the people had a mind to work [Nehemiah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.6)." And who shall say what Christians might effect, if they were but penetrated with becoming zeal, and would combine their efforts in a judicious way. From the state both of the Jewish and Gentile world, any one would have supposed it impossible for a few devout and pious persons to effect anything in so short a space of time as twenty or thirty years: yet, behold, plans originating with a few, who contemplated nothing but a little partial benefit, have spread almost over the world itself their beneficial efficacy; insomuch that what was at first but as a cloud, the size of a man's hand, has already overspread the heavens, and descended in fertilizing showers on every quarter of the globe. Let us take courage from what we have seen, and press forward in the work that is yet before us; not contemplating difficulties, but confiding in our God, and going on in his strength to fulfill his holy and blessed will.

**2.** In reference to God's work in our own souls—

These, too, are in a fearfully dilapidated state; so that one who looks at an arm of flesh only would be ready to despair. And need I say what discouragements are put in the way of those who would serve their God? Amidst princes that are supine, friends that are lukewarm, and spectators that are arrayed in hostility against us, it requires much faith and patience to carry us forward in so arduous an undertaking. But we should address ourselves to the work, and combine all our energies to repair the breaches which sin has made upon our souls. We should put on, too, the whole armor of God, and fight the good fight of faith. We should suffer neither men nor devils to deter us from our work, but should proceed with diligence until the whole work of God is wrought within us. If we would proceed with the zeal which such a cause should inspire, what might we not effect, perhaps in the space of a few days or weeks? Surely we should make our profiting to appear, to the honor of God, and to the confusion of all our enemies. Doubtless those who united not with Nehemiah would pour contempt upon his efforts, and deride him as a weak or wicked enthusiast. But is there a man in the universe that does not applaud him now? Thus must you expect to be derided now: but the day is coming, when God himself will applaud you before the assembled universe, and they who now condemn you will bitterly regret that they did not follow your steps.

[Nehemiah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.6)

DISCOURSE 440

THE EFFICACY OF ZEAL AND DILIGENCE

[Nehemiah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.6). The people had a mind to work.

GREAT and useful undertakings are often declined, from an idea that we are not able to carry them into effect, when, in fact, nothing is wanting to ensure success in them, but zeal and diligence. The history before us strongly exemplifies this remark. The walls of Jerusalem still continued in their desolate condition, notwithstanding the Jews had returned thither about ninety years: but, at the instigation of one single man, the people combined; and engaging heartily in the work, they effected in a short space of time what had appeared utterly impracticable: Nehemiah says, "So built we the wall; for the people had a mind to work."

Let us consider,

**I.**The reason assigned for their success—

The work which the people had to perform was attended with many difficulties—

The removal of the rubbish verse 2. was of itself no inconsiderable labor, considering how few hands there were to engage in it. But beside this, the enemies of the Jews exerted themselves by ridicule, by menaces, and by various other devices [Nehemiah 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.10); [Nehemiah 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.19) and [Nehemiah 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.1); [Nehemiah 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.3); [Nehemiah 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.7-8) and [Nehemiah 6:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.8-9), to discourage the undertaking, and to prevent the execution of it. The treachery and supineness of some among the Jews themselves verse 10, 12 and [Nehemiah 6:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.18-19). formed also a very formidable obstacle in the way of those who desired to accomplish the work.

But by zeal and diligence they were enabled to accomplish it with incredible despatch—

Arduous as the work was, it was all finished in two and fifty days [Nehemiah 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.15). But how was it effected so soon? We are told, in the text; "The people had a mind to the work:" every one engaged in it with his whole heart: they regarded neither fatigue nor danger: they would not so much as take off their clothes during the whole time, except for the sake of cleanliness verse 23; and they wore their swords by their side while they wrought with their hands verse 16–18, that they might be ready to resist their enemies in case of an attack. By this union of courageous zeal and unremitting diligence they effected their purpose, to the astonishment and confusion of all their enemies [Nehemiah 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.16).

To show that this subject is capable of very useful improvement, we shall notice,

**II.**The instruction we may gather from it—

There are two truths that may justly be deduced from this history;

**1.**In everything we have to do for God, zeal and diligence are necessary—

The Jews at that time were actuated by a religious zeal, and exerted themselves for God [Nehemiah 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.17-18). And the work which we have to do for God is by no means dissimilar, if only we consider what a typical aspect there was in the whole of their captivity and restoration See [Isaiah 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.2); [Isaiah 52:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.9-10); [Isaiah 65:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.18). We may at least be permitted to accommodate this subject to the reparation of the soul for God, after the desolations it has suffered through the incursions of sin. We see that year after year the souls of men lie in ruins; that the generality have no heart to seek their restoration to their primitive grandeur; and that the greater part of those who begin to labor in this work, make little progress. But to what is this owing? The truth is, "they have no mind to the work:" they do not love their work: repentance is a burden: prayer is a task: self-denial is a drudgery: they would rather be excused from every part of their duty: they would not think of communion with God, or of conformity to his image, if they were not driven to it by an imperious necessity, a fear of everlasting torments. Hence their exertions are weak and intermitted; and their enemies are suffered to pull down their work, as fast as they build it up: so that, after an interval of months and years, little, if any, progress is made in their work. Ah! think of this, you who are complaining of the low state of your souls! It would have been thus with respect to the walls of Jerusalem, if the people had been as lukewarm as you: but "they had a mind to work;" and so must you, if you would do anything with effect: "Whatever your hand finds to do, you must do it with your might [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

**2.** In everything we have to do for God, zeal and diligence will ensure success—

In the work of our souls we have to encounter difficulties not unlike to those which the Jews had to cope with; we have much rubbish to be removed, many reproaches and menaces to withstand, and many discouragements from weak or false brethren to surmount. But we need not fear: if we engage heartily in our work, we shall assuredly succeed. Nothing shall be able to obstruct our progress: yes, the opposition we meet with shall but inflame our ardor, and increase our energy; and we shall proceed triumphantly, in spite of the assaults either of men or devils. We do not mean to say, that our own arm can effect these things: we know full well that it cannot; and that, of ourselves, we cannot do anything that is good: but if we go forth with zeal and diligence in a humble dependence upon God, he will enable us to fulfill his will; yes, "through His strength we shall be able to do all things [Philippians. 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil. 4.13)." He is pledged to assist those who trust in him [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1); and the weakest that relies on him shall be "more than conqueror:" yes, the weaker we are in ourselves, the more shall "his strength be perfected in our weakness [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)." Let us but trust in him, and "the wall shall be built, though in troublous times [Daniel 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.25);" and "what has been begun in grace shall soon be perfected in glory [Philippians. 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil. 1.6)."

Address,

**1.**Those who make excuses for not engaging in the work of their souls—

The generality are saying, "The time for the Lord's work is not yet come [Hag. 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai. 1.2)." But whatever excuses men urge for their delay, the true and only reason of it is, "They have no mind to the work." Be assured, my Brethren, that when God shall call you into judgment, the veil with which you cover your hypocrisy will be found thinner than the spider's web. Rest not then any longer in such dangerous delusions; but arise, and set yourselves to the work without delay.

**2.** To those who have entered on the Lord's work—

To exert yourselves with effect, there is need not only of individual zeal, but also of general and cordial cooperation. The builders all had their proper work assigned them: and of some it is said, "They built before their own houses [Nehemiah 3:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.28-30);" and though the work seemed but ill adapted for females, some wrought in "concert with their daughters [Nehemiah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.12)." How prosperous would our exertions be, if we would imitate them in these respects! See, Beloved, what work you have to do near your own houses. If all who profess to be engaged in this good work would attend diligently to their children, their servants, their dependents; if they would visit their sick neighbors, and labor to instruct those to whom they can gain easy and familiar access; methinks the wall would soon be built, to the admiration of men, and the confusion of devils. Let there then be a general zeal among you, and a determination to co-operate in every labor of love. It is mentioned to the disgrace of the nobles, that "they put not their necks to the work of the Lord [Nehemiah 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.5)." O let there not be any such among you! Rather, let the example of Nehemiah and his followers animate us all: then shall the work proceed rapidly around us, and our "Jerusalem shall soon become a praise in the earth [Isaiah 62:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.7)."

[Nehemiah 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 5.15)

DISCOURSE 441

THE FEAR OF GOD A PRINCIPLE OF ACTION

[Nehemiah 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 5.15). So did not I, because of the fear of God.

IT is obvious that there are in the world a people whose conduct differs widely from that of the world around them: and, in attempting to account for it, some impute it to pride and vanity, some to weakness and folly, and some to downright hypocrisy. But, if men would examine into this matter with candor, they might easily find a principle abundantly sufficient to account for all the singularity they observe: and this principle is "The fear of God." By this Nehemiah was actuated, while, in the governing of Israel, he maintained a system directly opposed to that of all who had preceded him. They all had exacted from the people, even in their low impoverished state, such contributions as they judged necessary for the upholding of their dignity and the discharge of their official duties. And Nehemiah might have felt himself fully justified in following their example, which was originally ordained by legitimate authority, and afterwards established by long uninterrupted usage. But, in existing circumstances, he judged the practice to be oppressive; and therefore he would no longer suffer it, because he was under the influence of a principle which was sufficient to outweigh all selfish considerations: "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

Now, it will be no unedifying subject, if we consider,

**I.**The principle by which he was actuated—

It is called, in my text, "The fear of God;" by which we are to understand, not a dread of God's displeasure, but rather a holy filial fear, comprehending under it an habitual respect to God; a respect to,

**1.**His word, as the rule of our conduct—

The maxims of the world are not unfrequently the very reverse of those which are inculcated in the Sacred Volume. We need not go back to the philosophers of Greece and Rome, to show the erroneousness of their opinions: the sentiments even of the Christian world are, in many respects, very far from according with the dictates of inspiration. Pride is by many held as equivalent with magnanimity: and humility, such as God requires, is as little approved among us, as it was among the unenlightened heathen. As to the duties of love to God, of faith in Christ, of entire devotedness to the pursuit of things invisible and eternal, we well know that they are kept altogether upon the back-ground, except, indeed, as sentiments proper to be delivered from the pulpit, but equally proper to be banished from all the scenes of social converse. But the man who is under the influence of the fear of God will not suffer himself to be regulated by the opinions of men; but "by the fear of the Lord he will surely depart from evil," and in every doubtful point will inquire, "What says the Lord?"

**2.** His authority, as the reason of our conduct—

A Christian may doubtless have many reasons for acting in this or that particular way: he may judge such a line of conduct to be conducive to his own comfort, and to the benefit of others. But all such motives will be in perfect subordination to the divine will, which he will determine to obey, whether the immediate act be in accordance with his own interests or in opposition to them. A man under the fear of God will not consider whether he shall gain or lose, whether he shall please or displease, by any act; his only concern will be to approve himself to God. If urged by any considerations of human authority or personal interest, his answer is, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you: for I cannot but do the things which God commands."

**3.** His glory, as the end of our conduct—

The real saint feels that "God in all things should be glorified:" and he will not be satisfied with anything which will not conduce to this end. This idea he will carry into the most common transactions of his life: "Whether he eat or drink, or whatever he do, he will do all to the glory of God." In relation to this matter, there will be in him a tenderness, a sensibility, a great refinement of mind, such as, to a superficial observer, shall appear to have led him into great inconsistencies. Paul acted sometimes as under the Law, and sometimes as free from the Law; accommodating himself to the prejudices or weakness of men, as he saw occasion. But, whatever was his course, his object was the same; namely, to serve and honor God: and every one who truly fears God will propose to himself the same great end, and conduct himself in such a way as appears to him best calculated to effect it.

Such being the principle by which Nehemiah was actuated, let us notice,

**II.**The effect it produced on his life and conversation—

Methinks there is a striking agreement between the conduct of Nehemiah and of the Apostle Paul. Paul was entitled to demand support from the Christian Church, to which he ministered: but, so far was he from insisting on his right, that he wrought with his own hands, night and day, in order to support himself, and to exempt others from what they might have accounted a burden [2 Corinthians 11:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.7-12) with [1 Thessalonians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.9) and [2 Thessalonians 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.8-9). Thus Nehemiah, doubtless, was entitled to support from those over whom he was placed: but this right having been abused, he waved it altogether; that so he might both lighten the burdens of his people and set to all an example of forbearance and love.

We see, then, in him how the fear of God will operate wherever it exists as a principle of action in the soul. It will surely teach us the following lessons:

**1.**Not to conform ourselves to any custom until we have examined it with care—

Thousands of things are customary, which yet are far from being defensible. See the habits of the world altogether; its customs, its fashions, its maxims. Will they bear the test of sound wisdom, or endure a scrutiny by the word of God? Numbers cannot change the qualities of things, and make that to be good which is in itself evil: nor can we be justified in doing anything merely because it is sanctioned by custom. On the contrary, we are commanded "not to be conformed to this world," and "not to follow a multitude to do evil."

**2.** Not to suffer ourselves to be biased by any personal interests in forming our judgment of doubtful matters—

There was a strong temptation to Nehemiah to continue the abuses which had so long obtained: but he suffered not his interest to blind his judgment. So neither should we practice or connive at any evil, because of its tendency to advance our interests. The whole system of trade, as carried on at this time, is founded, I fear I must say, on fraud; insomuch, that if a person, in any line of business, were to do nothing which would not bear the test of truth and uprightness, he would not be able to maintain his ground; so universally do the profits in trade arise from some kind or other of falsehood and imposition. But the generality of men see no evil in this state of things: they can adulterate their commodities, and practice impositions without any remorse. The things are only such as custom sanctions; and such as, men will say, necessity requires; and therefore they go on, without ever inquiring into the lawfulness of them in the sight of God. But it were surely better to examine into this matter, and to judge righteous judgment; because we know that the judgment of God will certainly be according to truth. We are told by God himself, and that repeatedly, that "there is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death [Proverbs 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.12); [Proverbs 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.25);" and surely it were wise to ascertain with care the correctness of our sentiments, lest we then detect the evil of them, when, alas! the discovery will be of no avail.

**3.** Not to fear condemning what our conscience does not approve—

Though the persons who had practiced the evil were the governors of the nation, Nehemiah boldly bore his testimony against them: "Thus and thus did they: but so did not I." Similar fortitude should we also manifest, especially in a way of holy practice. If we blame anything in others, let us at least be careful to do it, not so much in a way of harsh censure, as of better example. This we shall do, if we really fear God. Instead of "walking after the course of this world," we shall endeavor to be "as lights in the world, holding forth in our life and conversation the word of life," that "others, beholding our light, may glorify our Father that is in Heaven." If our singularity be complained of, we must remember the issue of Noah's fidelity; and must console ourselves with the thought, that we shall ultimately be saved from that deluge, which will soon overwhelm the whole ungodly world. We shall bear in remembrance, that "we have been bought with a price," even with the inestimable price of the Redeemer's blood; and we shall make it the one object of our lives to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his."

[Nehemiah 6:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.3-4)

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NEHEMIAH'S FIRMNESS

[Nehemiah 6:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.3-4). I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.

NEVER can we be sufficiently thankful for the records which are given us respecting the saints of old. When we are put into arduous circumstances ourselves, and see the line of conduct which is required of us, we are ready to think that the requisition is impracticable. But when we behold others, in similar circumstances, approving themselves faithful to their God, we are encouraged, and emboldened to undertake whatever may come before us in the path of duty. Nehemiah, having received from the Persian monarch authority to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, addressed himself to the work with zeal and diligence. But he was not suffered to proceed any long time unmolested in his career. A conspiracy was formed against him, and every effort which malignity could suggest was used to impede him in his sacred course. How he baffled the attempts of his enemies we are told in the passage now before us: from whence I shall take occasion to show,

**I.**What efforts men will make to divert us from the service of our God—

It may be asked, What have we to do with the facts which are here recorded? I answer, They were all of a typical nature, intended to shadow forth the opposition which would be made to the cause of God in every age. The city of our God is erecting continually; and the builders are continually obstructed in their work by the enemies of our God and his Christ: and, as in the instance before us, those enemies will endeavor to prevail,

**1.**By artifice—

Four different times did Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arabian propose to Nehemiah some artifice whereby they might ensnare him to his destruction. And every species of device will the enemies of Christ contrive and execute, to divert his servants from the duties in which they are engaged. Proposals, in appearance the most friendly, shall be made, to draw them aside, and to ensnare their feet. Those who never took any interest about them in their unconverted state, will now express great anxiety to recover them from their supposed errors, and to restore them to the ways which they have forsaken.

**2.** By intimidation—

Parents and governors, who never offered so much as a word of advice to us to serve and honor God, will interpose their authority to keep us from serving him, the very instant that we should show ourselves on the Lord's side. Even at this present hour, notwithstanding the liberality which men profess on the subject of toleration, it is no uncommon thing for those who are possessed of power to use their influence, in an arbitrary and tyrannical way, for the suppression of religion: and the more nearly they are related to us, the more decided will they be in their efforts: "our greatest foes will generally be those of our own household".

**3.** By ridicule—

This is a weapon capable of being used by all: and all will have recourse to it, in order to expose to derision the most sacred characters. The enemies of Nehemiah ridiculed his efforts, saying, that "if but a fox should run up the wall which the Jews were constructing, he would throw it down." Thus will every thing that can bring odium upon us be reported concerning our principles and conduct: nor will any rank in society, any eminence of attainments, any wisdom of deportment, or any purity of manners, screen us from the envenomed shafts of ridicule and contempt.

But in the example of this holy man we see,

**II.**In what manner we should withstand them—

Two things in particular I would notice:

**1.**His wisdom—

He saw through the veil by which these hypocrites sought to cover their designs: but he forbore to bring any accusation against them, lest he should only inflame and irritate their minds, which he wished rather to soothe and to compose. But he appealed to them respecting the importance of prosecuting without intermission the work in which he was engaged: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

And are not we "doing a great work?" What, in the whole world, can be compared with that in which we are engaged, and on which an eternity of happiness or misery altogether depends?: If it be said, that a compliance with the habits of the world will not impede our spiritual progress, I utterly deny it: for if that be the case, why are we forbidden to be conformed to this world [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2). Why is it said, that "if any man love 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)." What truth would there be in this assertion, that the friendship of the world is enmity against God; and that whoever even desires to be the friend of the world, he is thereby constituted the "enemy of God [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). The Greek." The person who duly improves "the cross of Christ, is crucified to the world [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)." To "serve God and mammon" too is impossible [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24); and therefore the answer of Nehemiah is exactly suitable for us: "Why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you?".

**2.** His firmness—

Four different times did these crafty enemies renew their attempts; and Nehemiah answered them continually to the same effect. He would not enter into disputations with them, but contented himself with such an answer as they could most easily appreciate, and such an one as ought to satisfy their minds. Thus it becomes us also to act. However frequent or continued the efforts of men are to turn us from God, we must withstand them all: and it will be well to keep in our stronghold, and not to descend into the field of controversy with them. Here is a plain fact, which they easily comprehend, and cannot possibly deny: the work of salvation is, beyond all comparison, more important than any other that can be proposed to us; and nothing under Heaven ought to be suffered to interfere with it. This is so plain and acknowledged a truth, that no one can withstand it. Men may dispute about the principles of the Gospel; but this admits of no dispute. Here, therefore, we should do well to take our stand; and, by whoever we are assaulted, to maintain our ground. An appeal, so made, must at last carry conviction with it, and silence our most inveterate opposers.

Let us learn from hence,

**1.**What we are to expect, if we will serve our God—

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It is in vain to imagine that we shall escape. Ungodly men hate the light as much as ever: and as, in the days of Ishmael, he who was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now, and ever will be, as long as there shall be an ungodly man upon earth. If, then, you will set yourselves to serve the Lord, prepare your souls for temptation [Ecclesiastes 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.1).

**2.** How we must act, if we will approve ourselves to him—

We must yield to no artifice, no intimidation whatever. Whether persons come to us in the garb of friends or of foes, our plain answer must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you [Acts 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19)." If we "love even life itself" in comparison of Christ, "we shall lose it" forever [Matthew 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.39); "We must be faithful unto death, if ever we would attain a crown of life [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10)."

[Nehemiah 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.11)

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CHRISTIAN FIRMNESS

[Nehemiah 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.11). And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

WHOEVER examines the character of the primitive saints, will see, without fail, how religion dignifies and ennobles the mind of man. It gives to its possessor a superiority above all the common interests of time and sense, and enables him, under the most trying circumstances, to act as in the immediate presence of his God. His efforts to honor God will necessarily involve him in difficulties: but these difficulties will only elicit his true character, and display the efficacy of the grace he has received.

Nehemiah had engaged in the arduous work of rebuilding Jerusalem. In this he was opposed by the enemies of the Jews, who sought, by every artifice, to weaken his hands, and divert him from his purpose. At last a person, from whom he might have hoped better things, Shemaiah by name, and who, it should seem, professed himself a prophet, concurred with his enemies in a plot against him, and, under a specious plea of consulting his safety, proposed to hold converse with him in the temple, where he would be out of the reach of those who sought his life. But Nehemiah, either suspecting treachery, or, at all events, seeing what advantage such a measure would give to his enemies to reproach him for cowardice, and for a distrust of God, indignantly rejected the proposal in the terms which I have just read.

Now, without confining myself to this particular occurrence, I will take occasion from it to set before you,

**I.**The subtlety with which our great adversary will assault us—

You cannot but see how specious was the proposal made to Nehemiah. It was an undoubted fact, that his enemies sought his life: and to go into the temple for safety seemed a very prudent measure. But it was a temptation cast in his way by the enemies of God. And thus, our great adversary endeavors to take advantage of us in a great variety of ways, if by any means he may prevail upon us to act in a way unworthy of the Christian chamber. He will propose to us,

**1.**To neglect our social duties, with a view to the furtherance of our spiritual welfare—

This is a common temptation; and extremely specious. For, who can doubt the superior importance of eternal things above those which are merely temporal? Consequently, it may be thought that the less important duties may give way to those which are of paramount consideration. Thus many, especially in younger life, will vindicate their neglect of those offices which their station in society has imposed upon them, thinking it a sufficient excuse to say that they were seeking the advancement of their eternal interests. The apprentice or the servant will be attending upon religious ordinances in public or private, when he should be executing the business of his own particular calling; imagining that his zeal for the one employment will justify his neglect of the other. Nor is it uncommon for students to inquire, whether their desire to qualify themselves for the ministerial office by one line of study will not justify their neglect of those studies which their collegiate course marks out for them, and academic discipline indispensably requires. But all such desires are founded in error. They proceed on the idea that our social and religious duties oppose each other; whereas activity in temporal concerns will not at all abate or interfere with fervor of spirit in the Lord's service See [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11); on the contrary, in discharging our duty to man, we do, in fact, fulfill our duty to God: and while, in relation to one set of duties, we say, "These ought you to have done," we must with equal decision add, in reference to the other, "These you are not to leave undone [Luke 11:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.42)."

**2.** To conform to the world, with a view to conciliate their regard—

This also is specious, and very commonly proposed. But it is as erroneous as the former; for, however much we may conform to the world, we can never draw them to the love of true religion: on the contrary, we shall rather confirm them in their persuasion, that religion does not require that measure of spirituality which the saints of old maintained. Our Lord says; "If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but 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)." But, while he here acknowledges that a conformity with them will disarm a measure of their enmity, does he recommend the adoption of such a plan? No: he inculcates the very reverse. Whether men will hate us or not, our walk must be the same: we must not accommodate ourselves to their wishes, but to God's commands: and he says, "Be not conformed to this world; but be you transformed in the renewing of your minds, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2)."

**3.** To use undue means with a view to the attainment of some desirable end—

Safety was desirable to Nehemiah: but, to secrete himself in the temple was not a right method of obtaining it. Such a step would have argued a distrust of God's power to preserve him in the way of duty, and would have given great occasion of triumph to his enemies verse 13. Thus there may be many objects which may be desirable in themselves, which yet we must not seek by any sacrifice of duty or conscience. Let it be granted, that there is some great danger to be avoided, or some valuable blessing, say, the preservation of life itself, to be acquired; still the maintenance of strict integrity and of a good conscience must be preferred: nor must we suffer ourselves to be diverted so much as an hair's breadth from the line of duty, for the attainment of any object under Heaven. Uzzah has taught us this. To keep the ark from falling was good: but he, not being a Levite, had no right to touch it: and God, in striking him dead upon the spot, has shown us, that, on no occasion whatever, are we at liberty to "do evil, that good may come [Romans 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.8)." Our answer to every temptation must be, "Shall I go into the temple to save my life? I will not go in."

The greater the subtlety of Satan is, the greater should be our vigilance, and the more immovable.

**II.**The firmness with which we should resist him—

The direction given us is, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7)." And, as a pattern of firmness, we cannot have a better example than that before us: "Shall such a man as I flee?" a man invested with authority? a man engaged for the Lord? a man in whom any act of cowardice will be productive of the most injurious effects? "I will not go into the temple, even though it be to save my life." Now, thus should we set the Lord ever before us; bearing fully in mind,

**1.**Our relation to him—

Shall such a man as I yield to temptation of any kind? I, a servant of the living God? I, who profess myself to be a child of God? Nothing shall ever induce me to violate my duty to my heavenly Father, or to walk in any respect unsuitably to the relation I bear to him. God helping me, I will walk worthy of my high calling: and whoever he be that would seduce me from my duty, even though he were my dearest friend, I will spurn at his advice with honest indignation, and reject it with the utmost abhorrence [Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9).

**2.** Our obligations to him—

What do I owe to Almighty God, who gave his only-begotten Son to die for me, and to reconcile me to himself by his vicarious sacrifice upon the cross? And shall I, for any temporal advantage, offend his Divine Majesty? Shall I distrust his care of me, or be afraid to suffer for his sake? Abhorred be the thought! Let me only know the path of duty; and no consideration under Heaven shall divert me from it. Let those who know nothing of redeeming love please themselves, if they will: but so will not I: I will strive only to please my God, and to "render unto the Lord according to the benefits he has conferred upon me."

**3.** Our expectations from him—

Here am I, not only a candidate for Heaven, but, through grace, an expectant of it. I see crowns and kingdoms reserved for me in a better world. And shall I cast them all away? What carnal gratification can ever be put in competition with the glory that is prepared for me? or what temporary gain be weighed in the balance against an everlasting inheritance? Tell me of what dangers you will, they shall not appal my spirit; and tell me of what joys you will, they shall never allure my soul. For eternity I have been begotten, redeemed, and sanctified; and for eternity alone will I both live and die.

**4.** The interest which God himself has in the whole of our conduct—

This in particular pressed on the mind of this eminent saint. He saw that his enemies labored to draw him into sin, that they might have occasion for reproach against him, and might cast reflections upon God himself. And, under this conviction, he would risk life itself rather than comply with the solicitations of his friend. And thus it is that God's enemies endeavor to beguile us, in order that they may triumph over us, and exult in our shame. Only let them draw us into sin of any kind, and they will immediately exclaim, "There, there, so would we have it:" yes, if they can prevail to the extent they would, they will even "blaspheme the very name of God on our account." But who, that is aware of this, will not rather die than dishonor God? If we only consider how God's honor is involved in our conduct, we shall need no other motive for steadfastness in his holy ways: and if tempted to leave them, even for a moment, we shall reply, "Shall a man, situated as I am, be driven from his post, and go into the temple to save his life? No: I will not go in: nor shall all the powers of earth or Hell ever induce me to relax my diligence in the service of my God."

What, then, shall I say to you, my Brethren? This I say,

**1.**Expect temptation—

In the Book of Ecclesiasticus this advice is given: "My son, if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation [Ecclesiastes 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.1)." You must not expect that Satan will suffer his vassals to cast off his yoke, without many earnest endeavors to reduce them to their former bondage. And he has "wiles and devices" innumerable, whereby to assault our souls. He can even put on the aspect of an angel of light, in order the more effectually to beguile unstable souls [2 Corinthians 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.14). He will even make use of your own friends, yes, and of pious persons too, to draw you aside from the path of duty. It was no other than Peter, the bold and zealous Peter, whom he instigated to dissuade our blessed Lord from subjecting himself to the pains which were necessary for the redemption of a ruined world. But our Lord withstood him, saying to this favored disciple, "Get you behind me, Satan; you are an offence unto me: for you savor not the things that be of God, but those that be of men [Matthew 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.23)." So be you also on your guard not to follow implicitly the advice even of good men; but weigh every sentiment in the balance of the sanctuary, and conform yourselves in everything to the mind and will of God.

**2.** In every circumstance place your entire confidence in God—

This was Nehemiah's excellence. He knew in whom he had believed; and that, whatever conspiracies might be formed against him, he was safe in God's hands; "nor could any weapon that was formed against him prosper." Thus then do you. "Say not, A confederacy to all them that say a confederacy: neither fear you their fear, nor be afraid: but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13). See also [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4)." This your holy profession indispensably requires. When Ezra went from Babylon to Jerusalem with all the vessels of gold and silver which had been carried thither by Nebuchadnezzar, and was in danger of being plundered by robbers who infested the road, "he was ashamed to ask from Artaxerxes a guard of soldiers for his protection; for, says he, I had said to the king, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him [Ezra 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 8.22)." And do not you profess the same truth, that God is the protector, and friend, and portion of all that seek him? Whom then will you fear? or what will you desire for your comfort, when you have such an all-sufficient Friend ever at hand? "If He be for you, who can be against you [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)." or, if He be your Shepherd, what can you want [Psalm 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.1). Only "be strong in faith, giving glory to God;" and "you shall be kept in perfect peace;" "nor shall so much as a hair of your head perish." Your trials may be multiplied to the most fearful extent: but "you shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end."

[Nehemiah 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.15)

DISCOURSE 444

THE EXPEDITION WITH WHICH THE WALL OF JERUSALEM WAS BUILT

[Nehemiah 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.15). So the wall was finished …in fifty and two days.

A MERE historic record of the time occupied in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem appears at first sight to be an uninteresting subject for a popular DISCOURSE but it will be found replete with interest, when the circumstances connected with it are taken into the account. The extremely dilapidated and ruined state of the fortifications at that time, the weakness and poverty of those who undertook to rebuild them, and the opposition which they met with from numerous and potent enemies, combine to render the record in our text almost incredible. For the completion of such a work, two and fifty weeks would have been a very short time; but two and fifty days seem utterly insufficient for it: such expedition appears perfectly beyond the physical powers of the persons engaged in it: yet in that time the wall was finished: and it will be very profitable to inquire,

**I.**How it was completed in so short a time—

To enter fully into the subject, the six first chapters of this book should be carefully read. In them we shall find that the means whereby this great work was accomplished, were,

**1.**The wisdom and energy of the governor—

In every step which Nehemiah took, we are struck with his consummate wisdom. When first he made known to the Persian monarch his desire to undertake the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he kept out of sight every consideration which might tend to create jealousy in the monarch's mind, and mentioned only such as were likely to produce in him a favorable impression. With this view he speaks of Jerusalem, not as the city of the great God, which had been so great and powerful in former times, and was yet ordained of God to become the capital of an independent nation, but simply, as "the city of his fathers' sepulchers [Nehemiah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.5)."

Having obtained permission to execute his purpose, and come to Jerusalem for that end, he again showed his wisdom in concealing from the people the reason of his journey, until he had personally himself inspected the walls, and was thereby qualified to obviate all objections which indifference or despondency might suggest [Nehemiah 2:12-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.12-18).

The way in which he counteracted all the plots of his enemies, still further marked the depth and solidity of his judgment. He forbore to use any irritating expressions, notwithstanding the multiplied provocations which he met with: and while his enemies wasted their time in plotting how to arrest his progress, he occupied himself in the prosecution of his work, augmenting his exertions in proportion as they increased their efforts to impede him [Nehemiah 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.19-20); [Nehemiah 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.8-9); [Nehemiah 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.13-14). Yet it is worthy of particular observation, that he neither trusted to his own exertions, nor yet neglected them under an idea that he should be protected by his God: but he combined a dependence on God with a diligent use of all proper means of self-defense [Nehemiah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.9); thereby setting us an example which we shall do well to follow in every difficulty which we may be called to encounter.

Nor was the energy of Nehemiah less admirable than his wisdom: we see throughout the whole of his conduct as much promptitude as consisted with sound discretion, and an invincible firmness in executing whatever his deliberate judgment had dictated. So intent was he on the prosecution of his purpose, that neither he, nor those under his immediate influence, ever put off their clothes for several weeks together, except for the purpose of their being washed [Nehemiah 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.23). And when a proposal was made to him to hold a conference with some adversaries in an adjacent village, his reply was, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you [Nehemiah 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.2-3)." Yes, when the same message was sent four times, he repeated the same answer: and when at the fifth time it was accompanied with a letter containing many accusations against him, he contented himself with exposing the falsehood of them, and more determinately than ever besought the Lord to strengthen his hands for the work in which he was engaged [Nehemiah 6:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.5-9).

On the failure of that device, his enemies sought to intimidate him by reports of a conspiracy against his life, and advised him to take refuge in the temple: but he, with a fortitude worthy of his high character, answered, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in [Nehemiah 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.10-11)." It is in connection with this anecdote that our text informs us, "So the wall was built in fifty and two days:" and certainly to this extraordinary combination of wisdom and energy in him we must ascribe it, that the wall was erected in so short a time.

**2.** The union and perseverance of the people—

An individual, however good and great, can do little, unless he is seconded by those who are under his direction: but in this case Nehemiah found instruments well fitted to his hands. No sooner did he make known to the rulers of Jerusalem the commission which he had received from the king of Persia, and call for their assistance in the execution of it, than they said, "Let us rise up and build:" and "immediately they strengthened their hands for this good work [Nehemiah 2:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.17-19)."

It is true, there were some exceptions, some who were too proud and fond of ease to work [Nehemiah 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.5); and others, who yielded to despondency [Nehemiah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.10); and others who actually carried on a treasonable correspondence with Nehemiah's most inveterate enemies [Nehemiah 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.17-19); but, on the other hand, there was such a zeal among the great mass of the people, that some performed double the work allotted them [Nehemiah 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.5); [Nehemiah 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.27), and even ladies of the highest rank combined their utmost efforts to assist in building the wall, not accounting any service either derogatory to their honor, or unsuited to their gender, if they might but encourage their brethren, and advance the glory of their God [Nehemiah 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.12). And to this union is the success expressly ascribed: "So built we the wall; for the people had a mind to work [Nehemiah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.6)."

There was also among them astonishing perseverance: for when they were menaced with a sudden assault, and were told ten times over, that an armed host would come suddenly upon them to destroy them, they persisted resolutely in their work, arming themselves for their defense, setting alternate watches for their preservation, and working with a trowel, as it were, in the one hand, and a sword in the other, determining rather to sacrifice their lives, than be deterred from the service in which they had embarked [Nehemiah 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.11-13); [Nehemiah 4:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.16-18); [Nehemiah 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.21). Had they yielded to indolence or fear, the work could never have been carried forward: but by this zealous cooperation of all ranks and orders among them, all difficulties were overcome, and the wall was built with an expedition almost incredible.

**3.** The peculiar blessing of their God—

To this above all must the success be ultimately ascribed; for to this were owing the desire of Nehemiah to rebuild the wall [Nehemiah 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.12), the consent of Artaxerxes to the plan proposed [Nehemiah 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 1.11) with 2:4, 8, the wisdom and energy with which Nehemiah was inspired [Nehemiah 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.18), the cordial cooperation of so many people, and the defeating of all the plots which were devised to retard the work [Nehemiah 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.15). Even the very enemies themselves were so convinced that the work exceeded all the power of man, that they were constrained to acknowledge God himself as the author of it [Nehemiah 4:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.1-3) with 6:16, since none but God could have carried them through such labors, or delivered them from such perils, or given a successful issue to such hopeless exertions.

It is of infinite importance that we notice this; for otherwise we shall be ready to give to the creature the honor that is due to God only. Throughout the whole work, application was made to God for his direction and blessing: it was not undertaken without prayer [Nehemiah 1:4-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 1.4-11), nor carried on without prayer [Nehemiah 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.4); [Nehemiah 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.4-5); [Nehemiah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.9); [Nehemiah 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.9); [Nehemiah 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.11); but a reliance was placed on God as an all-sufficient Helper [Nehemiah 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.20); and he showed himself worthy of the confidence reposed on him: he showed that "none who trust in Him shall ever be confounded."

Having thus traced Nehemiah's success to its true cause, we proceed to set before you,

**II.**The important lesson which we are to learn from it—

We might with great propriety direct your attention to those wonderful events which occupy the attention of the public at the present hour June 23, 1814, a day or two after peace had been proclaimed; for certainly, whether we consider the union which has been produced among all the allied powers, or the wisdom and energy with which their efforts have been combined, or the rapid and complete success with which their labors have been crowned, there never was an occurrence which more strongly marked the hand of God, or more strictly corresponded with that which we have been considering, than that which we now commemorate, the reestablishment of peace among all the powers of Europe. We may almost literally say, in reference to it, "The wall has been built in fifty and two days."

But we will direct your attention rather to that which will be of importance, not to the present age only, but to all people to the end of time.

Behold, then, in what way we should all engage in the Lord's work—

To every man in the universe is a work assigned, namely, To erect an house that shall be an everlasting habitation for our God. The walls of Jerusalem reduced to heaps of rubbish do but faintly represent the desperate state of the world around us; while the number and malice of those who obstructed the rebuilding of that wall give us a very inadequate idea of the enemies with whom we have to contend while executing the work which God has given us to do. Every one indeed must begin at home, and work before his own door [Nehemiah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.10); [Nehemiah 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.23); [Nehemiah 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.28); [Nehemiah 3:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 3.30); for it is by getting the work of God advanced in our own souls that we shall best contribute to the good of the Church around us. But in the whole of our work we must cultivate wisdom. It is lamentable to reflect how often men defeat their own purposes by not attending to the counsels of wisdom. Many give great advantage to their adversaries by not considering what is the peculiar line of conduct which the particular time and circumstances call for, and how they may best overcome the difficulties with which they are surrounded. We are told to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without," and to unite "the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove:" and it is of absolute and indispensable necessity that we attend to these directions, if we would walk honorably before God ourselves, or be instrumental to the advancing of his work in the souls of others.

But to wisdom we must add energy. There is no time to be lost: "Whatever our hand finds to do, we must do it with all our might." We must be "fervent in spirit while serving the Lord:" and, if any one would divert us from our purpose, or tempt us to relax our diligence, we must make this our uniform and steady answer, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come down".

In this kind of conduct there should be an union among us all; ministers and people should all work together: yes, and women also should engage in the good work; for they, in their place and station, may be as helpful as any. Even the Apostles owed much to the labors of women [Romans 16:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.1-4); [Romans 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.12); and the most eminent ministers have been helped forward by their pious and well-regulated zeal [Acts 18:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.26). Let all of us then be of one heart and one mind in relation to this great matter; for it is surprising how much more rapidly the work of God advances in the souls of men, where many are engaged in strengthening each other's hands, and in encouraging one another's hearts. There are a thousand works which may be carried on in concert, which an insulated individual can never accomplish: and whoever engages in such works for the good of others, will find that he himself is the most profited by his own exertions: "While watering others, his own soul will be watered" also.

Nor must we draw back through fear or weariness. We must be men of fortitude and self-denial. We should scarcely find time, as it were, for relaxation, any further than absolute necessity requires: and if menaced with assaults, we should put on the panoply of God, and stand ready for the contest: and if by a temporary desertion of our post we may even preserve our lives, we should be willing rather to lay down our lives than dishonor our God by cowardice in his service: "Should such a man as I flee?" must be our answer to every suggestion of our great adversary, and to every unbelieving fear that may arise in our own hearts.

But above all, we must go forward in dependence on God. He must teach us, and guide us, and prosper us, in all our way. "Without him we can do nothing:" but, on the other hand, "through Christ strengthening us we can do all things." We need not despond on account of the greatness of the work, nor be discouraged through the number and malignity of our enemies: "if God be for us, none can effectually be against us:" "He will perfect that which concerns us," and "carry on to the end the work he has begun." If only we "be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, he has pledged himself to us, that our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord".

[Nehemiah 8:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.5-6)

DISCOURSE 445

EFFECT OF EZRA'S PREACHING

[Nehemiah 8:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.5-6). And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

THOUGH in the time of our Lord it was the custom to read the law of God in the synagogues, it does not appear to have been any regular part of the priest's office to preach unto the people. On some occasions however we find persons sent through the land of Israel to make known the law; and here we behold Ezra, on a pulpit of wood, elevated above the people, and surrounded by an immense congregation, who had come together on purpose to hear the word of God expounded to them. Since the introduction of Christianity, the preaching of the Gospel to men has been the particular office assigned to men who are set apart for that purpose: and though we must chiefly look to the Apostles as our examples, and to the effects of their ministrations as the pattern of what we may expect to see among our auditors, yet may we profitably look back to the time of Ezra to learn from him and his ministry,

**I.**In what manner the word of God should be dispensed—

The mode adopted by Ezra, namely, the expounding of Scripture verse 8, we conceive to be peculiarly worthy of imitation. It is indeed but little practiced at the present day, though at the time of the Reformation it generally obtained: and it has very great advantages above the plan which has superseded it.

**1.**It leads the people into a better acquaintance with the Scriptures—

The Scriptures, except as a book for children, are but little read: persons are discouraged from perusing them by an idea that they are unintelligible to common capacities. But a very little explanation would render them, for the most part, easy to be understood by all. And what a vast advantage would this be! The people studying the word of God at home would be abundantly better qualified to understand it when read in public; and the explanations given to them in public, would enable them to study it to better purpose at home: whereas the present plan of taking only a small passage for a motto, or merely as a ground-work for some general observations, leads to an extreme neglect of the Holy Scriptures, and to a consequent ignorance of them among all classes of the community.

**2.** It brings every part of the sacred records into view—

There are some who bring forward the doctrinal part of Scripture exclusively, and leave the practical part entirely out of sight: there are others who insist only on the practical parts, and leave out the doctrinal. There are some also to whom many of the doctrines contained in the sacred volume are perfectly hateful; and who never in all their lives so much as mentioned the doctrines of predestination and election, but to explain them away, and to abuse the persons who maintained them. But by expounding whole books of Scripture, every doctrine must be noticed in its turn, and the connection between them and our practice must be pointed out. True it is, that this mode of preaching would not altogether exclude false doctrine: but it would render the establishment of errors more difficult, because the hearers would be able to judge, in some good measure, how far the true and legitimate sense of Scripture was given, and how far it was perverted. The benefit of this therefore cannot be too highly appreciated.

**3.** It brings home truth to the conscience with more authority—

The word of man, though true, has little weight, in comparison of the word of God: "that is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword." It is inconceivable what an advantage a preacher has, when he can say, "Thus says the Lord:" then every doctrine demands the obedience of faith, and every precept the obedience of righteousness. When told that the word which is delivered to them will judge them in the last day, the people will not dare to trifle with it, as they will with the declarations of fallible men. Were this matter more attentively considered, we have no doubt but that more frequent appeals would be made to Scripture in our public harangues; and that the obsolete method of expounding Scripture would have at least some measure of that attention which it deserves This part of the subject, as addressed to Ministers, is deserving of much fuller notice, than it could receive as addressed to a common congregation.

But, in considering the word of God as explained to the people of Jerusalem, we are more particularly led to notice,

**II.**In what manner it should be heard—

Truly admirable was the conduct of the people on this occasion. Observe,

**1.**Their reverential awe—

When Ezra opened the book of God, all the people, in token of their reverence, stood up: and when he blessed God for giving them so rich a treasure, they "all with uplifted hands cried, Amen, Amen;" yes, "they bowed their heads also, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." This was a deportment which became sinners in the presence of their God: they did not look to the creature, but to God, whose voice they heard, and whose authority they acknowledged, in every word that was spoken. What a contrast does this form with the manner in which the word of God is heard among us! How rarely do we find persons duly impressed with a sense of their obligation to God for giving them a revelation of his will! How rarely do men at this day look through the preacher unto God, and hear God speaking to them by the voice of his servants! Even religious people are far from attending the ministration of the word in the spirit and temper that they ought: curiosity, fondness for novelties, and attachment to some particular preacher, too often supply the place of those better feelings by which men ought to be actuated in their attendance on the preached Gospel. To "stand in awe of God's word," and "to tremble at it," are far more suitable emotions, than those which we usually see around us. The Lord grant, that our duty in this respect may be more justly estimated, and more generally performed!

**2.** Their devout affections—

"When the people heard the words of the law, they all wept," as feeling that they had sinned greatly against it verse 9. And, when they were reminded, that, as the design of the present feast was to bring to their view the tender mercies of their God, and to encourage them to expect all manner of blessings at his hands, they ought rather to rejoice verse 10, 11, they did rejoice, insomuch that "there was very great gladness" among them verse 17; and they rejoiced especially on this account, that "they had understood the words that had been declared unto them verse 12." Now it is in this way that we should hear the word delivered to us. When it shows us our sins, we should weep, as it were in dust and ashes: and when it sets forth the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel, we should rejoice, yes, "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified." We should have our hearts rightly attuned, so that we should never want a string to vibrate to every touch of God's blessed word. But may it not be said to the generality in the present day, "We have piped unto you, and you have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and you have not lamented?" Yes; the Gospel has little more power over the affections of men than if it were "a cunningly devised fable." But we entreat you to consider, that, if the law, when expounded, was so powerful, much more should the Gospel be, since "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes."

**3.** Their unreserved obedience—

No sooner was it discovered that an ordinance, appointed by Moses, had been neglected, than they hastened to observe it according to the strict letter of the law, and actually did observe it with greater fidelity than it ever had been observed even from the days of Joshua to that present hour verse 13–18. This showed, that the impression made on their affections was deep and spiritual. And it is in this way that we also must improve the ministration of the word. If we attend to the Gospel as we ought to do, we shall find out many things which we have neglected, and many that we have done amiss: yes, many things which are not generally noticed even among the godly, will occur to our minds, and show us the defectiveness, not of our obedience only, but of the obedience of the best of men. Let us have our minds then open to conviction, and attentive to every commandment of our God. Nor let us be satisfied with paying only a customary attention to his revealed will, but let us aspire after higher degrees of purity, and a more perfect conformity to the divine image. This will serve as the best test of our sincerity, and it will show, that neither have you heard in vain, nor we dispensed his word in vain.

[Nehemiah 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.10)

DISCOURSE 446

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH

[Nehemiah 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.10). The joy of the Lord is your strength.

THE preaching of God's word is a very ancient ordinance. In the context we have a description of the manner in which Nehemiah conducted it. These means of instruction were useful in that day; nor are they less necessary in every place and age. People need, not only reproof for what is wrong, but direction in what is right. The Jews wept bitterly at the hearing of the law; but Nehemiah corrected their sorrow as ill-timed, and exhorted them to rejoice in God, who had done so great things for them.

Let us observe,

**I.**What reason we have to rejoice in the Lord—

God is often said to rejoice over his people [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17); but the joy here spoken of must be understood rather of that which we feel in the recollection of God's goodness towards us.

The Jews at that season had special cause for joy in God—

They had been miraculously delivered from Babylon. This temple had been rebuilt in twenty years, and the worship of God restored; and now, after seventy years more, the wall of the city was finished. They had been enabled to surmount innumerable difficulties [Nehemiah 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.17); they had prospered, even to a miracle, in their endeavors [Nehemiah 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.16). These were tokens of the divine favor, and pledges of its continuance. They were therefore called upon to rejoice with gratitude and confidence: nor was their sorrow, however just, to exclude this joy.

Such reason also have all the Lord's people to rejoice in the Lord—

They have experienced a redemption from sorer captivity, and been delivered by more stupendous means: Every day's preservation too from their numerous enemies is, as it were, a miracle; yet the work of their souls is carried on in spite of enemies, yes, is expedited through the means used to defeat it. Surely then they should say, like the Church of old, "The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad [Psalm 126:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.3)." Moreover, these mercies are pledges to them, and earnests of yet richer blessings. They may well confide in so good and gracious a God. They have indeed still great cause for sorrow on account of their past violations of the law; yet is it their duty to rejoice, yes to "rejoice always in the Lord [Philippians. 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil. 4.4)."

To promote and encourage this, we proceed to show,

**II.**In what respects this joy is our strength—

We are as dependent on the frame of our minds as on the state of our bodies. Joy in God produces very important effects:

**1.**It disposes for action—

Fear and sorrow depress and overwhelm the soul [Isaiah 57:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.16); they enervate and benumb all our faculties; they keep us from attending to any encouraging considerations [Exodus 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 6.9); they disable us from extending relief to others [Job 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.13); they indispose us for the most necessary duties [Luke 22:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.45). We cannot pray, or speak, or do anything with pleasure. On the contrary, a joyous frame exhilarates the soul [Proverbs 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 17.22). David well knew the effect it would produce [Psalm 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.12-13); and every one may safely adopt his resolution, "I will run the way of your commandments, when you shall enlarge my heart [Psalm 119:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.32)."

**2.** It qualifies for suffering—

When the spirit is oppressed, the smallest trial is a burden. In those seasons we are apt to fret and murmur both against God and man. We consider our trials as the effects of divine wrath; or, overlooking God, we vent our indignation against the instruments he uses. But when the soul is joyous, afflictions appear light [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34); [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2). How little did Paul and Silas regard their imprisonment [Acts 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.25). How willing was Paul to lay down his very life for Christ [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24). This accords with the experience of every true Christian [Romans 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.2-3) and [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10).

APPLICATION—

**1.**Let us not be always brooding over our corruptions—

Seasonable sorrows ought not to be discouraged: but we should never lose sight of all that God has done for us. It is our privilege to walk joyfully before the Lord [Psalm 138:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.5); [Psalm 149:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.5); [Psalm 89:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.15-16). If we abounded more in praise, we should more frequently be crowned with victory [2 Chronicles. 20:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron. 20.21-22).

**2.** Let us, however, carefully guard against the fresh incursions of sin—

It is sin that hides the Lord from our eyes [Isaiah 59:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.2). Joy will not consist with indulged sin [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18). Let us then "mortify our earthly members," and our besetting sins. Let us be girt with our armor, while we work with our hands [Nehemiah 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 4.17-18); Nor ever grieve the Holy Spirit, lest we provoke him to depart from us.

**3.** Let us be daily going to God through Christ—

If ever we rejoice in God at all, it must be through the Lord Jesus Christ [Romans 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.11). It is through Christ alone that our past violations of the law can be forgiven [Colossians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20). It is through Christ alone that the good work can be perfected in our hearts [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2). And, since "all things are through him, and from him, let them be to him also [Romans 11:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.36)."

**ESTHER**

***~~#447~~***

***~~HAMAN'S MURDEROUS PROPOSAL~~***

**[Esther 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 3.8-9)**

Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business."

Revenge is cruel; but never more cruel than when it has its foundation in wounded pride.

In the passage before us, it is carried to an almost incredible extent. Haman occupied the highest post of honor, next to the royal family, in the Assyrian empire. All the subjects in the kingdom bowed down to him. But there was a poor man, one Mordecai, who sat at the king's gate, and consequently was often passed by Haman, who refused to pay Haman this homage. At this neglect, Haman was grievously offended. He deemed it an insufferable insult, which could be expiated only by the death of the offender.

On inquiring into Mordecai's habits and connections, Haman found that he was a Jew; and, conceiving probably that this contemptuous spirit pervaded that whole nation, and accounting it a small matter to sacrifice the life of one single individual, he determined, if possible, to destroy the whole nation at once; and, accordingly, he made this proposal to King Ahasuerus, engaging from his own resources to make up to the king's treasury whatever loss might arise to the revenue from the proposed measure.

Now this proposal appearing, at first sight, so very extraordinary, I will endeavor to set before you:

***~~I. The commonness of persecuting God's people.~~***

In every age of the world have God's people been hated, for the very reasons that are here assigned.

"Their customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws." This is true in part. They worship the one true and living God; and obey his laws, which are unknown to the rest of the world, or, at all events, unheeded by them. Of course, whatever laws are inconsistent with the laws of God, they disobey; because they owe to Jehovah a paramount duty of allegiance, and are bound to "obey God rather than men." On this account they are hated, reviled, persecuted; and, on many occasions, if man could have prevailed, they would have been utterly extirpated.

David tells us of confederacies formed for this very purpose by all the nations around Jerusalem, each saying to the others, "Come, let us cut off the Jews from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance, [Psalm 83:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 83.3-8)."

Just so, in the early ages of Christianity, there were not less than ten strenuous persecutions made to attain this object. And at different periods since that time has persecution raged to the utmost extent, to destroy, if possible, all real piety from the face of the earth.

How "drunk the *Roman Church*has been with the blood of the saints," has been often seen, and would be seen again, if she could regain the power which she once possessed, [Revelation 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 17.6). She cannot endure that God should be served in opposition to her, and that God's laws should be regarded as of superior authority to hers.

But we need not go back to former ages for an elucidation of this truth.

Behold any person at this time cordially embracing the faith of Christ, and conforming in all things to God's revealed will; and it will soon be found that the same enmity still reigns in the hearts of men against the people of God, as at any former age. True, the cruelties of martyrdom are prohibited; but private animosity is indulged as far as the laws of the land wherein we live will admit; and every person who thoroughly devotes himself to God, is made to feel its baneful influence.

Paul, speaking of Ishmael and Isaac, says, in reference to his own time, "As he who was born after the flesh persecuted him who was born after the Spirit, even so it is now, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29);" thus also must I say at this time. Our blessed Lord told us that "he came not to send peace on earth, but a sword; for that he came to set the nearest and dearest relatives at variance with each other, [Matthew 10:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-36)." (Not that this was the *intent* of his Gospel, though unhappily it is the *effect* of his Gospel.)

And thus it is, wherever the Gospel is preached with power. There is immediately "a division among the people;" and those who are "obedient to the faith" become objects of hatred and persecution to those who "rebel against the light." So true is that saying of the Apostle, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall*suffer persecution! [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)."

Passing over the inhumanity of this proposal, as being too obvious to be insisted on, I proceed to notice,

***~~II. The impiety of persecuting God's people.~~***

The very accusation brought against the Jews by Haman shows what is the real ground of enmity against the Lord's people; it is that they serve God, while the rest of the world bow down to idols; and that, in this determination of theirs, they inflexibly adhere to the dictates of their own conscience. This is universal among all the people of the Lord.

The man who turns aside from the path of duty, through fear of man's displeasure, has no title whatever to be numbered among the children of God. *If we fear man, the fear of God is not in us*,[Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5). We must be willing to lay down our life for the Lord, or else we can never be acknowledged as his disciples, [Matthew 10:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.37-39). And this inflexibility we must carry into every part of our duty.

***~~But this preference of obeying God rather than man is the very thing which gives the offence.~~***

Where man's laws and customs are contrary to those of God, man expects and demands submission to his will, rather than to the oracles of God; and if we will not comply with man's requisitions, he will use all possible means to compel us. But what is this, but a direct rebellion against God, and an usurpation of his authority? It is, in fact, a contest with God, whether He shall govern the universe, or they.

Look at all the *Prophets*and *Apostles*, and see what was the ground of the world's opposition to them. They were ambassadors from God to men; and they were living examples of all that they proclaimed. Hence they were regarded as "the troublers of Israel," and were represented as enemies to the governments under which they lived. Compare [Ezra 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 4.13) with [Acts 16:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.20-21); [Acts 17:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.6-7); [Acts 24:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.5); [Acts 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.22).

It was this adherence to God's laws that involved the *three Hebrew youths*and *Daniel*in the calamities inflicted on them; and that subjected all the Apostles, with one only exception, to the pains and penalties of martyrdom. Hence, when Saul breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, our Lord addressed him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" And hence Jesus has declared, in reference to all his persecuted people throughout the world, "He that despises you, despises me; and he who despises me, despises Him who sent me! [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.16)."

And this leads me to show,

**III. The folly of persecuting God's people**.

***~~Can it be thought that such feeble worms as we shall be able to prevail against Almighty God?~~***

Hear how God derides the vain attempt, "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in Heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill! [Psalm 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-6)."

So said our blessed Lord to Saul also, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads, [Acts 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.5)." The truth is, that "the Lord Jesus holds all his stars in his right hand, [Revelation 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.1);" and it is impossible for any man to pluck them thence, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29). "Their life is hidden with Christ in God, [Colossians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3);" who, then, shall get access to it, to destroy it?

Haman, with all his power, could not prevail against the Jews, who yet, in appearance, were altogether in his hands. The whole power of the Roman empire, by whoever wielded, could not root out the disciples of the Christian Church, "nor shall the gates of Hell ever prevail" against the weakest of God's faithful people! [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18); for "He will keep them even as the apple of his eye, [Deuteronomy 32:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.10)," and "perfect in every one of them the work he has begun, [Philippians. 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil. 1.6)," and "keep them by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation! [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)."

However "they may be sifted, not one grain from among them shall ever fall upon the earth, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9)." Hypocrites may turn apostates; but of "those who were really given to him by the Father, our blessed Lord never has lost, nor ever will, so much as one! [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12)."

***~~Address,~~***

***~~1. To those who are the objects of the world's hatred.~~***

Realize the promises which God has given: [Isaiah 33:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.16); [Isaiah 33:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.20-22); [Isaiah 41:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.11-16)," and then say, "Shall I be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forget the Lord my Maker? [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13)." Dear brethren, know that "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world;" and that, if you confide in Him, "no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper!"

We have said that *it is on account of your Christian beliefs that you are hated*. But let not those peculiarities be carried into matters of mere indifference. If to love and serve God, as Elijah did, render you peculiar, then must you, like Elijah, dare to be singular in the midst of an ungodly world! You are not to leave "the narrow path that leads unto life, and to go into the broad road that leads to destruction," to compliment or please any man under Heaven.

In matters that are *indifferent*I am far from recommending an undue stiffness or singularity; but in relation to everything substantial, such as living a life of faith on the Lord Jesus, and confessing him openly before men, and devoting yourselves altogether to his service, I say, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord!"

***~~2. To those who are prejudiced against the Lord's people.~~***

If you cannot see with their eyes, do not endeavor to make them see with yours, unless in a way of sober argumentation, and of candid reference to the Word of God. To have recourse to derision or persecution of any kind will only involve your own souls in yet deeper guilt than you already lie under for rejecting the Gospel of Christ! Our blessed Lord warns you, that "It would have been better for you to have a millstone hanged about your neck, and be cast into the sea, than that you cause one of his little ones to stumble."

This is the advice I would give you: Search the Scriptures, to see what were the principles by which all the Prophets and Apostles were actuated, and what was the course of their lives; and then compare with them the principle and practice of God's people now; and if you find, as you will, a general agreement among them, though, alas! with a sad disparity in point of actual attainment among those of the present day—then beware how you imitate the unbelievers of former ages, in opposing the work of God in others; for, if you do not succeed, you only fight against God for nothing; and if you do succeed, you will perish under the accumulated guilt of destroying the souls of others; for assuredly "their blood will be required at your hands!"

***~~#448~~***

***~~THE FEAST OF PURIM~~***

***~~[Esther 9:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 9.26-28)~~***

"Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, the Jews took it upon themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants."

It has been observed of *the Book of Esther, that the name of God is not in it*; and certainly there is not the same strain of piety pervading it as is found in the Book of Nehemiah. This perhaps may be accounted for from the circumstance of its having been written in the court of Persia, where Jehovah, the God of Israel, was neither known or acknowledged. But though in this point of view it may appear more like to a mere record of facts, *it does in reality contain as striking a display of God's providence* *as any book in the inspired volume*. In explaining the feast of Purim, spoken of in our text, we must of necessity bring before you all the most leading facts recorded in the whole book; though we shall of course notice them only so far as they throw light on our main subject.

We shall consider,

***~~I. The feast of Purim itself.~~***

It is called the feast of Purim, in reference to a *lot*which was cast (the word *pur*signifying a lot), and which had a very principal effect in the preservation of all the Jewish people throughout the Persian dominions. But in speaking of the feast, we will distinctly state,

**1. The occasion on which the feast of Purim was observed.**

Haman, the prime minister and favorite of King Ahasuerus, was offended with Mordecai a Jew, who had refused to pay him that homage which the king had enjoined to be paid to him by all his courtiers. Indignant at this supposed insult, Haman sought to avenge himself, not on Mordecai alone, but on all the Jews throughout the empire. For this end, he cast a lot to determine on what day he should execute this design against them; and, having fixed the day in his own mind, obtained an order from the king that every one of them, old and young, women and children, should be put to death, and their property be delivered over as a prey to their destroyers.

The Jews, informed of the edict, betook themselves to fasting and prayer; and God, in answer to their prayer, wrought a wonderful deliverance for them, and enabled them to execute upon their enemies the very evils which they themselves had previously planned, verse 1.

It might have been expected indeed, when the king, at the request of Esther, had given liberty to the Jews to stand in their own defense, that their enemies would have abstained from any attempt against them, more especially when it was seen that the rulers of the different provinces favored the Jews; but, as Haman had been hanged on the very gallows which he had erected for Mordecai, and thus had fallen the first sacrifice to his own devices, his surviving friends were determined at their own peril to carry into execution his cruel design; but God so strengthened the Jews, that they prevailed in the contest, and slew in one day no less than seventy-five thousand of their enemies, besides five hundred in the very palace of Shushan, and, on the day following, three hundred more.

In commemoration of this glorious event, the feast of Purim was instituted; and from that day to the present hour it is kept, wherever there is a body of Jews to join in the celebration of it.

***~~2. The manner of the the feast of Purim's observance.~~***

We doubt not but that it was observed with pious gratitude; for though nothing is spoken of that, we may be well assured that the same piety which had enjoined a fast of three days to obtain the blessing, enjoined thanksgivings also, when the blessing was obtained.

But it was to be celebrated also with festive mirth. This is by no means incompatible with pious exercises, or unfit to be united with them on such an occasion as that. God himself had ordered three great feasts to be annually kept, in remembrance of his mercies:

the feast of the *Passover*, in remembrance of the deliverance of the Jewish first-born from the sword of the destroying angel;

the feast of *weeks*, in remembrance of the promulgation of the Law from Mount Sinai;

the feast of *tabernacles*, in remembrance of their dwelling in tents in the wilderness, [Deuteronomy 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.16).

These sufficiently show that our physical nature may participate in the joys which belong more particularly to our higher and better part, provided we keep within the strict rules of temperance, and enjoy the Donor in his gifts.

A special direction also was given, that the feast should be kept with active benevolence; the richer were not only to send portions to each other, but to provide for the poor also, who could not otherwise be partakers of the general joy. This was a very essential part of the institution, and highly proper to be observed; since we ought then more particularly to show love to our brethren, when we are commemorating God's love to us.

This union of *piety*, *festivity*, and *love*—may be seen in the feast which Nehemiah made for the people, when Ezra expounded to them the law of God, [Nehemiah 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.10); [Nehemiah 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 8.12); and it were to be wished that we, in the feasts instituted for the commemoration of still richer blessings, were careful never to separate what God in his ordinances has so plainly joined together.

The very particular injunctions given by Esther, and Mordecai, and all the principal Jews, respecting the perpetual observance of this feast, lead us naturally to inquire into:

***~~II. The ends and reasons for which the feast of Purim was appointed.~~***

***~~1. It was designed as a memorial of God's goodness to them.~~***

It was right to keep up, as far as possible, the remembrance of this mercy to all future generations. We are but too apt to forget the goodness of God to us; and we need occasional observances commemorative of them, in order to revive in our minds the impressions, which the first communication of his blessings excited in us. It was on this principle that God appointed a number of days to be kept holy under the Law; and for the same end is the ordinance of the Lord's supper appointed under the Gospel, "Do this in remembrance of me; for as oft as you shall eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show forth the Lord's death, until he comes."

On the same principle the Fathers of our Church have set apart certain days for the special contemplation of those mysteries, on which the salvation of the whole world depends; the incarnation, the death, the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In truth, the Jews in all ages are equally interested in this event; since, if the design of Haman had been carried into effect, the whole posterity of all the Jews in that immense empire would have been cut off in one day; and consequently they, as much as their remoter ancestors, are bound to "keep God's great goodness to them ever in remembrance."

***~~2. It was designed as an incentive to love and serve him.~~***

Commandments have but little effect, where love does not exist towards the authority that enjoined them. It is love alone that will constrain us to a willing and unreserved obedience even to God himself. Hence Paul urges us "by the mercies of God to yield ourselves as living sacrifices unto him;" for it is a sense of them only that will enable us to regard such a surrender of ourselves to him as "a reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

Now certainly the contemplation of this great deliverance could not but deeply affect the hearts of all, and stir them up to glorify their adorable Benefactor. And though, alas! at this time the feast is made only an occasion of intemperance among all who observe it—yet it ought to excite far other opinions than those of carnal mirth, and to stimulate to far other conduct than that of riot and excess.

***~~3. It was designed as an encouragement to trust in God.~~***

In this view it may well be a feast to the whole world. For where can we find, except in the history of Joseph, so striking an exhibition of the ways of Providence, as in the history before us?

Even long before the wicked thought was conceived in the heart of Haman, did God in a most singular manner exalt Esther to the throne, that she might be able to counteract and defeat his purpose.

God also enabled Mordecai also to detect and reveal a conspiracy against the life of the monarch, that he might afterwards have the influence that was necessary for the final preservation of the Jewish people.

When Haman had conceived the purpose, he superstitiously "cast a *lot*from month to month, and from day to day," to determine the best time for carrying it into effect; and behold God, "with whom alone the disposal of the lot rests," so ordered it, that the lot should fall on the very last month, and on the thirteenth day of that month; so that there was abundant time for making the people sensible of their danger, and for accomplishing their deliverance.

That the king should have a sleepless night might appear to be a very trivial accident; yet in the divine counsels it was an important link in the chain of his purposes, since it led to the exaltation of Mordecai at the very moment when Haman was prepared to put him to death.

In a word, the courage with which Esther was inspired to go in, uncalled for, to the king, the readiness of the king to hear and answer her requests, the versatility of the courtiers, the jealousy of the king, together with many other circumstances, all led to the immediate overthrow of Haman, and the consequent deliverance of the Jewish people.

How remarkable was it, that Haman himself, and afterwards his ten sons also, should be hanged on that very gallows which had been prepared by Haman for Mordecai; and that, instead of the Jews being put to death, they by the king's own authority should destroy seventy-five thousand of their enemies, besides eight hundred in the very palace of the king!

*All this shows how impossible it is to fight successfully against God, and how safe they are, who put their trust under the shadow of his wings*. Truly, if God is for us, we need not be concerned how many there may be against us; for "mightier is He who is in us, than he who is in the world." Only let us trust in him, and not a hair of our head shall perish.

***~~ADDRESS.~~***

***~~1. To the true people of God today.~~***

You must expect, as in the days of old, that the "enmity which exists between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman" will yet show itself, and that "those who are born after the flesh will persecute those who are born after the Spirit."

As you differ from the world in the laws which you obey, and in the habits you maintain, you must expect to be represented by them as enemies both to the Church and State, [Esther 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 3.8). But commit your cause to God, and he will preserve you. Your enemies may rage; but "no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper."

*There is an efficacy in fervent prayer, that shall bring Omnipotence to our aid*; and though your trials may be great and of long continuance—yet shall they issue in more abundant joy to you, and honor to your God.

***~~2. To those who show hostility to the people of God.~~***

You little think whom it is that you revile and persecute, "He who hates you hates me," says our Lord; and again, "Saul, Saul, why persecute me!" The people of God are regarded by him as "his first-fruits," which, being the Lord's property, no man was at liberty to consume; be assured therefore, that "all who shall devour them will stumble; and evil will come upon them, [Jeremiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.2)." It were "better for you to have a millstone put about your neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that you should offend one of his little ones." Let the history before us suffice to show you, that "whoever touches them, touches the apple of Jehovah's eye!"

***~~3. To those believers who in the midst of a persecuting world have been preserved.~~***

Know to whom you owe it, that you have not been given up as a prey into the hands of your enemies. *The agency of God's providence is secret, so that you behold it not*; but you reap the benefit of it, and will at a future day see as striking interpositions in your favor as those which are recorded in the history before us. Go on then, serving the Lord without fear, and multiply your services for him as he multiplies his mercies unto you.